



Republic of the Philippines  
Supreme Court  
Bacolod City

REPUBLIC COURT OF THE PHILIPPINES  
INFORMATION OFFICE

APR 05 2023  
*[Signature]*

EN BANC

JOEL AGULTO SAGUM,  
Complainant,

OCA IPI No. 20-5005-P

Present:

- versus -

GESMUNDO, C.J.,  
LEONEN,  
CAGUIOA,  
HERNANDO,  
LAZARO-JAVIER,  
INTING,  
ZALAMEDA,  
LOPEZ, M.,  
GAERLAN,  
ROSARIO,  
LOPEZ, J.,  
DIMAAMPAO,\*\*  
MARQUEZ,\*\*  
KHO, JR., and  
SINGH, JJ.

JONELL C. CASTILLO,\* CLERK,  
(LOCALLY FUNDED  
EMPLOYEE), BRANCH 89,  
REGIONAL TRIAL COURT,  
BACOR CITY, CAVITE

Respondent.

Promulgated:

November 29, 2022

X-----

*[Signature]*

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DECISION

LOPEZ, J., J.:

A person who purports to be a judicial employee or claims to have an influence in the outcome of a case should be subject to contempt proceedings.

\* "Jenel C. Castillo" in some parts of the records (see *rollo*, pp. 11 and 21).  
\*\* No part.  
\*\*\* On official leave.

This Court resolves the administrative complaint filed by Joel A. Sagum (*Sagum*) against Jenel C. Castillo (*Castillo*), a clerk at Branch 89, Regional Trial Court, Bacoor City, Cavite.

### The Antecedents

Sagum stated in his *Sinumpaang Salaysay*<sup>1</sup> that he was the driver/assistant of Mary Ann B. Ramos-Castro (*Castro*). He averred that sometime in June 2019, Castillo invited Castro and him to join Castillo in one of the rooms. Sagum heard Castillo saying, “*Wag kang mag-alala, ako na ang bahala diyan. Mahahatulan na iyan.*” He witnessed Castro handing money to Castillo as they stepped out of the room.<sup>2</sup>

Sagum further avowed that another incident occurred in July 2019 wherein Castillo told him, “*Nasan ‘yung para sa akin? Paano ‘yung pang-ayos natin sa mga piskal[?]*” He replied, “*Wala. Kayo naman ang magkausap diyan, siya na lang ang tanungin mo.*”<sup>3</sup>

Castillo, in his *Kontra Salaysay*,<sup>4</sup> claimed that the Office of the Court Administrator had no jurisdiction over the complaint because he was a casual messenger of the local government unit of Bacoor City, and not an office clerk of the Regional Trial Court. Castillo also vehemently denied the allegations of Sagum and claimed that the allegations were meant to malign his integrity and the office he was associated with.<sup>5</sup>

The Office of the Court Administrator referred the complaint to the Judiciary Integrity Board after it received the pleadings of the parties.<sup>6</sup>

The Judiciary Integrity Board dismissed the complaint based on its assessment that it lacks jurisdiction over the person of Castillo. It noted the letter<sup>7</sup> dated November 25, 2021 of the Legal Office, Office of the Court Administrator-Office of Administrative Services, which confirmed that per its records, “no approved detail order of locally-funded employee was issued by this Court to Mr. Castillo at Branch 89, Regional Trial Court, Bacoor City, Cavite.”<sup>8</sup>

### Issue

Whether or not Castillo should be held administratively liable for his acts.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rollo*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 46.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

### This Court's Ruling

This Court adopts the recommendation of the Judiciary Integrity Board with modifications.

The certifications of the Office of the Court Administrator-Office of Administrative Services and the Human Resources Development and Management Department of Bacoor City, Cavite<sup>9</sup> clearly proves that Castillo is not an employee of the Judiciary particularly of the Bacoor City Regional Trial Court. Thus, the Judiciary Integrity Board correctly recommended the dismissal of the Complaint. Rule III, Section 1 of the Internal Rules of the Judiciary Integrity Board<sup>10</sup> provides:

SECTION 1. *Jurisdiction.* — The Judiciary Integrity Board shall exercise jurisdiction over administrative complaints or referrals against the following:

- a. Presiding Justices and Associate Justices of the Court of Appeals, the Sandiganbayan, the Court of Tax Appeals, and the *Shari'ah* High Court and Judges of the lower courts, including *Shari'ah* District or Circuit Courts, and the officials and employees of the Judiciary, Court Administrator, Deputy Court Administrators, Assistant Court Administrators and their personnel; and
- b. Court officials and employees involving violations of the Code of Conduct for Court Personnel and/or the Civil Service Laws and Rules.

Nonetheless, even if the Judiciary Integrity Board and this Court has no jurisdiction to discipline the alleged infractions committed by Castillo, We deem it proper to refer the investigation to the officials of the local government unit of Bacoor City. Further, this Court orders the commencement of contempt proceedings against Castillo and a determination of being barred from future employment in the judiciary. This Court echoes our pronouncement in *Anonymous Complaint against Clerk of Court V Atty. Zenalfe M. Cuenco, et. al.*<sup>11</sup> as follows:

As for [Aleli] De Guzman, the Court sustains the OCA's findings that she violated reasonable office rules and regulations for using the court computer and printer to prepare and print pleadings for the litigants. The records disclose that in a Memorandum dated June 8, 2010, Atty. Caridad A. Pabello, OCA Chief of Office, Office of Administrative Services, confirmed that the Court did not approve De Guzman's detail. In a Resolution dated July 21, 2010, the Court ordered De Guzman to return to her mother unit. In her Comment dated August 19, 2010, De Guzman stated that she was no longer connected with the Malabon RTC,

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 25.

<sup>10</sup> A.M. No. 18-01-05-SC, December 15, 2020 [Resolution].

<sup>11</sup> A.M. No. P-10-2812 [Formerly OCA IPI No. 10-3420-P], August 18, 2020. [Per Curiam, *En Banc*]

Branch 72 and any other government institution as she purportedly resigned.

While De Guzman was never an employee of the Court, still she committed violations of the court's reasonable office rules and regulations when she used the court computer and printer to prepare and print pleadings for the litigants. Her actions may be considered as improper conduct tending, directly or indirectly, to impede, obstruct, or degrade the administration of justice, thus, a ground for indirect contempt. While the Court cannot exercise administrative supervision over her since, based on the records, her detail to the said RTC was not even approved, therefore, she is not a court employee, still she must be held accountable for her acts of disrespect towards the Judiciary. Also, since according to De Guzman she is no longer connected with any government institution, a recommendation of referral to the local government unit would not serve any practical purpose. For this reason, the Court deems it proper to refer De Guzman's case to the Presiding Judge of Malabon RTC, Branch 72 and direct said Judge to commence contempt proceedings against De Guzman. The findings in this administrative case may be taken cognizance of by said court in the contempt proceedings.

In the aforementioned case, while Aleli De Guzman (*De Guzman*) was supposed to be a locally funded-employee, the lack of approval of this Court did not make her an employee of the court to which she was purportedly assigned. Despite this, her acts in the trial court reflected on the impression of the public in the administration of justice, thereby authorizing the commencement of contempt proceedings. As further elaborated by Senior Associate Justice Marvic Leonen in his Separate Concurring Opinion:

From Judge Laurea's Report, De Guzman was purportedly in cahoots with other court employees in making money out of cases filed before Branch 72. Even without a duly approved assignment, De Guzman seemingly acted as a court personnel, which, in my mind, was a means to lure litigants into paying for a consideration in exchange for unwarranted favors and benefits such as "favorable or speedy actions and early settings" of their cases. Apart from this, it was discovered that De Guzman also took part in causing the arrest of accused in archived cases "who would later be released after payment of consideration."

Although further surveillance was recommended to adduce evidence for the above findings, it is my view that De Guzman's transgressions should, as a matter of course, be dealt with accordingly. Considering that the image of a court is reflected in the official and personal conduct of its employees, she should be made liable for her misrepresentation that not only degrades the administration of justice, but also erodes the people's confidence to the courts.<sup>12</sup>

The case of De Guzman is not far removed from the instant case wherein Castillo expressly gave representations of being able to influence

<sup>12</sup> Separate Concurring Opinion, A.M. No. P-10-2812 [Formerly OCA IPI No. 10-3420-P], August 18, 2020. [Per J. Leonen. *En Banc*]

a judge in a case. While he is not an employee of the court, his representation reflected on the manner of administering justice. He even used such representation to be able to extort money from other people. His act constituted a transgression of his duties, being a mere casual employee of the local government unit. Judicial notice must be taken that most of the courts are housed in the same building where offices of the local government units are likewise located. Hence, it is not easy for ordinary people to distinguish employees of the judiciary from employees of the local government unit. They could only rely on the representation of people they encounter. This Court, having emphasized not only impartiality but also the appearance of impartiality in the rendition of justice, cannot just let any person betray the trust reposed upon by the people in the judiciary. As held in *Rallos v. Judge Gako*:<sup>13</sup>

Well-known is the judicial norm that “judges should not only be impartial but should also appear impartial.” Jurisprudence repeatedly teaches that litigants are entitled to nothing less than the cold neutrality of an impartial judge. The other elements of due process, like notice and hearing, would become meaningless if the ultimate decision is rendered by a partial or biased judge. Judges must not only render just, correct and impartial decisions, but must do so in a manner free of any suspicion as to their fairness, impartiality and integrity.<sup>14</sup>

This Court must not let any person, be the employee or not of the judiciary, to tarnish judicial norms that this Court has sought to establish and preserve. Appropriate measures must be taken to protect the institution.

With this, this Court orders the Presiding Judge of the Bacoor City Regional Trial Court to refer the administrative complaint filed by Sagum to the proper office in the local government of Bacoor City. This Court further commands the Presiding Judge of the Bacoor City Regional Trial Court to commence contempt proceedings against Castillo or a determination of being barred from future employment in the Judiciary.

**WHEREFORE**, the Report and Recommendation of the Judicial Integrity Board dated April 20, 2022 is **ADOPTED WITH MODIFICATIONS**. This Court resolves to **ADOPT** and **APPROVE** the findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommendations of the Acting Executive Director in its Report and Recommendation dated February 2, 2022, which the Judicial Integrity Board likewise adopted and approved. The administrative complaint against Jonell C. Castillo, also known as Jenel C. Castillo, is **DISMISSED** for lack of jurisdiction over the person of the respondent.

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<sup>13</sup> 385 Phil. 4 (200) [Per J. Panganiban, Third Division].

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 20.


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Further, this Court **ORDERS** the Presiding Judge of Branch 89, Regional Trial Court, Bacoor City to **REFER** the administrative complaint filed by Joel Agulto Sagum to the proper office in the local government unit of Bacoor City. Furthermore, this Court **COMMANDS** the Presiding Judge of the Regional Trial Court Bacoor City to **COMMENCE** contempt proceedings or a determination of being barred from future employment in the Judiciary against Jenel C. Castillo also known as Jonell Castillo.

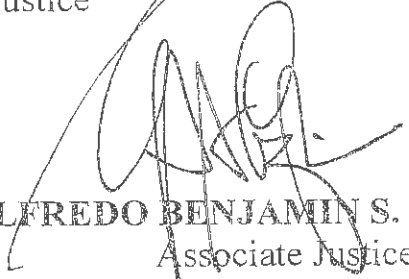
**SO ORDERED.**

  
**JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ**  
 Associate Justice

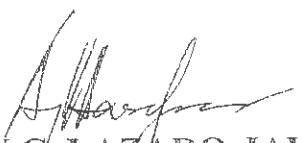
**WE CONCUR:**

  
**ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO**  
 Chief Justice

  
**MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN**  
 Senior Associate Justice

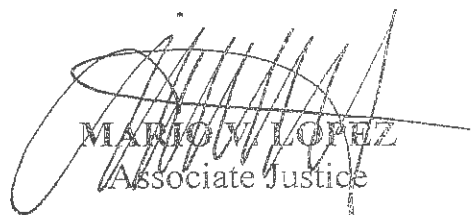
  
**ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA**  
 Associate Justice

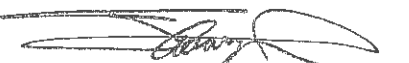
  
**RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO**  
 Associate Justice

  
**AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER**  
 Associate Justice

  
**HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING**  
 Associate Justice

  
**RODIL V. ZALAMEDA**  
 Associate Justice

  
**MARIO V. LOPEZ**  
 Associate Justice

  
**SAMUEL H. GAERLAN**  
 Associate Justice



  
**RICARDO R. ROSARIO**  
Associate Justice

On official leave  
**JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO**  
Associate Justice

No part  
**JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ**  
Associate Justice

  
**ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.**  
Associate Justice

  
**MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH**  
Associate Justice