

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW APPEALS**

Middlesex, ss.

Stephanie Littlefield,
Petitioner,

Docket No.: CR-24-0291

v.

Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System,
Respondent.

ORDER OF DISMISSAL

Stephanie Littlefield timely appealed a decision by the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System ("MTRS") denying her request to purchase creditable service for her work at the Justice Resource Institute ("JRI"). On June 11, 2024, she was ordered to show cause explaining how she was eligible to purchase service for her work as a Coordinator, Assistant Program Director, and Program Director at JRI's foster care program when the provision of the public employee retirement statute under which she sought to purchase service was limited to prior service "teaching pupils." *See* M.G.L. c. 32, § 4(1)(p). Ms. Littlefield filed a response outlining her responsibilities while working at JRI.

The submission establishes the following facts. Ms. Littlefield worked as a Coordinator, Assistant Program Director, and Program Director at JRI from 1996-2009. She provided JRI services as a "Licensed Social Worker." As she herself describes, she was a "licensed social worker" who "opened foster homes and placed children in foster care." She "provided clinical supervision to staff," and would "visit with the child and foster parent weekly, attend court dates, IEP meetings, . . . and various other case management duties." The Office Manager at JRI had limited information about the Petitioner's time there, but did confirm her dates of employment and various titles.

Under G.L. c. 32, § 4(1)(p), a member may purchase creditable service from a non-public school in the Commonwealth provided in part that the member was “engaged in teaching pupils.” “Teaching pupils” is about what a teacher taught, not who they taught. *Levin v. MTRS*, CR-20-0430, 2023 WL 3223844 (Div. of Admin. Law App., Apr. 28, 2023). The term “was intended by the Legislature to include instruction in the academic and vocational subjects that are typically taught for credit in the public schools, generally in the classroom, but not the myriad of other special education services that are provided in alternative day and residential schools, including instruction in life, coping, social, and emotional skills.” *Lukasik v. MTRS*, CR-15-668 at *12, 2020 WL 14009721 (Contr. Ret. App. Bd., Feb. 21, 2020).

Ms. Littlefield was not engaged in “teaching pupils” under G.L. c. 32 § 4(1)(p). Rather, she primarily provided and coordinated care for at-risk youths and young adults through JRI’s foster care system. The Petitioner has not demonstrated that she taught academic and vocational subjects that would normally be taught for credit in the classroom of a public school. *See Levin, supra* (social worker not eligible); *Verbits v. MTRS*, CR-17-1032 (Div. of Admin. Law App., May 27, 2021) (school psychologist who taught social and emotional skills to students not eligible); *Burke v. MTRS*, CR-16-259 (Div. of Admin. Law App., July 24, 2020) (teacher who taught “functional academics” and life skills not eligible); *Dibella v. MTRS*, CR-10-0181 (Div. of Admin. Law App., March 4, 2016) (“A therapist, even one who provides services in a classroom to students, is not teaching students academics.”)

That Ms. Littlefield is now a social worker in a public school system and a member of MTRS does not change the result. No doubt Ms. Littlefield was a dedicated social worker who contributed substantially to the JRI program participant’s growth. Unfortunately, whether she is

entitled to purchase this prior service is not about whether she provided social work services at JRI, but whether she taught pupils.

Accordingly, this matter is hereby **dismissed**.

Date: September 5, 2025

James P. Rooney

James P. Rooney
First Administrative Magistrate
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