



For Immediate Release: September 10, 2014
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Former head of private college settles ethics complaint

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust today approved a settlement with former Dade Medical College President Ernesto Perez, who was accused of lobbying Homestead and Coral Gables city officials from 2011 to 2013 on behalf of his school without first registering, as required by County ordinance. As part of the negotiated agreement to the complaint (**C 14-24**), Perez pled No Contest to two counts of unregistered lobbying and will pay a fine of \$1,500 plus costs of \$500, and will also accept a Letter of Instruction from the Commission.

The Ethics Commission approved a Letter of Instruction to the owner of an architectural firm interested in the redevelopment of the Miami Beach Convention Center who last month settled a complaint (**C 14-30**) that he illegally lobbied for the work. John "Jack" Portman claimed that he was unaware that he would have to register as a lobbyist when he met with several city commissioners from January to July of 2013. The Letter states that Miami Beach's lobbying ordinance is "clear and unambiguous. It clearly specifies that a 'principal' is included in the definition of a lobbyist." It adds, "The Ethics Commission does not condone alleged ignorance of the law as an excuse for the violation of ethics rules." In addition to receiving the Letter, Portman also paid a fine of \$1,000 and investigative costs of \$1,000.

During the meeting, Executive Director Joseph Centorino reported to the Commission on two proposals under consideration by the Board of County Commissioners that would affect the Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance. One would extend the ban on lobbying by former County employees from two to four years after leaving their posts, and that is expected to go before the County Commission for a final hearing next month. Another proposal would grant an exception to the Sunshine Law and the County's Cone of Silence rule that would close public participation when proposals are presented by vendors before selection committees or when vendor negotiations or negotiation strategy sessions take place.

Mr. Centorino also reported that more than 125 people have already volunteered to take part in "Ethical Governance Day," but that more are needed to fill every 12th grade government and economics classes in Miami-Dade Public Schools. Talking points will be provided to speakers, who will also share their own experiences to students on the importance of civic involvement and ethics in government. Registration forms for volunteers can be found on the Ethics Commission website: ethics.miamidade.gov.

The Ethics Commission was created in 1996 as an independent agency with advisory and quasi-judicial powers. It is composed of five members, serving staggered terms of four years each. Through a program of education, outreach and enforcement, the Commission seeks to empower the community and bolster public trust.

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