

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA	)	
COUNTY OF RICHLAND	)	BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
	)	
IN THE MATTERS OF:	)	
	)	
Complaints C2024-051, C2024-055	)	
C2024-056	)	
	)	
Kyle Joslin, Brittney Duncan,	)	CONSENT ORDER
and Nicholas Duncan,	)	
Complainants.	)	
	)	
Charles "Chuck" Wright,	)	
Respondent.	)	
	)	

These matters come before the State Ethics Commission (Commission) by way of three (3) Complaints filed on July 15, 2024 (C2024-051) and July 22, 2024 (C2024-055 and C2024-056). Pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i) of the South Carolina Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act (Ethics Act), the Complaints against Charles "Chuck" Wright (Respondent) were 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 served as Sheriff of Spartanburg County (County) from 2004 until his resignation on May 23, 2025.
2. On May 3, 2024, Respondent's son, Jared Andrew "Andy" Wright (Andy) submitted an application for employment with the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) for the position of part-time Deputy Sheriff.
3. On May 28, 2024, Respondent provided the following in writing to Sergeant Anthony Soddu, recruiting officer for SCSO:

My son, Andy Wright, has applied for a part-time position with the Sheriff's Office. Please treat him as any other applicant. No specialties for him.

4. On June 25, 2024, following a background investigation, SCSO extended an offer of part-time employment to Andy, citing a start date of July 1, 2024.¹
5. On July 1, 2024, Respondent appointed Andy as a Deputy Sheriff and administered his oath of office. As part of the swearing-in process, both Andy and Respondent signed two (2) documents: (1) the Deputy Sheriff Commission and (2) the Oath for Deputy Sheriff. The Deputy Sheriff Commission contained the following language:

I, Chuck Wright, Sheriff of Spartanburg County, reposing special trust and confidence in the ability, character and intelligence of Jared Andrew Wright of said County and State, and by virtue of the authority vested in me by Section 23-13-10,² Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, do hereby commission, constitute, and appoint you, the said Jared Andrew Wright, Deputy Sheriff of Spartanburg County, in the State aforesaid, for a term during my pleasure, as provided in the aforesaid act relating to the appointment of Deputy Sheriff for Spartanburg County, together with all the rights, privileges, profits, and emoluments whatsoever thereto belonging, or in any wise appertaining. Given under my hand and seal on this the First Day of July in the year of our Lord, Two Thousand and Twenty Four and the Two Hundred and Forty-Eighth Year of the Independence of the United States of America. (footnote added).

6. Also on July 1, 2024, Andy entered into an employment agreement (Agreement) with SCSO wherein the parties agreed, in relevant part, that Andy's employment was "subject to and at the pleasure of the Sheriff of Spartanburg County in accordance with South Carolina law." Both Respondent and Andy signed and dated the Agreement.
7. Andy was subsequently issued an SCSO identification card displaying his image, name, and

¹ The SCSO background investigation was prepared by Master Deputy M. Garland on June 13, 2024 and found "no current impediments as to [Andy] getting employment with Spartanburg County."

² S.C. Code Ann. § 23-13-10 provides, in relevant part: "The sheriff may appoint one or more deputies to be approved by the judge of the circuit court or any circuit judge presiding therein. Such appointment shall be evidenced by a certificate thereof, signed by the sheriff, and shall continue during his pleasure."

badge number. The back of the identification card contained Respondent's signature below the following language:

By the virtue of the authority vested in me as Sheriff in and over Spartanburg County, I, reposing special trust and confidence in your care, prudence, and integrity, have constituted, appointed, and commission you the said Jared Andrew Wright in Spartanburg County, to have, hold, exercise, and enjoy said office of Deputy Sheriff and to enforce the laws of the State of South Carolina and Spartanburg County. This commission expires at the pleasure of the Sheriff.

8. On July 3, 2024, Respondent distributed a written memorandum to Chief Deputy William Parris, Captain Raymond Gist, First Lieutenant Jeremy Byrd, Lieutenant Timothy Amsler, Sergeant Matthew Dean, and Sergeant Sean Biggs. The memorandum provided, in part:

This is a formal directive that you will be Andrew Wright's chain of command. As part of the Traffic Division, Sgt's [sic] Dean and Biggs will be his immediate supervisors, followed by Lieutenant Amsler and Byrd. As Special Services Captain, Capt. Gist will be his captain, and Chief Parris will be the head of Andrew's supervisory chain. I want it to be clear that I will have NO input that pertains to Andrew's daily operations as well as disciplinary actions, should they arise. Andrew will be treated as any other deputy at the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office. As a public official, I will NOT participate in any disciplinary actions nor be in any role of supervision as it pertains to Jared Andrew William Wright. If for any reason Andrew is disciplined, the disciplinary appeal process will consist of a review board consisting of Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office captains. (emphasis in original).

9. At 9:39 p.m. on July 3, 2024, Respondent emailed Parris, Gist, Byrd, Amsler, Dean, and Biggs, in relevant part:

I am writing this email to make sure we are clear on who Andy answers to. As I said to you Tim, Matt and Sean, [n]o special treatment for Andy. Let me be clear, he will answer to the Sgts., the Lt., the Captain and the Chief. You all will be his supervisors, I will have NO input in anything that pertains to Andy.

Chief, [y]ou will be the ultimate finale [sic] word on any disciplinary action should the need arise. I just wanted to be very clear before he

starts his FTO tomorrow July 4th, there will be no short version of the FTO or any shorts [*sic*] cut for that matter.

Thank you all for what you do and how you represent the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office. I hope you all have a happy 4th of July, and enjoy your family time.

10. The instant Complaints were filed on July 15, 2024 and July 22, 2024, alleging Respondent violated Section 8-13-700 and Section 8-13-750 of the Ethics Act by hiring Andy to a position that he directly supervised.³
11. On July 22, 2024, Commission Investigator William B. White interviewed Respondent.⁴ Respondent stated that Andy was hired as a part-time Deputy Sheriff assigned to Traffic Enforcement Unit. Respondent advised that he had taken steps to ensure that any conflict of interest was avoided by issuing a written directive that Andy was to be given no special treatment and instructing that Chief Deputy Parris handle any necessary discipline.
12. On September 26, 2024, Investigator White interviewed Sergeant Soddu. Soddu stated that as a recruiting officer, he was responsible for processing employment applications. Soddu advised that Andy's application was handled the same as any other applicant. Soddu stated that he spoke with Respondent once he learned of Andy's application and that Respondent told him to treat Andy as any other candidate. Soddu subsequently requested documentation of Respondent's directive, which was provided by Respondent on provided on May 28, 2024.
13. On October 17, 2024, in response to a request for information, Respondent's Coordinator,

³ C2024-055 and C2024-056 also alleged Respondent "create[ed]" a special position for his son Andy. However, the Commission's investigation revealed that the control number identifying the position ultimately occupied by Andy was created on January 4, 2020 and was occupied by three (3) other employees before Andy. Therefore, the Commission did not find probable cause existed to support this allegation.

⁴ Respondent retained counsel in these matters on July 23, 2024.

Master Deputy Amanda Wilson, emailed Investigator White, in relevant part:

Sgt. Soddu oversees recruiting for the [SCSO]. Typically, when a pre-certified officer is going through the hiring process it is "assumed" that they will be hired. If at any point through this process it is decided that they will not be a good fit with our agency, Sgt. Soddu will let them know that we are no longer interested. If the applicant does make it through these initial steps, Sgt. Soddu will have them move forward with Human Resources. From that point, HR will send an offer letter, in this case, Lynn Trammell. Sheriff Wright *typically* does not have interaction with potential deputies until the day that they are sworn in. Once they have been sworn in, pre-certified officers then begin their Field Training. Upon completion of this, there is an FTO Oral Review Board (that does include written documentation) . . . In short, Sgt. Soddu is that person prior to HR process. (emphasis in original).

14. In a follow-up telephone call with Investigator White, Wilson stated that Respondent told her "I'm thinking about bringing Andy in," or words of a similar nature, several months prior to July 2024. Wilson said she expressed concern to Respondent, who replied "I'm hiring my son and if they don't like it, they can go." Wilson further advised that, at the time of his hire, Andy's Class 1 law enforcement certification was nearing expiration. Wilson explained that if Andy's certification expired before he was hired by a law enforcement agency, the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy (CJA) would require him to attend Basic Law Enforcement Training.
15. Investigator White subsequently contacted CJA and confirmed that Andy's certificate was scheduled to expire on September 19, 2024 and that if Andy was not hired by a law enforcement agency prior to that date, he would be required to attend Basic Law Enforcement Training.⁵

⁵ The Commission's investigation revealed Andy obtained his Class 1 law enforcement certification pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. 23-28-80, which allows reserve officers to obtain certification without attending Basic Law Enforcement Training.

16. On March 6, 2025 and March 9, 2025, Investigator White interviewed Chief Deputy Parris. According to Parris, Respondent did not discuss any plans to hire Andy with him. Parris advised that Andy's hiring process was consistent with the hiring of other certified deputies. Parris stated that he agreed with the July 3, 2024 memorandum issued by Respondent, in which he (Parris) was to be the top of Andy's chain-of-command.
17. On March 10, 2025, Investigator White interviewed former Administrative Captain Brandon Letterman, who was responsible for negotiating Andy's position with County Administration. Letterman recalled Respondent telling him, "I am going to hire Andy" prior to Andy's hiring. According to Letterman, he told Respondent this was a "bad idea."
18. Andy was employed by SCSO from his hiring on July 1, 2024 until his resignation on July 3, 2025. During that time, the County expended \$32,293.06 in furtherance of Andy's employment.

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 official" as defined by Section 8-13-100(27). Therefore, the Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction.
2. At all times relevant, Andy was Respondent's "family member" as defined by Section 8-13-100(6), which includes the child of a public official.
3. Respondent violated Section 8-13-750(A) by appointing Andy and administering the oath of office on July 1, 2024:

No [public official] may cause the employment, appointment, promotion, transfer, or advancement of a family member to a state or local office or position in which the [public official] supervises or manages.
4. "Section 8-13-750 has applicability to all public officials, member or employees with no

exceptions for sheriffs, solicitors or clerks of court." SEC AO92-028 (Dec. 18, 1991).

5. 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."
6. Section 8-13-320(10)(l) allows the Commission to require payment of a civil penalty of up to two thousand dollars for each violation of the Ethics Act and to require the forfeiture of any amount obtained in violation of the Ethics Act.

DISCUSSION

The Commission found probable cause to charge Respondent with one (1) count of Section 8-13-750(A)⁶ for appointing Andy to the position of Deputy Sheriff and administering his oath of office. Through this Consent Order, Respondent acknowledges he violated the Ethics Act in this

⁶ The Commission also found probable cause to believe Respondent violated Section 8-13-700(B) when he recused himself in writing two (2) days *after* Andy's appointment. Section 8-13-700(B) prohibits a public official from participating in any matter in which a family member has an economic interest and requires him to:

furnish a copy of the statement to the presiding officer of the governing body of an agency, commission, board, or of a county, municipality, or a political subdivision thereof, on which he serves, who shall cause the statement to be printed in the minutes and require that the member be excused from any votes, deliberations, and other actions on the matter . . .

In this case, Respondent is a public official, but there is no "governing body" of the SCSO. Rather, Respondent, as sheriff, was the ultimate authority when it came to hiring deputy sheriffs. See Heath v. Aiken County, 295 S.C. 416 (1988)("Section 23-13-10 grants a sheriff unreviewable employment and discharge authority over deputies"); Allen v. Fidelity and Deposit Co. of Maryland, 515 F. Supp. 1185 (D.S.C.)(1981)("the sheriff's power for appointing and dismissing his deputies and assigning them their respective duties at his pleasure gives him unlimited control over them")(citing Barksdale v. Posey, 20 S.C.L. (2 Hill) 647, 652 (1835)). Because Section 8-13-700(B) does not outline a process by which Respondent could have recused himself, the Commission declines to proceed on this charge. The Commission notes that this reasoning applies only to elected County Sheriffs appointing and swearing-in family members as Deputy Sheriffs and should not be construed as a broader prohibition against a Sheriff's family member working within his or her agency, which the Commission has never formally opined on. See SEC AO92-030 (instructing a public employee to recuse pursuant to Section 8-13-700(B) when dealing with matters arising under Section 8-13-750); SEC AO93-017 (same); SEC AO92-035 (instructing a special purpose district commissioner to recuse pursuant to Section 8-13-700(B) when dealing with matters arising under Section 8-13-750); SEC AO92-213 (same); SEC AO92-096 (instructing a county councilmember to recuse pursuant to Section 8-13-700(B) when dealing with matters arising under Section 8-13-750).

regard. As mitigation, Respondent denies that he facilitated Andy's hiring. Respondent states that he believed his conduct was permissible because he attempted to ensure that Andy received no special treatment by issuing the May 28, 2024 and July 3, 2024 memoranda.

DISPOSITION

1. The Commission hereby finds Respondent in violation of Section 8-13-750(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 to Respondent for the and orders Respondent to pay to the Commission, within one (1) year from his release from confinement, an administrative fee of \$900.00 and a civil penalty of \$2,000.00. The Commission further orders Respondent to pay \$32,293.06 in restitution to the County and to provide proof of such payment to the Commission within one (1) year from his release from confinement.⁷

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⁷ In September of 2025, the United States Attorney's Office for the District of South Carolina charged Respondent with Conspiracy to Commit Theft Concerning Programs Receiving Federal Funds, Wire Fraud Conspiracy, and Obtaining Controlled Substances by Misrepresentation. Respondent subsequently pled guilty to these charges and was sentenced to a term of imprisonment of forty-one (41) months. In addition, Respondent was ordered to pay restitution totaling \$462,866.06. The amount agreed upon in this matter (C2024-051, C2024-055, C2024-056) is distinct from any restitution owed as a result of the federal charges.

By executing this Consent Order, Respondent understands that he is not only admitting to violations of the Ethics Act but also confessing to a judgment of \$35,193.06 (less any money paid to the Commission) in the event he does not make full and timely payment or action as provided in this Order. In that event, the Commission shall file a Judgment against Respondent in the County of Respondent's last known residence and in any County where Respondent owns real property. Upon said filing, the Clerk of Court shall enter this Order in the amount of \$35,193.06 (less any money paid to the Commission) in its Judgment Rolls, without cost to the Commission.

AND IT IS ORDERED THIS 24th DAY OF August, 2026.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION


SARA PARRISH, VICE CHAIR


CHARLES "CHUCK" WRIGHT
RESPONDENT


STEVEN DENTON
RESPONDENT'S ATTORNEY