

*

In the Matter of	*	Before the
Cereta A. Lee	*	State Ethics Commission
Respondent	*	Complaint No. C-1-25

*

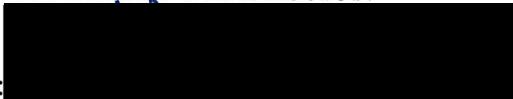
ORDER

Having considered the Stipulation of Settlement Agreement entered into between the Respondent, Cereta A. Lee, and Katherine P. Thompson, Staff Counsel to the State Ethics Commission, on September 11, 2025, the State Ethics Commission hereby determines that the matter complained of herein has been settled by the Respondent's execution of the Stipulation of Settlement Agreement, attached hereto and made part hereof.

ORDERED, that the Respondent is reprimanded, and that this Order and the Stipulation of Settlement Agreement are public documents.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

Date: September 11, 2025

By: 
Craig D. Roswell, Chair

In the Matter of:

CERETA A. LEE

Respondent

Before the State Ethics Commission

Complaint No. C-1-25

STIPULATION OF SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

This Stipulation of Settlement Agreement (hereinafter “Agreement”) was made on the 11th day of September, 2025, between Cereta A. Lee, Respondent, and Katherine P. Thompson, Staff Counsel to the State Ethics Commission (“Staff Counsel”).

STIPULATIONS

1. The State Ethics Commission (“the Commission”) is an executive agency of the State of Maryland established for the purpose of enforcing the Maryland Public Ethics Law (General Provisions Article, Title 5, Annotated Code of Maryland, (hereinafter the “Ethics Law”).
2. Cereta A. Lee (the “Respondent”) was, at all times relevant to this matter, the elected Register of Wills for Prince George’s County. The elected Register of Wills for Prince George’s County is defined as a State official subject to the conflict of interest provisions of the Ethics Law.
3. On January 9, 2025, the Commission received correspondence from an individual (“the Complainant”) requesting that a complaint be issued against the Respondent for participating in a matter she had an interest in while in her State position and for intentionally using her public position for her own personal gain and the gain of another. The Commission met on March 27, 2025, and authorized the issuance of the complaint. Staff Counsel was directed to perform a preliminary investigation into the allegations.
4. On April 14, 2025, a copy of the foregoing Complaint issued in proceeding C-1-25 was forwarded by both regular mail and electronic mail to the Respondent.
5. During Staff Counsel’s investigation and review of documents, it was determined that the Respondent participated in matters as Register involving an estate where she had an interest as Co-Personal Representative and as a beneficiary. In addition, the two qualifying relatives of the Respondent had an interest in the estate during times when the Respondent was participating as Register. The actions taken by the Respondent include approving paperwork related to the estate, directing others on matters involving the estate, signing letters involving the estate, and participating in hearings and motions involving the estate, all while she was either representing the estate or listed as a beneficiary to the estate.

6. During the investigation, the Respondent used her State position and office to direct others to process the estate as a “small estate” and to approve the estate as a “small estate” even though it did not meet the requirements. In addition, the Respondent used her State position in her request that the hearing held regarding her handling of the estate before resigning as Co-Personal Representative be sealed for her own personal benefit.
7. Section 5-501(a)(1) of the Public Ethics Law prohibits a State employee or official from participating in matters in which the official or employee has an interest. Section 5-101(t) defines “interest” as a legal or equitable economic interest that is owned or held wholly or partly, jointly or severally, or directly or indirectly, whether or not the economic interest is subject to an encumbrance or condition. Through its published opinions, the Commission has defined a “matter” as “any proceeding, application submission, request for ruling or other determination, contract, claim, case or such particular matter.” (Op. No. 80-17).
8. Section 5-506 of the Public Ethics Law prohibits a State employee or official from intentionally using the prestige of his or her office for his or her own private gain or that of another. The Commission has determined that § 5-506 prohibits a State employee or official from engaging in activities unrelated to their State duties while on State time or using State resources and facilities for their own personal gain. The Respondent has been forthright in her cooperation in Staff Counsel’s review of this matter.
9. The Respondent is voluntarily entering into this Agreement to admit certain violations of the Ethics Law, to accept certain sanctions, and to resolve the matter now pending against her without a hearing before the Commission.
10. The Respondent has been represented throughout these proceedings by counsel, William C. Brennan, Jr., Esquire, as indicated by his signature on this Agreement.

NOW THEREFORE, in consideration of the agreed facts contained herein, and effective on the date of the Commission’s acceptance of the terms of this Agreement, Cereta A. Lee, Respondent, and Katherine P. Thompson, Staff Counsel, agree as follows:

- A. The Respondent stipulates that her participation, while in her State position, in matters where she and her qualifying relatives had an interest was in violation of the participation provisions in § 5-501(a)(1) of the Ethics Law.
- B. The Respondent stipulates that her intentional use of the prestige of her office for her private gain in this matter was in violation of the prestige of office provision in § 5-506 of the Ethics Law.
- C. The Respondent understands that violations of the conflict of interest provisions of the Ethics Law may result in civil fines pursuant to § 5-902 of the Ethics Law. The Respondent further agrees to pay, in lieu of potential

finer, the sum of FIVE THOUSAND and no/100 DOLLARS (\$5,000.00) for the above admitted violations of the Ethics Law. That said sum will be paid by check or money order made payable to the "State of Maryland" in care of the Commission on or before July 30, 2025. The fee shall be distributed to the Fair Campaign Financing Fund established under § 15-103 of the Fair Campaign Finance Article. If the fee is not paid, it is agreed that the matter will be transferred to the Maryland State Central Collection Unit for the purpose of collecting the monies owed.

- D. This Agreement will serve as a reprimand to the Respondent for the above admitted violations of the Ethics Law effective the date of the Commission's acceptance of this Agreement.
- E. The Commission will transmit a copy of this Agreement to the Maryland State Court Administrator.
- F. The Respondent waives any formal proceedings and hearing in this matter if the Commission accepts this Agreement and agrees that acceptance of this Agreement by the Commission constitutes a final action and finding of violation by the Commission.
- G. The Respondent further agrees that this Agreement is not subject to the confidentiality provisions of the Ethics Law and will be public information unless otherwise protected.
- H. Upon execution of this Agreement by the Respondent, Staff Counsel will recommend that the Commission suspend any further proceedings against the Respondent and recommend further that the Commission issue a Final Order consistent with the terms of this Agreement. Should the Respondent fail to comply with the terms of this Agreement, and after written notice to her, the Commission reserves the right to issue a further order regarding this matter or to schedule a hearing in this matter.
- I. In the event that the Commission declines to accept this Agreement, both the Respondent and Staff Counsel are relieved of their respective obligations hereunder, and neither this Agreement, nor any admission it may contain, shall be admissible in any subsequent proceeding by the Commission.
- J. The Respondent and Staff Counsel are entering into this Agreement for the sole purpose of resolving this matter and for no other purpose.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, Cereta A. Lee, Respondent, and Katherine P. Thompson, Staff Counsel, State Ethics Commission, have hereunto set their hands.



Katherine P. Thompson, Staff Counsel
State Ethics Commission
45 Calvert Street, 3rd Floor
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(410) 260-7770



Cereta A. Lee



William C. Brennan, Jr., Esquire
Brennan McKenna & Lawlor, Chtd.
6305 Ivy Lane, Suite 700
Greenbelt, MD 20770
Attorney for Respondent

State of Maryland

County of: Prince George's, to wit:

Before me, the undersigned, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Cereta A. Lee, who made oath in due form of law on this 30th day of July, 2025, that the matters and facts hereinabove set forth in the Stipulation of Settlement Agreement are true to the best of her knowledge, information and belief and it is her voluntary act and that she executed this Agreement for the purposes set forth herein.



My Commission Expires: 04/13/2029

(Notary Seal)



State of Maryland,

County of: Baltimore, to wit:

Before me, the undersigned, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Katherine P. Thompson, Staff Counsel to the State Ethics Commission, who made oath on this 11 day of September, 2025, in due form of law that she executed this Agreement for the purposes therein and

[Redacted Signature]

Notary Public

My Commission Expires: 12/22/26



Accepted by the Commission

[Redacted Signature]

Date: 9/11/2025