COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES COMMISSION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, **Petitioner,**	:	
v.	:	**DOCKET NO. DI-14-39**
LAUREN N. HARRINGTON-COOPER, **Respondent.**	:	

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

On July 3, 2014, the Department filed a Notice of Charges against Lauren N. Harrington-Cooper ("Respondent") seeking the immediate suspension of her Pennsylvania teaching certification pursuant to section 2070.9b(a)(1) of the Educator Discipline Act. Under section 2070.9b(a)(1), the Commission may direct the Department to suspend immediately the certificate and employment eligibility of an educator indicted for a crime set forth in section 111(e)(1) through (3) of the Public School Code of 1949 if the Commission determines that the educator poses a threat to the health, safety or welfare of students or other persons in the schools of this Commonwealth. Suspension may occur only after the educator has received notice of the charges and request for immediate discipline and has an opportunity to be heard at a hearing if so requested. 24 P.S. § 2070.9b(a)(1); 24 P.S. § 1-111(e)(1)-(3).

In the instant case, the Department properly served the Notice of Charges on Respondent. Notwithstanding the language in the Notice of Charges cautioning Respondent that failure to respond could result in the factual assertions being deemed

admitted and the imposition of discipline without a hearing, Respondent declined to file an answer or to request a hearing. In accordance with the Commission's bylaws, an educator who fails to respond to the Notice of Charges is in default as provided for in section 35.37 of the General Rules of Administrative Practice and Procedure. 22 Pa. Code § 233.115(c)(1); 1 Pa. Code § 35.37. Thus, all relevant facts stated in the Notice of Charges will be deemed admitted.

Accordingly, the Commission makes the following findings of fact. Respondent holds an Instructional I Pennsylvania teaching certificate in the area of English 7-12, which was issued by the Department on May 1, 2009. At all times relevant to the instant matter, Respondent was employed by the Wyoming Valley West School District as a high school English teacher. Respondent has been criminally charged in the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas under three separate indictments with the following crimes enumerated in section 1-111(e)(1) of the Public School Code of 1949: Institutional Sexual Assault, 18 Pa. C.S. § 3124.2(a.2)(1); Corruption of Minors, 18 Pa.C.S. 6301(a)(1)(i); and Corruption of Minors, 18 Pa.C.S. § 6301(a)(1)(ii). The criminal charges stem from allegations that Respondent engaged in sexual contact with male students, including sexual intercourse, oral sex and the exchange of sexually-explicit electronic communications.

Based on these facts, the Commission finds that the Department has presented sufficient evidence to support its claim that Respondent's alleged misconduct poses a threat to the health, safety or welfare of students or other persons in the schools of this Commonwealth. The burden then shifts to Respondent to rebut the evidence presented by the Department that she was indicted for the particular crimes and/or that

she poses the requisite threat. In this case, Respondent forfeited the rebuttal opportunity.[1]

Accordingly, the Commission finds that Respondent's teaching certification and employment eligibility should be suspended immediately pursuant to 24 P.S. § 2070.9b(a)(1) and enters the following Order:

[1] The Commission's decision in this matter is based upon the nature and seriousness of the charges lodged against Respondent, the district court's finding that probable cause exists to believe that Respondent committed the acts charged, and Respondent's failure to provide evidence to rebut the Commission's reasonable belief that the health, safety or welfare of students or others would be jeopardized by the retention of her certification and employment eligibility during the pendency of the criminal proceedings. However, the Commission makes no findings herein regarding the truth of the factual allegations underlying the criminal charges filed against Respondent. Moreover, should the criminal charges be dismissed or otherwise removed, Respondent's teaching certification and employment eligibility will be immediately reinstated pursuant to section 2070.9b(a)(1)(iii) upon receipt of the appropriate documentation.

ORDER

AND NOW, this 14th day of August, 2014, upon consideration of the Notice of Charges requesting immediate suspension filed by the Department of Education, it is hereby ORDERED that Lauren N. Harrington-Cooper's teaching certification and eligibility to be employed as a charter or cyber charter school staff member or contracted educational provider staff member shall be SUSPENDED IMMEDIATELY pursuant to 24 P.S. § 2070.9b(a)(1).

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND
PRACTICES COMMISSION

BY: _____
Gilbert R. Griffiths
Chairperson

ATTEST: _____
Carolyn Angelo
Executive Director

Date Mailed: August 14, 2014