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County Executive’s Office

# Independent Hearing Officer Finds Cause to Remove Sheriff Christina Corpus

Board of Supervisors Meeting to be Scheduled to Consider Next Steps

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**Redwood City** – An advisory opinion issued today by retired Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge James Emerson finds multiple causes to remove Sheriff Christina Corpus from Office under the County Charter of San Mateo County.

In his opinion, Emerson concluded that Corpus used her office to benefit Victor Aenlle with whom she has a close personal relationship outside the boundaries of a professional working relationship, directed the arrest of the deputy sheriffs’ union president without probable cause and retaliated against a captain who refused to take part in what he believed to be an unlawful personnel action.

“Based upon the evidence and argument presented, it is the undersigned Hearing Officer’s opinion that the County had cause, under Section 412.5 (of the County Charter), to remove appellant Sheriff Corpus,” Emerson wrote in his advisory opinion.

The opinion was delivered today to the County and Sheriff Corpus.

Under procedures established pursuant to Measure A, the voter-approved County Charter amendment that authorizes the Board of Supervisors to remove an elected sheriff for cause, the Board will meet in a special public session to consider the advisory opinion and the record of the hearing.

The County is working to schedule that special meeting, which will be publicly noticed and open to the media and public.

In his 42-page advisory opinion, Emerson found that Sheriff Corpus violated laws related to her official duties by engaging in conflicts of interest and acts of retaliation.

He determined that Corpus used her position to create and fund positions for Victor Aenlle, writing “Although vehemently denied by appellant and Victor Aenlle, the evidentiary record is highly suggestive that appellant Sheriff Corpus and Mr. Aenlle were in a romantic extra-marital relationship preceding appellant Sheriff Corpus’s election to office and continuing thereafter.

The undersigned Hearing Officer need not determine whether appellant Sheriff Corpus and Mr. Aenlle were in a romantic extra-marital relationship. However, the undersigned Hearing Officer finds, supported by the greater weight of the evidence, that appellant Sheriff Corpus and Mr. Aenlle were in a close personal relationship outside the boundaries of a professional working relationship,” and he explained that “[t]he evidentiary record . . . supports a finding that appellant Sheriff Corpus elevated her own interest in the close personal relationship she held with Mr. Aenlle above her obligation to appoint, recruit, select, and/or retain based upon merit and in conformity with the principles of equal opportunity”.

Emerson also found cause for removal based on Corpus’ unlawful order to arrest Deputy Carlos Tapia, president of the Deputy Sheriffs Association “for his exercise of lawful action as an elected representative of the DSA”, explaining that “the evidentiary record supports a finding . . . that appellant Sheriff Corpus ordered the investigation and ultimate arrest of Deputy Tapia because of Deputy Tapia’s position as DSA President and/or because of Deputy Tapia’s participation in activities as DSA President”.

Judge Emerson also raised questions about Sheriff Corpus’ credibility, writing, “In denying that she held a close personal relationship with Mr. Aenlle, appellant Sheriff Corpus has already lost credibility with the undersigned Hearing Officer who now finds Lt. Hensel’s testimony more credible. As a result, appellant Sheriff Corpus’s purportedly non retaliatory justification for ordering an investigation against Deputy Tapia is, at the very least, questionable and, more likely, pretextual.” Finally, as to the Tapia arrest he emphasized “the evidence identified above go beyond neglect which is why the undersigned Hearing Officer has sustained County’s charge that appellant Sheriff Corpus retaliated against Deputy Tapia.”

A third finding of cause involved retaliation against Captain Brian Philip, who refused to deliver an Internal Affairs notice that he believed was improper and could violate state law. Emerson concluded that Philip’s refusal was protected under state laws and that his transfer by Corpus was retaliatory.

Emerson’s findings followed a 10-day public hearing in August conducted under procedures established by Measure A, the County Charter amendment approved by 84 percent of voters in March 2025 that authorizes the Board to remove an elected sheriff for cause.

Corpus took office in January 2023 after being elected the previous year. During her first year in office, questions arose about her conduct and management of the Sheriff’s Office, prompting the Board of Supervisors to authorize an independent investigation.

The investigation, led by the San Francisco law firm Keker, Van Nest & Peters LLP, concluded that Corpus misused her authority, created a position for a close associate who lacked qualifications and fostered a workplace culture marked by retaliation.

Based on those findings, the Board voted 5-0 on June 24, 2025, to proceed with removal under Measure A, triggering the formal hearing overseen by Emerson.

Additional information, including the hearing record, prior Board actions, and related reports, is available at <https://www.smcgov.org/ceo/independent-investigation-sheriffs-office>. The County will have no further comment on this matter at this time.

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## Media Contact

Effie Milionis Verducci  
Interim Director of Strategic Communications  
650-407-4915  
[everducci@smcgov.org](mailto:everducci@smcgov.org)

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO



500 County Center  
Redwood City, CA 94063  
(650) 363-4000

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