

CITY OF NEW YORK
THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER OF INVESTIGATION
FOR THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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ANASTASIA COLEMAN
SPECIAL COMMISSIONER

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

October 4, 2024

Hon. David C. Banks
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Renay Bell
SCI Case #: 2024-05434

Dear Chancellor Banks:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that Renay Bell (“Bell”), a Special Transportation Paraprofessional employed by New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) vendor Preferred Home Care of New York (“PHC”), engaged in employee misconduct and theft.¹ The investigation uncovered that Bell submitted fraudulent timesheets wherein she claimed to have worked on days when she was absent from work, resulting in her being paid \$1,840.00 to which she was not entitled.

I. Investigation and Findings:

The investigation began in June 2024, when the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District (“SCI”) received an email complaint of misconduct against Bell from the [REDACTED]. In her complaint, [REDACTED] reported that Bell submitted fraudulent billing documentation to the agency. [REDACTED] further reported that Bell admitted that she billed PHC for dates when she did not provide services to a 15-year-old male student (“Student A”).² [REDACTED] said that Bell’s wrongdoing was confirmed by “cross-referencing” Student A’s school attendance with the timesheets she submitted to PHC.

SCI investigators interviewed [REDACTED] who stated that Bell had been employed by PHS since 2022 and had worked as a full-time special transportation paraprofessional assisting Student A during the 2023-2024 school year. [REDACTED] explained that Bell accompanied Student A to and from school, and while

¹ Bell was terminated from PHC on April 10, 2024.

² Student A’s age referenced herein is as of the time when the investigation commenced.

Student A attended classes; Bell performed clerical duties at the school. [REDACTED] added that Bell submitted weekly timesheets which only required the signature of Student A's mother ("Mother A").

During the interview, [REDACTED] recounted an occasion when [REDACTED] [REDACTED] became "suspicious" of one of the timesheets Bell had submitted because it was on the "wrong form." Consequently, [REDACTED] contacted Mother A and inquired about Bell's attendance. [REDACTED] stated that Mother A informed her that Bell had been absent on several occasions, however, her absences were not recorded. Instead, the dates when she was absent were "filled in" on Bell's timesheet indicating that she had worked the day. [REDACTED] subsequently requested Student A's attendance records from his school. A review of this documentation revealed several days when Student A was absent, however, Bell claimed on her timesheet that she worked a full day.

[REDACTED] told SCI investigators that when Bell was confronted about the discrepancies concerning her timesheets, Bell expressed that she did not care and exclaimed, "What does it matter? Everyone steals." Bell further stated that it was "very easy to steal," and explained that she would leave the dates blank when either she or Student A were absent and later fill in the dates and times after Mother A had signed off on the timesheet. [REDACTED] provided the assigned SCI investigator with documentation concerning Bell's fraudulent timesheets, her email correspondence with Bell, and the Employee Counseling Record ("ECR") concerning Bell's termination on April 10, 2024.

A review of the ECR memorandum revealed that on April 10th, Bell met with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].³ At the meeting, it was addressed that, upon reviewing Bell's timesheets and cross-referencing Student A's attendance at school, Bell billed and received payments for several dates when she was absent and did not work. In total, Bell fraudulently billed the agency for 92 hours of services she never provided on the following dates:

- Seven hours on January 30th, February 6th, February 7th, and February 8th.
- Eight hours on February 12th, February 14th, February 15th, February 16th, February 26th, February 27th, February 29th, and March 1st.

According to [REDACTED] Bell was immediately terminated, and she agreed to repay the sum of \$1,840.00 – which was the amount she owed to PHC. [REDACTED] continued that Bell was supposed to remit five bi-weekly payments of \$368.00, however, as of June 2024, she had not made one payment towards the amount owed. [REDACTED] added that PHC had not yet billed the DOE for the services provided by Bell.⁴

³ Prior to the meeting, [REDACTED] sent an email to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] wherein she disclosed that Bell tried to bill for March 5th and March 7th, however, Mother A reported that Bell was absent on both dates. Attached to her email was Bell's fraudulent timesheet dated March 8th.

⁴ In the ECR document, it was reported that Bell said that she committed fraud because she was in school or at her overnight job and could not report to work. It was further noted that Bell made the following remarks during the meeting: "Who doesn't steal nowadays? If I didn't come in today, what would have happened? How are you going to find me?" Bell then agreed to repay the amount of \$368.00 bi-weekly, beginning on May 8th.

II. Conclusion and Recommendation:

Upon review of the above facts, SCI substantiated that Renay Bell engaged in employee misconduct and theft – which she readily admitted. In fact, when confronted by administrators from PHC, Bell justified her wrongdoing and stated, “Who doesn’t steal nowadays?” Further, Bell not only acknowledged that she submitted fraudulent timesheets, but she also explained the process by which she committed her theft and boasted that it was “very easy to steal.” It is the recommendation of this office that a problem code be assigned to her personnel file to serve as a reminder should Bell seek future employment with the DOE or any of its vendors.

Please respond in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter as to what, if any, action has been taken or is contemplated regarding Renay Bell or the recommendation made herein. We are forwarding a copy of this letter to the Office of Legal Services.

Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact Special Counsel Valerie A. Batista, the attorney assigned to the case. She can be reached at (212) 510-1417 or vbatista@nycsci.org. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

ANASTASIA COLEMAN
Special Commissioner of Investigation
for the New York City School District

By: /s/ Daniel I. Schlachet
Daniel I. Schlachet
First Deputy Commissioner

AC:DS:VB:lr

cc: Elizabeth Vladeck, Esq.
Karen Antoine, Esq.
Katherine Rodi, Esq.
Monica Davis-Thorne - Director

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

January 3, 2024

Hon. David C. Banks
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Jeffrey Alvarado
SCI Case #: 2023-5617

Dear Chancellor Banks:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) Special Transportation Paraprofessional (“STP”) Jeffrey Alvarado (“Alvarado”) submitted fraudulent timesheets which resulted in Alvarado being improperly paid \$3,319.80.¹

I. Investigation & Findings:

A. Initial Allegation

The investigation began when the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District (“SCI”) received a complaint from [REDACTED], who reported allegations of misconduct against Alvarado. [REDACTED] stated that Alvarado was the STP for an eight-year-old male third grade student (“Student A”). [REDACTED] noted that upon review of Alvarado’s timesheets, she noticed that while

¹ As of this writing, STP Alvarado has not been reassigned, and no problem code has been assigned to his personnel file.

Student A was dropped off at home at approximately 3:00 p.m. most days, Alvarado had regularly recorded his drop-off time as approximately 4:50 p.m. on his timesheets.

B. SCI Investigation

SCI investigators spoke with ██████████ who said that Alvarado was absent from work one day in May 2023, which compelled the mother of Student A (“Mother A”) to bring Student A to P.S. 138, located in Manhattan. ██████████ stated that in making preparations for Student A to be dropped off at home that day, she reviewed Alvarado’s timesheets and noticed that Alvarado had regularly declared Student A’s drop-off time as 4:45 p.m. ██████████ told investigators that this seemed abnormally late for a drop-off time, so she asked for both the bus company and Mother A to be contacted, and both confirmed that Student A was regularly dropped off at approximately 2:45 p.m. ██████████ instructed the replacement STP that day to contact her when she dropped Student A off at home. ██████████ was later contacted by the STP at 2:45 p.m. and informed that Student A had been returned home.

██████████ informed SCI investigators that at the beginning of the school year, during staff orientation, STPs were required to read through a handbook which noted that STPs could only claim the time from when they left school until their assigned student was dropped off at home. ██████████ added that STP time and attendance was also verbally discussed during the orientation. ██████████ stated that Alvarado signed a form confirming that he read and understood the handbook prior to the start of the school year.

SCI investigators then spoke with the Grandparents of Student A (“Grandmother A” and “Grandfather A”), who stated that from September 2022 until June 2023, Grandfather A took Student A to and from the bus stop during the school year. Grandfather A stated that Student A was typically dropped off at home between 3:30 p.m. and 4:15 p.m., depending on traffic. Grandfather A further noted that the bus paraprofessional would depart the bus along with Student A in the afternoons and would not get back on the bus after delivering Student A to Grandfather A.

DOE Office of Pupil Transportation (“OPT”) provided SCI investigators with the GPS data from Alvarado’s bus from September 2022 until June 2023. The data indicated the times at which the bus was in the vicinity of Student A’s residence in the afternoons following a school day. Between September 19, 2022, and June 7, 2023, GPS data indicated the times at which Alvarado dropped Student A off at his residence.² This GPS data indicated that Student A was dropped off at approximately 3:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m., nearly each day. A further review of the time differences between the GPS data and the hours that Alvarado declared on his timesheets established that Alvarado claimed an additional 129 hours and 56 minutes.

² On numerous days between September 2022 and June 2023, the GPS data did not indicate the stop near Student A’s residence, presumably because the bus did not idle long enough for the GPS to register the stop.

SCI investigators interviewed STP Alvarado who explained that a STP was responsible for meeting their assigned student outside the student's residence in the morning, riding the bus with the student to school, and riding the bus home from school with the student in the afternoon, before delivering the student to their parent or guardian. Alvarado stated that he had been the STP assigned to Student A for the last two school years, and recalled that Student A was usually picked up in the mornings earlier than 7:00 a.m. and typically arrived home in the afternoons around 3:40 p.m. Alvarado told investigators that he was allowed to claim the time Student A got on the bus until 7:59 a.m., and from 2:31 p.m. until Student A was handed off to his parent or guardian in the afternoon. Alvarado recalled that Grandfather A typically brought Student A to the bus in the mornings and received Student A from Alvarado in the afternoons.

Alvarado confirmed that he was aware that GPS was installed on the bus which could identify the time when the bus was in the vicinity of Student A's residence. Alvarado was informed of substantial time discrepancies between the GPS data and the times he notated on his timesheet in the afternoons. Alvarado explained that he did "not have much to say," but he conceded that he was regularly "adding more time" to his timesheets. Alvarado elaborated that he did not want to be the STP for Student A, as Student A lived far from his home, but an AP had specifically asked him to be Student A's STP. Alvarado told investigators that he added the extra time to account for the time it took for him to get home after returning Student A since it was "far." Alvarado confirmed that he was aware of the location of Student A's residence prior to agreeing to be his STP and noted that he would write down his hours in a notebook every day and then submit weekly timesheets every Monday.

████████████████████ provided investigators with a copy of the 2022-2023 Staff Handbook which was signed by Alvarado at the beginning of the school year. ██████ further indicated that Alvarado was paid \$25.55 per hour during the 2022-2023 school year. Based upon the 129 hours and 50 minutes that Alvarado improperly added to his timesheets, Alvarado was paid a total of \$3,319.80 to which he was not entitled.

II. Conclusion and Recommendation:

Upon review of the above facts, SCI has substantiated that Special Transportation Paraprofessional Jeffrey Alvarado submitted fraudulent timesheets resulting in an overpayment by DOE of \$3,319.80 for the 2022-2023 school year. Therefore, it is the recommendation of this office that DOE take appropriate disciplinary action regarding Alvarado, up to and including termination of his employment. SCI further recommends that the DOE seek repayment of the \$3,319.80 improperly paid to Alvarado as a result of his actions.

Please respond in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter as to any action taken regarding Jeffrey Alvarado, or the recommendations made herein. We are sending a copy of this letter to the DOE Office of Legal Services.

Hon. D. Banks

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January 3, 2024

Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact Stephen Boniberger, the assigned attorney for this matter, at (212) 510-1440 or sboniberger@nycsci.org.

Sincerely,

ANASTASIA COLEMAN
Special Commissioner of Investigation
for the New York City School District

By: /s/ Daniel I. Schlachet
Daniel I. Schlachet
First Deputy Commissioner

AC:DS:SB:lr

cc: Elizabeth Vladeck, Esq.
Karen Antoine, Esq.
Katherine Rodi, Esq.
Monica Davis-Thorne - Director