MARIO R. BARROZO AND RICHANNE CHERRY HERRERO, COMPLAINANTS, VS. ROSALIE D. SARSAGAT, COURT STENOGRAPHER III, BRANCH 67, REGIONAL TRIAL COURT, PANIQUI, TARLAC RESPONDENT.

A.M. No. P-25-293 (Formerly JIB FPI No. 24-454-P), June 03, 2026

Ponente: INTING, J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): https://batas.org/library/8e57dd4d7d0f/

INTING, J.:

The instant administrative matter before the Court stemmed from a handwritten Complaint[1] dated March 11, 2024, filed by Mario R. Barrozo (Mario) and Richanne Cherry Herrero (Cherry) (collectively, complainants), charging respondent Rosalie D. Sarsagat (Rosalie), Court Stenographer III, Branch 67, Regional Trial Court (RTC), Paniqui, Tarlac, with gross misconduct constituting violations of the Code of Conduct for Court Personnel and violations of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.[2]

The Antecedents

Mario is an overseas Filipino worker in Saudi Arabia who wanted to have his marriage in the Philippines with Jo-an Galano-Barrozo (Jo-an) annulled. Mario met a certain Phyllis Castañeda (Phyllis), through his friends from Saudi Arabia, who promised to process the annulment of his marriage in nine months.[3] Thus, in 2016, Mario, through Cherry, made several payments in favor of Phyllis in the total amount of PHP 250,000.00.[4] In turn, Phyllis referred complainants to Rosalie. Because Mario was in Saudi Arabia in 2017, his sister personally appeared in Branch 67, RTC, Paniqui, Tarlac, and coordinated with Rosalie.[5]

In 2018, Mario returned to the Philippines.[6] He personally went to the RTC to meet Rosalie who handed him the Decision[7] dated November 5, 2015, entitled "Mario Ramos Barrozo v. Jo-An Galano-Barrozo," docketed as Civil Case No. 066-13, purportedly signed by Assisting Judge Agapito K. Laoagan, Jr., declaring his marriage with Jo-an null and void ab initio, coupled with a Certificate of Finality[8] and a Certificate of Authenticity[9] both dated April 20, 2018. Rosalie instructed Mario to wait for his official copies of the Decision and the Certificate of Finality for their registration with the Philippine Statistics Office (PSO). Subsequently, Mario returned to Saudi Arabia.[10]

After a year, Rosalie asked Mario's sister for an additional PHP 30,000.00 supposedly for registration purposes.[11] Hence, Mario sent respondent the requested amount on September 25, 2019, viz.:

BDO Online Banking

> 9/25/2019
> New Send Money Request
>
> Request has been successfully saved with Reference No. OB991201900004291736.
>
> . . .

Total Amount Due

30,150.00

Service Charge

150.00

. . . .

Receiver Details

Receiver Name

ROSALIE D SARSAGAT

Receiver Address 1

Paniqui Tarlac

. . . .

Message to Receiver

Process for Registration of Annulment

Purpose of Transaction

for Registration of Annulment[12]

Subsequently, Rosalie blocked all forms of communication with complainants. Then, in 2020, Mario's lawyer discovered that the RTC had no records of the purported annulment proceedings and that the Decision dated November 5, 2015 in Civil Case No. 066-13 and the accompanying certificates were sham documents.[13]

Hence, the case.

Complainants explained that the COVID-19 Pandemic prevented them from immediately returning to the Philippines and pursuing the case against Rosalie. They submitted a copy of a fake court decision and certificates, screenshots of their conversations with Rosalie and Phyllis, and proof of money transfers to support their allegations.[14]

In a 1[st] Indorsement[15] dated May 9, 2024, the Judicial Integrity Board (JIB) directed Rosalie to file her comment to the letter-complaint.

In her Comment,[16] Rosalie vehemently denied the allegations against her and insisted that she was not involved therein, nor had she ever met the complainants. Rosalie added that she has served the Judiciary, for more than three decades and has performed her assignments well.

Other Relevant Information

This is not Rosalie's first administrative infraction. The Office of the Court Administrator (OCA), prompted by reports that Branch 67, RTC, Paniqui, Tarlac, had become a haven for couples who wanted to annul their marriages, conducted a judicial audit in 2008 and 2011. Hence, in the Resolution dated October 9, 2012, in A.M. No. RTJ-12-2316, entitled "Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Castañeda,"[17] the Court En Banc,

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dismissed Judge Liberty Castañeda (Judge Castañeda) and penalized several personnel of the branch for their involvement in bogus annulment proceedings. In particular, Rosalie, in the said case, was found guilty of simple neglect of duty and fined PHP 5,000.00.[18] Notably, Judge Castañeda is the sister of Phyllis and Rosalie's former presiding judge.[19]

Relatedly, respondent in the case of Umipig-Marquez v. Atty. Saguyod,[20] was likewise accused of issuing a fake court decision, albeit that case was dismissed for insufficiency of evidence and considered closed and terminated.

The Recommendation of the JIB

In the Report and Recommendation[21] dated August 11, 2025, the acting executive director of the JIB issued the following recommendations:

> III. Recommendation
>
> IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, it is respectfully submitted for the consideration of the Honorable Board that the following recommendations be made to the Supreme Court:
>
> 1.)
>
> The instant administrative Complaint be RE-DOCKETED; and
>
> 2.)
>
> Respondent Rosalia D. Sarsagat, Court Stenographer III, Branch 67, Regional Trial Court, Paniqui, Tarlac, be found GUILTY of gross misconduct constituting violations of the Code of Conduct for Court Personnel and be DISMISSED from the service, with FORFEITURE of all her benefits, except accrued leave credits, and with prejudice to-reemployment in any branch or instrumentality of the government, including government -owned or controlled corporations.
>
> August 11, 2025.[22] (Emphasis omitted)

Meanwhile, in a Resolution[23] dated March 4, 2025, in A.M. No. 23-12-05-SC, the Court En Banc approved the reorganization of the JIB as the Judicial Integrity Office (JIO).

The Recommendation of the JIO

In the Report and Recommendation[24] dated October 24, 2025, the JIO also found Rosalie guilty of one count of gross misconduct for engaging in corrupt activities, and consequently, recommended her dismissal from the service, to wit:

> III. Recommendation
>
> IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, it is respectfully submitted for the consideration of the Honorable Court that:
>
> 1.)
>
> The instant administrative Complaint be RE-DOCKETED; and
>
> 2.)
>
> Respondent Rosalia D. Sarsagat, Court Stenographer III, Branch 67, Regional Trial Court, Paniqui, Tarlac, be found GUILTY of gross misconduct constituting violations of the Code of Conduct for Court Personnel and be DISMISSED from the service, with FORFEITURE of all her benefits, except accrued leave credits, and with

> prejudice to reemployment in any branch or instrumentality of the government, including government -owned or controlled corporations.
>
> October 24, 2025.[25]

The Issue

The issue for the Court's resolution is whether respondent should be held administratively liable despite her denial of involvement on the spurious transactions.

The Ruling of the Court

The Court adopts and approves the factual findings, legal conclusions, and recommendations of the JIO.

However, it should be noted that during the pendency of the case, the Court promulgated the 2025 Code of Conduct and Accountability for Court Officials and Personnel (CCACOP)[26] which expressly states that the Code shall be applicable to all pending and future cases, unless its retroactive application is not feasible or would work injustice.[27] Absent any such exceptional circumstance, the Court deems it proper to resolve the case under the provisions of the CCACOP.

Needless to state, the image of a court of justice is reflected in the conduct, official or otherwise, of its personnel, from the judge to the lowest staff member.[28] The Court has constantly reminded court personnel to adhere to high ethical standards to preserve the good name and integrity of the court; and avoid any impressions of impropriety, misdeed, or negligence, and steer clear of any situation that may cast the slightest suspicion on their conduct. Any act or omission that would diminish or even just tend to diminish the faith of the people in the Judiciary shall never be countenanced.[29]

Relatively, Canon II, Sections 3 and 12(f), and Canon III, Section 8 of the CCACOP read:

CANON II
Propriety

> SECTION 3. Prohibition against claim of influence. — Court officials and personnel shall not make it appear that they have the power to influence or affect the outcome of a case or any other matter pending before their office.
>
> . . . .
>
> SECTION 12. Prohibited acts involving the discharge of duties. — When discharging their duties, court officials and personnel shall not:
>
> . . . .
>
> (f) Directly or indirectly solicit or accept from court users, lawyers, litigants, or third parties dealing with the Judiciary, any gill, bequest, or favor, of any value on any occasion, except unsolicited gifts of small or insignificant value as a mere token of gratitude or friendship according to local customs and usage[.]
>
> CANON III
> Impartiality and Equality
>
> SECTION 8. Nonacceptance of gifts and tips. — Court officials and personnel shall not receive gifts, tips, or other gratuities for assisting or attending to litigants, lawyers, or other court users.

Naturally, any violation of the CCACOP constitutes misconduct or "any unlawful conduct, on the part of the person concerned with the administration of justice, prejudicial to the rights of the parties or to the right

determination of the cause."[30]

Under the CCACOP, misconduct can either be simple[31] or gross.[32] To differentiate between the two, gross misconduct is a serious offense that must involve any of the additional elements of corruption, clear willful intent to violate the law, or flagrant disregard of established rules, supported by substantial evidence.[33] In contrast, for an offense to constitute simple misconduct, the violation should not be of a serious nature, and it should relate to the performance of the official functions and duties of a public officer.[34]

Here, there is no doubt that respondent engaged in corrupt activities.

To recall, Mario positively identified respondent as the very person with whom he transacted inside Branch 67, RTC, and who personally handed him the spurious Decision, dated November 5, 2015, together with the fake Certificate of Finality and Certificate of Authenticity, both dated April 20, 2018.[35]

There is likewise no doubt that respondent and Phyllis knew each other. Phyllis was the sister of Judge Castañeda, who was involved in fake annulment cases. Moreover, respondent, through her social media account "Ochichay Pargas DP (Ochie)," tagged Phyllis's social media account in a Facebook post following the latter's death.[36] Significantly, respondent did not refute the text messages sent by "Ochie" to complainants, stating "Inaantay ko s Phyllis kmi magdadala s baguio namatay ate nya eh." Even worse, the Certificate of Finality and Certificate of Authenticity furnished to complainants bore respondents' initials, i.e., "och".[37]

On the face of overwhelming evidence against her, respondent merely submitted a general denial. It is well settled that denial is an inherently weak defense and must be buttressed by strong evidence of non-culpability; otherwise, such denial is purely self-serving and has no evidentiary value.[38]

Given the circumstances, the Court agrees with the JIO that substantial evidence exists to prove that respondent committed gross misconduct. However, the Court finds that respondent committed not one, but two distinct acts of gross misconduct.

Notably, respondent never refuted Mario's allegation that a year after she gave him the fake Decision, she again asked for money, as evidenced by an online bank transaction dated September 25, 2019, which shows that Mario sent PHP 30,000.00 to respondent for "registration of annulment," viz.:[39]

BDO Online Banking

> 9/25/2019
> New Send Money Request
>
> Request has been successfully saved with Reference No. OB991201900004291736.
>
> . . .
>
> Total Amount Due
>
> 30,150.00
>
> Service Charge
>
> 150.00
>
> . . . .

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Receiver Details

Receiver Name

ROSALIE D SARSAGAT

Receiver Address 1

Paniqui Tarlac

. . . .

Message to Receiver

Process for Registration of Annulment

Purpose of Transaction

for Registration of Annulment[40]

Thus, the Court holds respondent administratively liable for two counts of gross misconduct: first, for entertaining complainant's repeated follow-ups of the sham annulment proceedings and handing the fake annulment Decision and Certifications to Mario in exchange for PHP 250,000.00 paid directly to Phyllis; and second, for extorting money from complainants on the pretext that said amount would cover the costs of registration of Mario's annulment status with the PSO .

Anent the penalty, under Canon V, Section 22(1) of the CCACOP, the penalty for serious offenses, such as gross misconduct, shall be any of the following:

(a)

Dismissal from the service, forfeiture of all or part of the benefits as the Supreme Court may determine, and disqualification from reinstatement or appointment to any public office, including in government-owned or -controlled corporations. Provided, however, that the forfeiture of benefits shall in no case include accrued leave credits;

(b)

Suspension from office without salary and other benefits for one year and one day up to two years; and/or

(c)

A fine of more than PHP 101,000.00 but not more than PHP 500,000.00.

Canon V, Section 25 of the CCACOP states that "[i]f one or more aggravating circumstances and no mitigating circumstances are present, the Supreme Court may impose the penalty of suspension or fine for a period or amount not exceeding double of the maximum prescribed under this Canon." While Section 26 of the same provides that "[i]f the respondent is found liable for more than one offense arising from separate acts or omissions in a single administrative proceeding, the Court shall impose separate penalties for each offense. Should the aggregate of the imposed penalties exceed five years of suspension or PHP 1 million in fines, the respondent may be meted with the penalty of dismissal from service[.]"

Considering that this is not respondent's first administrative infraction and given her involvement in Office of the

Court Administrator v. Castañeda,[41] the Court agrees with the JIO that respondent does not deserve to remain a part of the Judiciary and must be dismissed from the service.

In Atty. Malibago-Santos v. Francisco, Jr.,[42] the Court enunciated that any misconduct that tarnishes the Judiciary's image in the future will be dealt with more severely, viz.:

> This Court will no longer tolerate court employees who receive gifts or tokens from party-litigants for favorable treatment or efficient service. Subsequent incidents of this nature will be dealt with more severely in the future.
>
> Those serving in the judiciary must carry the heavy burden and duty of preserving public faith in our courts and justice system by maintaining high ethical standards. They must stand as "examples of responsibility, competence and efficiency, and they must discharge their duties with due care and utmost diligence since they are officers of the court and agents of the law." We do not tolerate any misconduct that tarnishes the judiciary's integrity.[43]

In addition, the last paragraph of Section 22, Canon V of the CCACOP is explicit that "[i]n all instances, when the offense involves money or property owed, which is intrinsically linked to the duties of the respondent, the respondent shall be ordered to return the same."

Here, while Mario alleged that he made several payments amounting to PHP 250,000.00 to Phyllis, and not directly to respondent, it bears stressing that respondent was the very person who personally handed Mario the spurious Decision, together with the accompanying fake Certifications. Moreover, the records show that respondent even requested for an additional payment of PHP 30,000.00 from Mario, purportedly for registration purposes. Taken together, these circumstances sufficiently establish respondent's involvement in the scheme and her receipt of the proceeds thereof.

The Court finds it just and equitable to require respondent to return the total amount of PHP 30,000.00, representing the sums she unlawfully demanded and actually received from Mario.

ACCORDINGLY, the Court finds respondent Rosalie D. Sarsagat, Court Stenographer III, Branch 67, Regional Trial Court, Paniqui, Tarlac, GUILTY of two counts of gross misconduct constituting violations of the Code of Conduct for Court Personnel. She is hereby DISMISSED from the service effective immediately, with forfeiture of all retirement benefits, except accrued leave credits, with prejudice to reemployment in any branch or agency of the government, including government-owned or controlled corporations, and without prejudice to her criminal liabilities.

Respondent Rosalie D. Sarsagat is likewise ORDERED to return the amount of PHP 30,000.00 to complainant Mario R. Barrozo.

SO ORDERED.

Gesmundo, C.J., Leonen, SAJ., Caguioa, Lazaro-Javier, Zalameda, Rosario, Dimaampao, Marquez, Kho, Jr., Singh, and Villanueva, JJ., concur.
Hernando,[*][*] J., on official business.
Gaerlan[*][*][*] and J. Lopez,[*][*][*] JJ., on leave.

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[*] Also referred to as "Rosalie DP Sumagat" in some parts of the rollo.

[*][*] On official business.

[*][*][*] On leave.

[1] Rollo, pp. 2-3.

[2] Id. at 65.

[3] Id. at 5.

[4] Id. at 6-7.

[5] Id. at 66.

[6] Id. at 2 and 65.

[7] Id. at 11-18.

[8] Id. at 19.

[9] Id. at 20.

[10] Id. at 66.

[11] Id. at 2 and 66.

[12] Id. at 34.

[13] Id. at 3.

[14] Id. at 66.

[15] Id. at 48.

[16] Id. at 56-60.

[17] 696 Phil. 202 (2012) [Per Curiam, En Banc].

[18] Rollo, p. 67.

[19] Id. at 69.

[20] A.M. No. P-21-029, April 4, 2023 [Notice].

[21] Rollo, pp. 65-70.

[22] Id. at 70.

[23] Re: Reorganizing the Judicial Integrity Board as the Judicial Integrity Office. OCA Circular No. 269-2025, dated August 29, 2025, the Resolution took effect on September 5, 2025.

[24] Rollo, pp. 71-76. Penned by Officer-In-Charge Eduardo C. Tolentino.

[25] Id. at 76.

[26] A.M. No. 25-06-11-SC, took effect on December 21, 2025.

[27] SECTION 1. Transitory Clause. - The Code shall be applied to all pending and future cases, except to the extent that in the opinion of the Supreme Court, its retroactive application would not be feasible or would work injustice, in which case the procedure under which the cases were filed shall govern.

[28] Agarao v. Judge Parentela, Jr., 421 Phil. 677, 690 (2001) [Per Curiam, En Banc].

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[29] Atty. Pasok v. Diaz, 677 Phil. 520, 529 (2011) [Per Curiam, En Banc]; Anonymous v. Ibarreta, 853 Phil. 498, 508 (2019) [Per J. Perlas-Bernabe, Second Division].

[30] Laspiñas v. Judge Banzon, 806 Phil. 113, 123 (2017) [Per Curiam, En Banc].

[31] Canon V, Section 20(a), CCACOP.

[32] Canon V, Section 19(a), CCACOP.

[33] Dr. Mabanag v. Ramos, 950 Phil. 177, 188 (2024) [Per J. Lazaro Javier, En Banc].

[34] Atty. Alentajan v. De Jesus, 955 Phil. 24, 33 [Per J. Kho, Jr., En Banc].

[35] Rollo, pp. 19-20 and 68.

[36] Id. at 68.

[37] Id. at 19-20 and 68.

[38] Anonymous Complaint Re: Fake Certificates of Civil Service Eligibility, 821 Phil. 781, 785 (2017) [Per Curiam, En Banc].

[39] Rollo, p. 69.

[40] Id. at 34.

[41] 696 Phil. 202 (2012) [Per Curiam, En Banc].

[42] 787 Phil. 670 [Per J. Leonen, En Banc].

[43] Id. at 682-683.

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