MINUTES OF THE TWO-HUNDRED-AND-THIRTIETH MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY CIVIL SERVICE MERIT BOARD – MARCH 10, 2026

State Universities Civil Service System
1717 Philo Road, Suite 24
Urbana, IL

Chicago State University
Gwendolyn Brooks Library
Conference Room 352
9501 South King Drive
Chicago, IL

Governors State University
1 University Parkway
Room C2315
University Park, IL

Illinois State University
718 W. College Avenue
Room NSB 101A
Normal, IL

Northern Illinois University
Altgeld Hall, Room 203
DeKalb, IL

Southern Illinois University of Edwardsville
School of Dental Medicine
2800 College Ave.
Alumni Conference Room, Room B273
Alton, IL

University of Illinois at Chicago
Discovery Partners Institute
200 S Wacker Drive
Conference Room 702
Chicago, IL

Call to Order and Roll Call – John Butler, Chair

Chair Butler called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm.

Members present at the State Universities Civil Service System (University System) and posted designated sites were: John Butler, Chair, from the Northern Illinois University Board of Trustees; Barb Baurer from the Eastern Illinois University Board of Trustees; Carolyn Blackwell from the University of Illinois Board of Trustees; Jim Kvedaras from the Governors State University Board of Trustees; Robert Navarro from the Illinois State University Board of Trustees; J. Todd Phillips from the Northeastern Illinois University Board of Trustees (arrived at 1:15 pm); Jason Quiara from the Chicago State University Board of Trustees, and Kisha Lang from the Western Illinois University Board of Trustees

Members absent were Tami Craig Schilling from the University of Illinois Board of Trustees; Ramon Cepeda from the University of Illinois Board of Trustees; and John Simmons from the Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees.

Gail Schiesser, Executive Director; Maggie Miller, Legal Counsel; and Teresa Rademacher and Jennifer Miles, Secretary for the Merit Board, were also present. Various other university employees and University System staff were also in attendance.

Consideration of participation by other Merit Board Members not physically present at the meeting site

Chair Butler stated that Dr. Lang was unable to participate at one of the meeting locations due to a work commitment. As required by the Open Meetings Act, the Merit Board took action to allow her to participate at a non-public site.

Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to approve Dr. Lang's participation in the meeting at a non-public site due to work commitments. Mr. Quiara seconded Mr. Kvedaras' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Absent
Mr. Quiara................................Aye
Mr. Simmons............................Absent
Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent

Approval of the Agenda for the 230th Meeting of the Merit Board – John Butler, Chair

Chair Butler asked for a motion to approve the agenda for the March 10, 2026, meeting with an amendment to strike the Chicago State University location due to technical complications. Ms. Baurer made a motion to approve the agenda as amended for the 230th Meeting of the Merit Board. Dr. Navarro seconded Ms. Baurer's motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent
Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Absent
Mr. Quiara................................Aye
Mr. Simmons............................Absent

Merit Board Reorganization

Chair Butler stated that the Merit Board needed to elect officers for 2026. Chair Butler stated that according to Article 3, Section 1, of the Bylaws of the University Civil Service Merit Board (Bylaws), the Board is to elect a Chair and Vice Chair on an annual basis at the first meeting of the year. He also stated that, according to Article 8, Section 1, of the Bylaws, two members are to be elected to the Executive Committee, and per Article 5 of the Bylaws, the Merit Board appoints a Secretary for the Merit Board. He stated the current officers are himself as Chair and John Simmons as Vice Chair. The Executive Committee members are Barb Baurer and Jim Kvedaras. The current Secretary for the Merit Board is Teresa Rademacher.

Chair Butler then called for nominations for the position of Chair. Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to nominate John Butler. Ms. Baurer seconded Mr. Kvedaras' motion.

There being no other nominations, Chair Butler called for nominations for Vice Chair. Chair Butler made a motion to nominate Mr. Simmons. Mr. Kvedaras seconded Chair Butler's motion.

There being no other nominations for Vice Chair, Chair Butler called for nominations for the Executive Committee. Chair Butler made a motion to nominate Ms. Baurer for one of the positions. Mr. Navarro seconded Chair Butler's motion. There being no other nominations, Chair Butler called for nominations for the second position on the Executive Committee. Chair Butler made a motion to nominate Mr. Kvedaras. Mr. Navarro seconded Chair Butler's motion.

Chair Butler asked for a motion to close the nominations. Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to close the nominations. Ms. Baurer seconded Mr. Kvedaras' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras............................Aye
Dr. Lang....................................Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara................................Aye
Mr. Simmons............................Absent
Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent

Chair Butler asked for a roll call for the single nominee of Dr. Butler for the position of Chair. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye

Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent
Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons ....Absent

Chair Butler asked for a roll call for the single nominee of Mr. Simmons for the position of Vice Chair. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent
Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons ....Absent

Chair Butler asked for a roll call for the nomination of Ms. Baurer as a member of the Executive Committee. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent
Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons ....Absent

Chair Butler asked for a roll call for the nomination of Mr. Kvedaras as a member of the Executive Committee. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Ms. Baurer................................Aye

Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda................................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent
Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro................................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons.............................Absent

Chair Butler asked for a motion to appoint Ms. Miles as the Secretary for the Merit Board. Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to appoint Ms. Miles as the Secretary for the Merit Board. Ms. Baurer seconded Mr. Kvedaras' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro................................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons.............................Absent
Ms. Baurer.................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda................................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent

Consideration of the Minutes of the 229th Meeting of the Merit Board, December 9, 2025

Chair Butler asked for action to approve the minutes of the December 9, 2025, meeting. Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to approve the Minutes of the 229th Meeting of the University Civil Service Merit Board. Dr. Lang seconded Mr. Kvedaras' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro................................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons.............................Absent
Ms. Baurer.................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye

Mr. Cepeda	Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling	Absent

Consideration of the Closed Minutes of the 229th Meeting of the Merit Board, December 9, 2025

Chair Butler asked for action to approve the closed minutes from the December 9, 2025, meeting. Chair Butler requested that the Closed Minutes of the 229th Meeting be amended to reflect the Board's return to open session by indicating Dr. Lang as absent, Dr. Navarro as voting "aye," Ms. Blackwell as absent, and Mr. Cepeda as absent.

Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to approve the Closed Minutes of the 229th Meeting of the University Civil Service Merit Board. Mr. Phillips seconded Ms. Kvedaras' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and the Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras	Aye
Dr. Lang	Aye
Dr. Navarro	Aye
Mr. Phillips	Aye
Mr. Quiara	Aye
Mr. Simmons	Absent
Ms. Baurer	Aye
Ms. Blackwell	Aye
Chair Butler	Aye
Mr. Cepeda	Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling	Absent

Report of the Chair concerning the January 30, 2026, Executive Committee meeting

Chair Butler stated the Board's Executive Committee met with the Employee Advisory Committee (EAC) on January 30, 2026, for a discussion regarding issues of concern to employee representatives from member institutions. Three Executive Committee members attended and used the meeting primarily as a listening session and opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

EAC representatives discussed several concerns, including delays in filling civil service positions due to the lack of open and continuous testing and the discontinuation of active applicant registers. They indicated that maintaining ongoing testing and active registers could reduce hiring delays and allow institutions to draw from an established applicant pool when positions become available. Concerns were also raised about applicants needing to repeat evaluation processes when registers are discontinued.

EAC also reported what they view as an overuse of extra help positions to temporarily fill roles that would typically be civil service positions. They emphasized that such positions should be limited to short-term or emergent needs and not used to delay permanent hiring.

Additionally, EAC representatives highlighted concerns about low compensation and its impact on recruiting and retaining qualified candidates, noting the difficulty universities face competing with private sector opportunities.

The meeting concluded with a discussion about potential ways to expand collaboration between the EAC and other system stakeholders to identify shared interests and pursue system improvements.

Ms. Baurer commented that she was impressed with the interest and openness of the EAC members and their desire to work with the Merit Board and other colleagues at the university.

Mr. Kvedaras expressed appreciation for the EAC members' openness and hospitality in hosting the discussion and noted that the meeting represented a positive and constructive start to engagement between the groups and expressed hope that it will lead to a more collaborative relationship moving forward. The Executive Committee looks forward to continued dialogue and opportunities to work together on shared priorities.

Public Comments

Chair Butler stated that there was one request to make public comments.

Pete Varney, Director of Transportation and Building Services at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, stated he enrolled at the University of Illinois in 1990. Having grown up in the Chicago suburbs, he had zero intention of staying in central Illinois after graduation. He began his career unintentionally as a student employee, washing and fueling university vehicles to help pay for tuition. He progressed to become a full-time employee within Facilities & Services and today is proud to lead a team of over 400 of the most essential and quietly relied-upon employees of the University of Illinois. Members of our team are on campus 24/7.

Examples include:

- Driving garbage trucks at 4 am;
- Plowing and shoveling snow with trucks, equipment, and hand shovels in extreme temperatures;
- Keeping 1,300 vehicles and equipment running and operable;
- Collecting 6k tons of garbage and over 1.5k tons of recyclables; and
- Last but far from least – 300+ custodians keeping campus clean and safe.

Mr. Varney stated he has a strong obligation to carry the message from front-line supervisors to the Merit Board. He also commented that he is not speaking on behalf of the Chancellor, Provost, or Illinois Human Resources, that he is sharing the concerns of the front-line supervisors, and that he is putting those concerns into context. The leaders are responsible for directing and supporting upwards of 30 custodians, often at 1:00 am, preparing classrooms for the next day, cleaning entranceway glass for parents, donors, and world-renowned researchers, and cleaning restrooms on a daily or, in many cases, nightly schedule.

Mr. Varney discussed the many due-process protections staff members receive at the university. The University of Illinois uses the Performance Partnership Program (PPP), a proactive performance management system for our civil service employees. This program emphasizes recognizing good performance while providing a process to address poor behavior, conduct, or performance. This process can ultimately lead to the employee's discharge. The dismissal of a team member is a difficult decision; there are instances when it is appropriate.

The steps involved in reaching the point of dismissal are rigorous and not taken lightly. This process ensures that the employee has ample due process with time and information to improve performance or behavior. It is easy to turn a blind eye to poor performers. It is hard to be a true leader, take the time to encourage improvement, assist the employee in achieving appropriate behavior, and remain a productive team member. Mr. Varney assured the Merit Board is not presented with a discharge from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign that has not gone through this rigorous and progressive due process. For various reasons, three employees on our team reached the discharge stage in 2025. Each of these three were returned to working status, in some cases with considerable back pay. One of these employees came before the Merit Board, and a second has filed an appeal.

The natural results of these reinstatements are two-fold: supervisor disillusionment and the perception that hard work may be wasted effort. Frankly, what is the point of doing the hard work to decide that discharge is the only option if the action is going to ultimately be overruled? Documentation and administrative tasks take away from assisting other employees who need a supervisor's attention. Employee dissatisfaction: 90%+ of productive employees witness poor behavior by a co-worker and start to wonder why they should put in effort and do the right thing, while someone can exhibit extremely poor behavior and essentially receive paid time off and be returned to their position with no consequences.

Our team is committed to providing outstanding service to our university. We take pride in our work and strongly feel we contribute to the ongoing success of our university. We ask that when this board is presented with appeals to discharge decisions, in addition to the employee's appeal, they keep in mind the supervisor's coaching, employer's documentation, and the entire performance management process (that is extensive at the University of Illinois) necessary to reach the point of discharge. The impact on the individual is unfortunate, yet it is also important to consider the impact on the entire team when decisions are overturned.

Report of the Designated Employer Representative Group – Josh Allen, DER for the Governors State University

Joshua Allen, Vice President and the Designated Employer Representative (DER) for Governors State University, emphasized the importance of continued collaboration between the Merit Board, universities, and HR leadership to support civil service professionals during a period of fiscal constraint in higher education. Mr. Allen stated that everyone can support our initiatives, regardless of level. Mr. Allen recommended that the Merit Board's support was in the best interest of civil service professionals in maintaining operational excellence, and it has never been more critical.

Mr. Allen noted that the recruitment, retention, and engagement of a skilled workforce are strongly influenced by policies, processes, and institutional flexibility, as we have heard from the

Merit Board, our EAC reps, and our DERs across the civil service system. DERs' chief human resource officers, as well as university leaders in the state of Illinois, have continued to echo the same statement: that there has been no action or progress, and that support was their key message.

Mr. Allen shared the DER's highest priorities, which he hopes the Merit Board will support, and requested an ongoing dialogue and challenges in key areas. Support only helps our employees and institutions. The current residency requirement, as we know, continues to limit applicant pools at a time when universities are facing shrinking applicant pools and heightened competition from remote or hybrid-friendly employers. Greater flexibility would help us, specifically, border institutions. Governor's State is only 11 miles from the state of Indiana. We have applicants consistently applying, wanting to pay employment tax in Illinois. This would help our recruitment, but we are hampered by the current residency requirements.

The rule of three is another concern. We need to discuss how to get those highly qualified candidates to the hiring manager. It constrains our ability to select the candidate who is the best match for organizational needs, team dynamics, and long-term potential. We are facing a budget crisis in Illinois. A low turnover rate keeps highly qualified people employed at our universities. We heard at the last Merit Board meeting that the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library is advocating the same thing. It is a continued statement that we hope for support.

Mr. Allen next turned to the total streamlining hiring processes. HR teams continue to adapt to modernized processes and workforce expectations. Let's have conversations about legacy systems and see what works best for our civil service professionals and our employees at the universities. Opportunities to modernize, conduct classification reviews, improve workflows, conduct audits, and digitize documents would yield substantial results.

The DERs talked about police communication, for example, the one-on-one versus a Teams meeting. Let's have increased communication and support as state employees and state civil service employees and move forward.

The more we don't support each other, the more it's going to impact recruitment, retention, and morale, no matter the classification or where you sit in the state. These constraints affect more than operations; they shape an employee's experience. We need to focus on transparency and on shaping the employees' experience to yield support. Again, we are asking the Merit Board to continue supporting our initiatives and advancing our policy initiatives. We remain committed to supporting both compliance and institutional and university effectiveness. And ongoing collaboration will ensure the civil service system and its professionals are positioned to meet the evolving needs of today's marketplace.

Report of the State Universities Employee Advisory Committee – Jill Odom, Chair

Andy Harpst from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Jacqueline Pointer from Chicago State University presented the Employee Advisory Committee (EAC) report on behalf of Chair Jill Odom, who was unable to attend.

Mr. Harpst stated that Jill Odom was reelected as Chair, Jacqueline Pointer as Vice Chair, Tenea Harris as Secretary, and Andy Harpst as Parliamentarian. Members were also selected to serve on the Executive, Election, and Legislative Committees. Mr. Harpst noted that the EAC's priorities for 2026 include addressing topics and concerns important to civil service employees, strengthening collaboration with the University System Office, the HR Directors group, and the Merit Board, and continuing productive dialogue with stakeholders. EAC thanked the Merit Board Executive Committee members for their time and discussion during the January meeting.

Ms. Pointer shared results from a five-question statewide survey of civil service employees designed to gather feedback on workforce satisfaction, retention, communication, and transparency. Survey results indicated that benefits are the primary factor encouraging employees to remain at their universities, ranking above compensation, while workplace flexibility and opportunities for professional development were also valued but ranked lower. Responses further showed that staff reductions have affected many employees, with 63% reporting changes in their duties, including additional responsibilities both within and outside their job classifications, which may contribute to increased workload and stress. The survey also found that while awareness of the University System website is high, awareness of local EAC representatives and civil service councils is lower, highlighting the need for improved communication and outreach. Employees reported mixed perceptions regarding transparency in employment opportunities, inconsistencies in departmental communication, and access to information. When asked about workplace priorities, compensation was identified as the most important factor by nearly half of the respondents, followed by work-life balance and job security. Ms. Pointer noted that survey responses were anonymous, though some respondents provided comments and contact information for follow-up, and the EAC intends to engage further with those employees to better understand their concerns.

Consideration of Discharge Proceeding Number UIUC-25-19 filed by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign against Clarissa Babiarz

Ms. Miller provided a summary of the discharge case, stating that the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) filed Written Charges for Discharge against Clarissa Babiarz on October 20, 2025. Ms. Babiarz submitted a timely request for a hearing on November 3, 2025, and the hearing was convened within 45 days on December 1, 2025, under the purview of Hearing Officer Aaron Janik. The hearing was reconvened before Mr. Janik on December 19, 2025.

Ms. Babiarz began her employment as a Building Service Worker at UIUC on October 30, 2023. She was assigned to a Building Service Worker position in the University Housing division on April 14, 2024.

On October 20, 2025, the University filed six charges for discharge, which include:

> Charge 1 – Failure to follow instructions, uniform requirements, and work and time schedule;
> Charge 2 – Taking unauthorized breaks in unauthorized areas;
> Charge 3 – Unprofessional behavior;
> Charge 4 – 1.1 hours of unauthorized and unexcused absences;
> Charge 5 – Sleeping during work hours; and

Charge 6 – Poor quantity and quality of work.

In support of these charges, the university presented the testimony of a Building Service Worker, a Building Service Foreperson, and a Building Service Supervisor, all of whom worked with Ms. Babiarz the week before students moved into university housing facilities. Each witness described their interactions with Ms. Babiarz that week, and the supervisory staff spoke about the relationship between Ms. Babiarz's behavior and the department's policies. The university supplemented this evidence with a history of 8 instances of progressive discipline for attendance, behavior, and work performance.

In her defense, Ms. Babiarz stated that she had made mistakes and that she could do better in the future if given the opportunity to return to work.

The Hearing Officer found that the University sustained its burden of proof on all six charges.

Mr. Philips made a motion that the Merit Board go into Closed Session to discuss both discharge cases on the agenda. Mr. Kvedaras seconded Mr. Phillips' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara.................................Aye
Mr. Simmons.............................Absent
Ms. Baurer.................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda................................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent
Mr. Kvedaras.............................Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro................................Aye

The Merit Board went into closed session at 2:07 pm.

The Merit Board returned to open session at 3:21 pm.

Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to discharge Clarissa Babiarz. Mr. Phillips seconded Mr. Kvedaras' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras.............................Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro................................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara.................................Aye
Mr. Simmons.............................Absent

Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent

Therefore, the following Decision and Order of the University Civil Service Merit Board was adopted.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
STATE UNIVERSITIES CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA CHAMPAIGN,	**)**	**BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY CIVIL SERVICE MERIT BOARD**
Employer,	**)**	
v.	**)**	
CLARISSA BABIARZ,	**)**	**DISCHARGE PROCEEDING**
Employee.	**)**	**No. UIUC-25-19**

DECISION AND ORDER OF THE UNIVERSITY CIVIL SERVICE MERIT BOARD

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Discharge proceedings have been commenced by the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**, Employer, against **Clarissa Babiarz**, Employee, by service of Written Charges for Discharge by **UPS** on **October 20, 2025**, and the Employee, **Clarissa Babiarz**, has filed a timely written request for Hearing. A Hearing was duly convened and held on **December 1, 2025**, and concluded on **December 19, 2025**, in conformity with the procedures set forth in Section 250.110(f) of the Illinois Administrative Code (Code) (80 Ill. Adm. Code §250.110(f)). The complete Hearing Record has been certified and placed on file in this cause.

The University Civil Service Merit Board has examined and reviewed the Hearing Record, as supplemented, which includes the following:

1. Written Charges for Discharge, dated **October 20, 2025**
2. Suspension Notice Pending Discharge, dated **October 20, 2025**
3. Employee's Request for Hearing, received on **November 3, 2025**
4. Acknowledgement of Hearing Request, dated **November 4, 2025**
5. Notice of Appointment as Hearing Officer and Notice of Convening of Hearing to the Hearing Officer, dated **November 5, 2025**
6. Notice of Convening of Hearing to the parties of record, dated **November 5, 2025**

7. Order Regarding Procedures for Remote Hearing, dated **November 6, 2025**
8. Employer witness list submitted, **November 24, 2025**
9. Employee Motion for Continuance 8:09am, dated **December 1, 2025**
10. Employee Motion for Continuance 8:14am, dated **December 1, 2025**
11. Employee Motion for Continuance 8:43am, dated **December 1, 2025**
12. Transcript of Hearing, Volume I, dated **December 1, 2025**
13. Notice of Reconvening of Hearing to the Hearing Officer, dated **December 2, 2025**
14. Notice of Reconvening of Hearing to the parties of record, dated **December 2, 2025**
15. Transcript of Hearing, Volume II, dated **December 19, 2025**
16. Exhibits admitted into Record at Hearing, **December 19, 2025**
17. Request for Findings of Fact from Hearing Officer, dated **January 15, 2026**
18. Findings of Fact rendered by Hearing Officer, dated **January 28, 2026**

DECISION AND ORDER

Now being fully advised of the matters contained in the hearing record, and based solely on the hearing record, the University Civil Service Merit Board makes the following jurisdictional and factual findings in support of this Decision and Order, and hereby **ORDERS AS FOLLOWS**:

1. The Findings of Fact of the Hearing Officer, attached hereto, are approved and incorporated herein, to the extent not inconsistent with this Order.

2. The Employee, **Clarissa Babiarz**, is hereby separated from the service of their Employer, **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**, and the effective date of their discharge shall be **March 10, 2026**.

3. This Order is FINAL and is subject to the Illinois Administrative Review Law. Rule 250.110 does not authorize the Merit Board to hear any motion or request for reconsideration.

4. The name of the Hearing Officer and the name and contact information for each of the parties are as follows:

   Hearing Officer
   Mr. Aaron P. Janik
   1717 Philo Road, Suite 24
   Urbana, IL 61802

   Employer
   Mr. Seth Baker
   Assistant University Counsel
   University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

258 Henry Administration Building
506 South Wright Street
Urbana, IL 61801
Baker41@illinois.edu

Employee
Clarissa Babiarz
601 E Barker St
Tuscola, IL 61953
clairbabiarz@gmail.com

Dated March 10, 2026
University Civil Service Merit Board

By: /s/ John Butler
John Butler, Chair
University Civil Service Merit Board

ATTEST:
By: /s/ Jennifer Miles
Jennifer Miles
Secretary for the Merit Board

Consideration of Discharge Proceeding Number UIC-25-17 filed by the University of Illinois at Chicago against Gino Ortiguerra

Ms. Miller provided a summary of the discharge case, stating that Gino Ortiguerra began his employment as an Operating Room Technician at the University of Illinois Hospital on October 19, 2020. On November 7, 2025, the University filed Written Charges for Discharge against Mr. Ortiguerra, and he submitted a timely request for a hearing on November 12, 2025. The hearing was convened within 45 days on December 15, 2025, under the purview of Hearing Officer Kevin Camden.

The University filed four charges for discharge, which include:

Charge 1 – Jeopardizing patient care and safety;
Charge 2 – Poor job performance and clinical judgment;
Charge 3 – Failure to adhere to and/or execute protocols and training; and
Charge 4 – Behavior that places the University at risk of liability.

These charges all relate to a surgical procedure performed on June 16, 2025. During the pre-hearing conference, the parties agreed to six stipulations about this surgical procedure. Specifically:

1. On June 16, 2025, Gino Ortiguerra was part of a surgical team performing a radial head arthroplasty at the University of Illinois Hospital. (Tr. 14).

2. During the radial head arthroplasty procedure on June 16, 2025, a suture anchor, which is a type of implant, was implanted into a human patient. (Tr. 16).
3. The Employer's policy on implants in perioperative services required Mr. Ortiguerra to verify the implant's expiration date. Prior to handing off the implant to the sterile field. (Tr. 16).
4. Mr. Ortiguerra failed to verify the implant's expiration date prior to handing off the instrument to the sterile field. (Tr. 16).
5. The suture anchor implant was implanted into the body of the patient. (Tr. 17).
6. The implant that was implanted into the patient on June 16, 2025, had expired on December 31, 2023. (Tr. 17).

The Employer argued that this incident rises to the level of discharge because Mr. Ortiguerra was trained on, on notice of, and expected to follow the policy, and because the deviation from the policy resulted in risks to patient safety and employer liability. (Jones, Tr. 203-05).

In his defense, Mr. Ortiguerra testified about the context in which this incident occurred and highlighted multiple opportunities for other staff to have noted the expiration date before the implant at issue reached the sterile field.

The Hearing Officer found that the University sustained its burden of proof on all four charges.

Mr. Phillips made a motion to reinstate Gino Ortiguerra with a 120-day suspension. Dr. Lang seconded Mr. Phillips' motion.

Ms. Baurer stated she had concerns regarding the seriousness of the infraction, the prior education provided, and the university's ability to support what they've been trying to do from a systemic correction perspective.

In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion failed due to a tie:

Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons ....Absent
Ms. Baurer.................................No
Ms. Blackwell ....No
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda................................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent
Mr. Kvedaras ....No
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro................................No

Ms. Baurer made a motion to discharge Gino Ortiguerra. Mr. Kvedaras seconded Ms. Baurer's motion.

Dr. Lang commented that a decision of discharge puts the university's systemic issues on one person, based on what that person did and believes that a suspension is enough at this point.

Ms. Baurer commented that based on the record there is no indication of what discipline might have been involved for other employees.

Mr. Kvederas stated that in terms of order of magnitude, this is more than mundane job efforts that result in minimal impact beyond aggravation or annoyance. This is a very significant operation, one in which somebody's life is at risk. There is a real concern about an expired device being placed and implanted in a patient's body. This is especially concerning given that there was very recent training by the university on this exact issue, which Mr. Ortiguerra recieved. With that in mind, it rises to a different level of responsibility, one that we need to take very seriously.

Mr. Phillps acknowledge the level of rigor this board is applying in addressing this issue. I fully respect my colleagues and the perspectives expressed here. There appears to be a potential systemic issue in ensuring that expiration dates are properly checked and that appropriate devices and materials are used in surgeries. There is no evidence that this employee received any level of progressive discipline. Recognizing the importance of preventing a repeat of this type of incident, a 120-day suspension, the maximum possible, sends a very clear and strong message. It reinforces that the employer's protocols and processes must be followed, and that the training provided must be respected and taken seriously.

Chair Butler noted that the record reflects significant effort by the employer to address a systemic issue, which is appreciated. However, the record does not indicate that other responsible parties were held accountable, and it suggests the employee believes they are the only individual being disciplined within a process involving multiple parties. From this perspective, imposing the most severe discipline short of discharge to reinforce the importance of compliance and support the employer's efforts. Discharge is reserved for cases involving a substantial risk or deficiency that renders continued employment detrimental, and generally requires repeated misconduct.

Ms. Blackwell acknowledged the concern regarding whether others were held accountable but noted that such information is not part of the record and, therefore, cannot factor into the decision. Stating the charges are serious enough to warrant discharge.

Chair Butler commented that the employee's position is in the record that they are being singularly held accountable; however, there is no counterargument from the employer in the record.

In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion failed due to a tie:

Ms. Baurer.................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....No
Mr. Cepeda................................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent

Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....No
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Mr. Phillips ....No
Mr. Quiara ....No
Mr. Simmons............................Absent

Dr. Navarro asked if additional information could be provided as part of the record.

Ms. Miller stated the rules permit a fourth option whereby the Merit Board could order that the hearing be reconvened for the limited purpose of supplementing the record if the Merit Board determines it cannot decide based on the current record. The Order would need to specifically identify the issues to be addressed during the reconvened hearing, such action would require a vote.

Mr. Phillips asked if it was the case that in the hearing that occurred the employee introduced the notion that there was a systemic issue and what was the employer's response? Ms. Miller stated the employee did speak to this in his testimony. There was not a substantive response from the employer.

Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to reinstate Gino Ortiguerra with a 120-day suspension. Mr. Phillips seconded Mr. Kvederas' motion.

Ms. Blackwell stated that there was prior progressive discipline in the record regarding other issues.

Ms. Baurer commented that the Merit Board generally prefers to see progressive discipline as it is often fairest to the employee, however it is not required. The lack of prior progressive discipline does not prevent discharge when misconduct is sufficiently serious.

In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws and Open Meetings Act, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................No
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons............................Absent
Ms. Baurer................................No
Ms. Blackwell ....No
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent

Therefore, the following Decision and Order of the University Civil Service Merit Board was adopted.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
STATE UNIVERSITIES CIVIL SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO,	**)**	**BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY CIVIL SERVICE**
Employer,	**)**	**MERIT BOARD**
v.	**)**	
GINO ORTIGUERRA,	**)**	**DISCHARGE PROCEEDING**
Employee.	**)**	**No. UIC-25-17**

DECISION AND ORDER OF THE UNIVERSITY CIVIL SERVICE MERIT BOARD

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Discharge proceeding has been commenced by the **University of Illinois at Chicago**, Employer, against **Gino Ortiguerra**, Employee, by service of Written Charges for Discharge by **UPS** on **November 7, 2025**, and the Employee, **Gino Ortiguerra**, has filed a timely written request for a Hearing. A Hearing was duly convened and concluded on **December 15, 2025**, in conformity with the procedures set forth in Section 250.110(f) of the Illinois Administrative Code (Code) (80 Ill. Adm. Code §250.110(f)). The complete Hearing Record has been certified and placed on file in this cause.

The University Civil Service Merit Board has examined and reviewed the Hearing Record, as supplemented, which includes the following:

1. Written Charges for Discharge, dated **November 7, 2025**
2. Suspension Notice Pending Discharge, dated **November 7, 2025**
3. Employee's Request for Hearing, received on **November 12, 2025**
4. Acknowledgement of Hearing Request, dated **November 13, 2025**
5. Notice of Appointment as Hearing Officer and Notice of Convening of Hearing to the Hearing Officer, dated **November 13, 2025**
6. Notice of Convening of Hearing to the parties of record, dated **November 13, 2025**
7. Order Regarding Procedures for Remote Hearing, dated **November 14, 2025**
8. Employer Witness List, submitted **December 8, 2025**
9. Transcript, **December 15, 2025,** Hearing
10. Exhibits admitted into Record at Hearing, **December 15, 2025**
11. Request for Findings of Fact from Hearing Officer, dated **January 30, 2026**
12. Findings of Fact rendered by Hearing Officer, dated **February 13, 2026**

DECISION AND ORDER

Now being fully advised of the matters contained in the hearing record, and based solely on the hearing record, the University Civil Service Merit Board makes the following jurisdictional and factual findings in support of this Decision and Order, and hereby **ORDERS AS FOLLOWS**:

1. The Findings of Fact of the Hearing Officer, attached hereto, are approved and incorporated herein, to the extent not inconsistent with this Order.

2. The Employee, **Gino Ortiguerra,** shall be assigned to perform the duties in a position in their classification following the completion of a 120-day suspension without pay. Any time served while on a Suspension Notice Pending Discharge shall be applied towards the fulfillment of this suspension.

3. The Employee shall be returned to full compensation status effective March 7, 2026.

4. The Employer's Designated Employer Representative, **Gladys Lopez**, shall write to the Secretary for the Merit Board, with copy to the Employee, within 14 days of service of this Order to confirm that the Employee has been assigned and compensated consistent with the terms of this Order.

5. This Order is FINAL and is subject to the Illinois Administrative Review Law. Rule 250.110 does not authorize the Merit Board to hear any motion or request for reconsideration.

6. The name of the Hearing Officer and the name and contact information for each of the parties are as follows:

Hearing Officer
Mr. Kevin Camden
1717 Philo Road, Suite 24
Urbana, IL 61802

Employer
Mr. Matthew Jones
Assistant University Counsel
University of Illinois System
405 Administration Office Building
1737 W. Polk St.
Chicago, IL 60612
mgjones@uillinois.edu

Employee
Mr. Gino Ortiguerra
605 Joslyn Way
Batavia, IL 60510
ginoortiguerra13@hotmail.com

Dated March 10, 2026

University Civil Service Merit Board

By: /s/ John Butler
John Butler, Chair
University Civil Service Merit Board

ATTEST:
By: /s/ Jennifer Miles
Jennifer Miles
Secretary for the Merit Board

Review of Recent Activities of Audit Division and Classification, Examination, and Compensation Division – Liz Borman

Liz Borman noted that the Compliance Services Division had conducted 22 audit engagements. There was one pending audit engagement, three preliminary audit engagement reports, and five final audit engagement reports still pending. The Classification, Examination, and Compensation Division completed five revisions this fiscal year. Approximately 14 class revisions are currently in progress, and a number of others are currently on hold.

Ms. Borman provided an overview of the shift from credential-based assessments to competency evaluation examinations, explaining that competencies encompass the practical knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes required to perform a job. Such as communication, customer service, and de-escalation skills for security officers. Distinguishing these from traditional credentials, such as degrees and certifications, which reflect completion of predefined criteria, noting that a competency-based approach recognizes skills acquired through a variety of pathways, including experience, training, and education. The shift is intended to broaden the applicant pool, increase workforce diversity, and allow for recognition of transferable skills across different fields, such as public safety or behavioral health experience for security roles. Ms. Borman also highlighted operational benefits, including improved readability of job classifications using plain, person-centered language, enhanced ability to map competencies across classifications to support both vertical and lateral career mobility, and greater efficiency in developing and revising classifications. Ms. Borman noted that the current classification revision process, consisting of proposal, preliminary, and final notices, will remain in place and continue to be used when implementing changes, including updates to evaluation methods.

Chair Butler stated that the Merit Board would benefit from a deeper dive into the classification process, including the development and revision of class specifications and class series, and expressed an interest in receiving a presentation on the topic in the future.

Report of the Executive Director – Gail Schiesser

Executive Director Schiesser stated that the University System was down one Human Resource Representative but was looking to refill this position in the near future.

Executive Director Schiesser commented that the agency's total appropriation of $1,510,000, approved by the Governor as a lump sum, with $820,482 expended to date and an additional $46,000 in committed obligations, leaving approximately $643,000 in unexpended funds. The previously approved FY27 budget request of $1,745,500 submitted to the legislature and is currently under consideration. Additionally, the Governor's proposed budget includes an increase of $71,400 over the current appropriation, bringing the total to $1,581,400. Final funding levels will be determined through the appropriations process, and the Merit Board will be updated once a final budget is enacted.

Finally, Executive Director Schiesser provided an update on the development of police testing. The agency is working with the state procurement officer to prepare a request for proposals for professionally developed examinations for police officer, police corporal, police sergeant, and police telecommunicator classifications. It was noted that funding for these examinations is included in both the current and pending budgets. Staff further explained that initial input was gathered through individual meetings with system employers, including police chiefs and HR directors. This input is being incorporated into the development of the request for proposals. The next phase will involve establishing an evaluation group, likely to consist of police chiefs, HR directors, or designated staff, although the size and composition of this group have not yet been determined and will be discussed with the state procurement officer. Additional consultation with HR directors is planned to address test administration processes, which are expected to differ from current examination practices.

Ms. Blackwell asked for clarification on the involvement of the HR Directors and Police Chiefs. Executive Director Schiesser stated that the University System had met separately with HR Directors and Police Chiefs and is now preparing the Request for Proposal (RFP). She explained that when the evaluation phase begins, the University System will assemble an evaluation team that includes representatives from the HR Directors and Police Chiefs, but further information is needed from the State Procurement Officer. The University System will also have conversations with HR Directors regarding the testing process, as it will differ from the current process.

Report of Legal Counsel – Maggie Miller

Ms. Miller stated that, thus far in FY 26, 45 Written Charges for Discharge have been filed by the employers and served on employees, with seven requests for hearing received. Of those, two matters were resolved through settlement agreements, one request was withdrawn by the employee, one case resulted in discharge, and three matters remain pending, including two cases acted upon by the Merit Board at the current meeting. No Notice of Demotions have been filed during this period.

The Merit Board was also informed that one pending administrative review was filed in the Circuit Court of Cook County by Laura Minnelli (Case No. 2026-CH750), following her discharge from Northeastern Illinois University on December 10, 2025. The Merit Board's decision and order were served on December 18, 2025, and the Complaint for Administrative Review was filed on January 26, 2026. The complaint names multiple defendants, including the Merit Board, its Chair and Secretary, the Executive Director, the Hearing Officer, and Northeastern Illinois University and affiliated entities. The Office of the Attorney General has agreed to represent the Merit Board and the individually named defendants, including the Hearing Officer.

Ms. Miller clarified that an employer may pursue demotions before the Merit Board in the same manner as a discharge, including the filing of charges and the opportunity for a hearing if requested by the employee; however, such cases are relatively infrequent.

Other Items as presented

Chair Butler stated that the next meeting is scheduled for August 11, 2026.

Mr. Kvedaras made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Lang seconded Mr. Kvedaras' motion. In accordance with the Merit Board Bylaws, a roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved with the following vote:

Mr. Kvedaras ....Aye
Dr. Navarro...............................Aye
Dr. Lang ....Aye
Mr. Phillips ....Aye
Mr. Quiara ....Aye
Mr. Simmons............................Absent
Ms. Baurer................................Aye
Ms. Blackwell ....Aye
Chair Butler ....Aye
Mr. Cepeda...............................Absent
Ms. Craig Schilling ....Absent

The meeting adjourned at 4:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Jennifer Miles
Jennifer Miles
Secretary for the Merit Board

APPROVED:

/s/ John Butler
John Butler, Chair
University Civil Service Merit Board

August 19, 2026
Date