

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

FOR COMMISSION USE ONLY:

CASE NUMBER

c 2025-029

COMPLAINT FORM

COMPLAINANT: Heather R. Galvin
ADDRESS: PO Box 1083
TELEPHONE NUMBER: 843-255-5850
TITLE: Probate Judge

RESPONDENT: Brianna Hamilton
ADDRESS: [REDACTED]
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]
TITLE: N/A

Set forth in detail specific facts upon which you based your complaint against above-named respondent (only detailed, clear factual allegations will be considered. If additional space is needed, attach supplemental sheets).

Per recommendation of Brian E. Hulbert, Deputy County Attorney for Beaufort County, attached hereto as Exhibit "A," this matter is being reported for a review of the information and a determination as to whether an investigation should be opened.

If there is a finding of probable cause, the following documents become public record: the complaint, the response (if any) by respondent, and the notice of hearing. If a hearing is to be held, the final order and all exhibits become public record. If no hearing is held following a finding of probable cause, the final disposition of the matter becomes public record.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF Beaufort

Personally appeared before me Heather Galvin who, first being duly sworn, says that he/she has read and knows the contents of the above complaint and that the allegations contained therein, are true and correct to the best of his/her own knowledge, except for those matters therein based upon information and belief, and as to those he/she believes them to be true.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this
13 day of March, 2025

[REDACTED]

Complainant Signature

[REDACTED]

Notary Public for South Carolina
My Commission expires 1/8/2028

SEC-7 (Revised 3/2022)

REPLY TO: 201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150, Columbia, South Carolina 29210 (803)253-4192
ELECTRONIC COPIES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND) BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
))
IN THE MATTER OF:)
))
Complaint C2025-029)
))
Heather Galvin) **NOTICE OF HEARING**
Complainant.)
))
Brianna Hamilton)
Respondent.)
_____)

The State Ethics Commission has determined that there is probable cause pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, in the above-captioned complaint. The State Ethics Commission will, therefore, convene a formal hearing into the matters, in accordance with Section 8-13-320(10)(i) & (j), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, and State Ethics Commission Regulations, S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 52-707 (1997 Cum. Supp.) on Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 9:30 a.m. at the State Ethics Commission Hearing Room located at: 201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150, Columbia, South Carolina 29210.

The following allegation will be heard:

COUNT ONE
USE OF OFFICIAL POSITION FOR FINANCIAL GAIN
SECTION 8-13-700(A), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Brianna Hamilton, former Beaufort County Probate Court Employee, used her official position with the Probate Court to enter into a private agreement with a third party to provide probate-related services for a fee, in violation of Section 8-13-700(A).

You have the right to be represented by counsel, the right to call and examine witnesses, the right to introduce exhibits, and the right to cross-examine opposing witnesses. This hearing will be open to the public as required by Section 8-13-320(10)(j), Code of Laws, South Carolina,

1976, as amended. The procedures to be followed are set forth in the Administrative Procedures Act, Section 1-23-10, et seq., Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, the State Ethics Act, Section 8-13-100, et seq., Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, and State Ethics Commission Regulations S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 52-707 (1997 Cum. Supp.).

A pre-hearing conference may be scheduled prior to the hearing to allow exchange of witness lists and evidence, marking of exhibits, and disposition of motions or pleadings. In the event you fail to appear, judgment by default will be rendered against you. If there are any questions concerning the above notice or hearing times, please contact the State Ethics Commission.


Meghan Walker Dayson, Executive Director
State Ethics Commission

Dated this 23 day,
of July 2025.

Certificate of Service by Certified Mail

I hereby certify that a copy of this **NOTICE OF HEARING** was duly served on RESPONDENT Brianna Hamilton, 201 Saddlehorse Drive, #179, Okatie, SC 29909 by depositing said **NOTICE OF HEARING** in the United States mail, Columbia, South Carolina on this 25th day of July 2025, by **CERTIFIED MAIL, E-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**, appropriate postage affixed, and a return address clearly indicated on said envelope.



Rachael O'Bryan, Administrative Assistant

State Ethics Commission

(803) 253-4192

Columbia, South Carolina

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
IN THE MATTER OF:)
COMPLAINT C2025-029)
Heather Galvin,)
Complainant,)
Briana Hamilton,)
Respondent.)

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

CONSENT ORDER

This matter comes before the South Carolina State Ethics Commission (Commission) by way of a complaint filed on March 17, 2025. Pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i) of the South Carolina Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act (Ethics Act), the Complaint against Briana Hamilton (Respondent) was considered by the Commission and probable cause was found to warrant an evidentiary hearing. Prior to the call of the case, Respondent agreed to the following:

STATEMENTS OF FACT

1. Respondent was employed by Beaufort County (County) Probate Court as an Estate Specialist for approximately two (2) years. Respondent's employment was terminated on March 11, 2025.
2. On or about March 6, 2025, Natalie Garriett (Garriett) visited the Probate Court to open an estate for her deceased parents. As she was leaving the office, Respondent approached her and offered to complete the probate paperwork for a fee. The parties agreed on a fee of \$500.00, to be paid in two (2) installments. Respondent subsequently advised Garriett that the amount of the fee could be reduced if Garriett purchased two (2) cigars for Respondent's friend. That evening, Garriett and Respondent met in a nearby Publix parking lot and Garriett provided Respondent with \$250.00 and the requested cigars.

JA # 1

3. On or about March 7, 2025, Garriett asked Respondent to return the \$250.00, stating she needed the money back to pay an outstanding bill. Respondent returned the \$250.00 to Garriett the same day, but kept the cigars.
4. On or about March 10, 2025, Garriett advised the Deputy Probate Clerk of Respondent's actions. The County immediately investigated the matter and, as a result, terminated Respondent's employment on March 11, 2025. During the County's investigation, Respondent admitted to soliciting a fee from Garriett in exchange for assistance with the probate paperwork. Respondent also acknowledged receiving and returning the \$250.00 and keeping the cigars.
5. After Respondent's termination, Complainant¹ filed this Complaint with the Commission.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon the Statements of Facts, the Commission concludes, as a matter of law:

1. At all times relevant, Respondent was a public employee, as defined by Section 8-13-100(25).
The Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction.
2. The aforementioned fee constitutes an "economic interest" pursuant to Section 8-13-100(11)(a), which provides the following, in relevant part:

"Economic interest" means an interest distinct from that of the general public in a purchase, sale, lease, contract, option, or other transaction or arrangement involving property or services in which a [public employee] may gain an economic benefit of fifty dollars or more.
3. By soliciting, then receiving, the aforementioned fee, Respondent improperly used her public employment to obtain an economic interest in violation of Section 8-13-700(A), which provides:

DocuSigned by:
BRIANA HAMILTON
00000000011400...

¹ Complainant currently serves as the County's Chief Probate Judge.

JK #2

No [public employee] may knowingly use his official [employment] to obtain an economic interest for himself, a family member, an individual with whom he is associated, or a business with which he is associated. This prohibition does not extend to the incidental use of public materials, personnel, or equipment, subject to or available for a [public employee's] use that does not result in additional public expense.

4. Section 8-13-130 allows the Commission to “levy an enforcement or administrative fee on a person who is in violation of any provision of the Ethics Act.”
5. Section 8-13-320(10)(I)(i) allows the Commission to require payment of a civil penalty of up to two thousand dollars for each violation of the Ethics Act.

DISCUSSION

The Commission found probable cause to charge Respondent with one (1) count of Section 8-13-700(A) for using her official position with the Probate Court to enter into a private agreement with a third party to provide probate-related services for a fee. Through this Consent Order, Respondent acknowledges that she violated the Ethics Act in this regard. The Commission finds, and Respondent agrees, that Section 8-13-700(A) prohibited her from entering into an agreement with a third party to provide probate-related services for a fee. Respondent offers the following statement in mitigation:

First[,] I want to sincerely apologize for my actions and take full responsibility for how I handled this situation. I understand now that even agreeing to assist someone outside of my role as a deputy clerk and outside of a professional setting crossed a boundary. I take full responsibility for that decision and for my actions. I want to explain that while I knew [Garriett] through brief interactions at the court, my connection was truly with her sister, Ms. Sandra Williams (Sandy), whom I have known for some time through church and church life. Because of that relationship, I agreed to try and help [Garriett] outside of work. I now understand that doing so was inappropriate, regardless of my intentions . . . Shortly after, [Garriett] contacted me and stated she had an urgent bill and needed her money back. She had given me \$250, and I returned the money the next morning without hesitation, in the same format it was given. No paperwork had been completed or drafted. I made it clear that I could not move forward with helping her outside of work, and that if she needed assistance, she could come to the office and I [*sic*] just help her there . . .

JK #3

This experience has been difficult, but it has taught me a very real lesson about professional boundaries, judgment, and how serious these matters truly are. I have taken this entire process to heart and I have learned from it. I offer my sincerest apologies to the Commission, to my former employer, and also to [Garriett]. I never intended to disrespect the position I held, the court, or the public's trust. This was a lapse in judgment on my part, and I take full responsibility for it. And I am sorry and repentance [*sic*].

DISPOSITION

1. The Commission hereby finds Respondent in violation of one (1) count of Section 8-13-700(A).
2. The Commission hereby adopts the Statements of Fact, Conclusions of Law, Discussion, and Disposition as agreed upon by the Respondent.

THEREFORE, the Commission hereby issues this Public Reprimand and orders Respondent to pay the Commission a \$400.00 administrative fee within six (6) months of her receipt of this Order. The Commission declines to assess a civil penalty in light of the mitigation offered and given that the County has already terminated Respondent's employment.

By executing this Consent Order, Respondent understands that she is confessing to a judgment of \$400.00 if she does not make payment as provided for in this Order, in which case the Commission shall file a Judgment against Respondent with the County Clerk of Court in Respondent's last known County of residence, who shall enter this Order in the amount of \$400.00 (less any money paid) in its Judgment Rolls, without cost to the Commission.

AND IT IS ORDERED THIS 11th DAY OF February, 2026.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION


BRIANNA HAMILTON
RESPONDENT