

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)

IN THE MATTER OF:)
COMPLAINT C2014-091)

State Ethics Commission,)
Complainant;)

Michael L. Johnson,)
Respondent.)

) BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

STATE ETHICS
COMMISSION

2014 OCT 16 PM 3:06

RECEIVED

DECISION AND ORDER

This matter comes before the State Ethics Commission by virtue of a complaint filed by the Commission on February 6, 2014. On June 17, 2014, pursuant to S. C. Code Ann. § 8-13-320(10)(i)(Supp. 2013), the State Ethics Commission reviewed the above-captioned complaint charging the Respondent, Michael L. Johnson, with a violation of Section 8-13-1140 and probable cause was found.

Present at the Hearing on were Commission Members James I. Warren, Chair, Francis E. Grimbball, and Julie S. Jeffords-Moose. Respondent was not present, but he was duly noticed. Complainant was represented by Cathy L. Hazelwood, General Counsel. The following charge was considered:

COUNT ONE
FAILURE TO FILE A STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTEREST REPORT
SECTION 8-13-1140, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

The Respondent, Michael L. Johnson, Williamsburg County Sheriff at the time of the violation, did in Richland County, fail to timely file a 2013 annual Statement of Economic Interests form on or before April 15, 2013 in violation of Section 8-13-1140.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Having carefully reviewed the evidence presented, the Commission finds as fact:

1. The Respondent, Michael L. Johnson, was the Williamsburg County Sheriff at the time of the filing requirement and he was required to file an annual Statement of Economic Interests form (SEI) prior to April 15th of each year.

2. Kristin Smith, administrative coordinator of the Commission's non-compliance office, testified that in November 2012 Respondent was elected Williamsburg County Sheriff. Respondent was penalized \$100.00 in a October 28, 2013 letter for failure to file his 2013 SEI. That letter was re-sent certified on December 17, 2013. It was returned as "unclaimed" on January 13, 2014 and re-mailed first class on January 14, 2014. Penalties began accruing on January 24, 2014 at \$10.00 per day. Penalties began accruing on February 3, 2014 at \$100.00 per day. Respondent has not filed the 2013 SEI and the late-filing penalty of \$5,000.00 has not been paid.

3. Commission Investigator Dan Choate testified that on February 11, 2014 and February 25, 2014 he left voice mail messages at Respondent's telephone concerning the late 2013 SEI and accruing penalties. On February 19, 2014 local newspapers reported that Respondent had been indicted by a Federal Grand Jury charging Respondent with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and he went on trial September 15, 2014.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon the Findings of Fact, the Commission concludes, as a matter of law:

1. During all times relevant, the Respondent, Michael L. Johnson, was a public official, as defined by Section 8-13-100(27).
2. The State Ethics Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction
3. Sections 8-13-1110 and 8-13-1140 provide that certain public officials shall file a Statement of Economic Interests prior to taking the oath of office and annually



thereafter prior to April 15.

4. Section 8-13-1510(1) provides as follows:

Except as otherwise specifically provided in this chapter, a person required to file a report or statement under this chapter who files a late statement or report or fails to file a required statement or report must be assessed a civil penalty as follows:

(1) a fine of one hundred dollars if not filed within five days after the established deadline provided by law in this chapter;

(2) after notice has been given by certified or registered mail that a required statement or report has not been filed, a fine of ten dollars per calendar day for the first ten days after notice has been given, and one hundred dollars for each additional calendar day in which the required statement or report is not filed, not exceeding five thousand dollars.

5. Section 8-13-320(10)(l) provides:

(i) requiring the public official, public member, or public employee to pay a civil penalty of not more than two thousand dollars for each violation.

6. Section 8-13-130 states in part:

The State Ethics Commission may levy an enforcement or administrative fee on a person who is found in violation, or who admits to a violation, of the "Ethics, Government Accountability and Campaign Reform Act of 1991". The fee must be used to reimburse the commission for costs associated with the investigation and hearing of a violation.

DECISION

NOW, THEREFORE, based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the State Ethics Commission has determined based upon a preponderance of evidence that Respondent Michael L. Johnson is in violation of Section 8-13-1140; and therefore, Respondent Michael L. Johnson is hereby issued a Publicly Reprimand; he is hereby assessed a fine of \$2,000.00, in addition to the late-filing penalty of \$5,000.00; and finally he is assessed an administrative fee of \$500.00.



IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, pursuant to Section 8-13-320, a Judgment in the amount of \$7,500.00 is, and shall be entered against Respondent.

IT IS FURTHER THE ORDER OF THIS COMMISSION that the Clerk of Court of the County in which Respondent was last known to reside shall enter this Order in its Judgment Rolls, without cost to the State Ethics Commission, in the amount of \$7,500.00 upon the Commission's filing of same with the Clerk of Court's Office.

FINALLY, Respondent Michael L. Johnson has ten (10) days from receipt of this order to appeal this Decision and Order to the full Commission.

IT IS SO ORDERED THIS 15th DAY OF October, 2014.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION



JAMES I. WARREN, III
HEARING CHAIR

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

