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Former police official settles case; legal precedent set

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) today approved a settlement with a former Miami Beach police major who tried to affect the prosecution of a drunken-driving charge against a relative. The complaint (**C 12-46**) accused now-retired Major Angel Vazquez of attempting to improperly influence a Miami Beach patrol officer who had arrested Vazquez's former brother-in-law for DUI at a court hearing on the charge in October of 2010. Vazquez pled no contest to the ethics complaint, accusing him of "Exploitation of Official Position" under the County's Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance. The Ethics Commission accepted the settlement in which Vazquez paid a \$500 fine. The COE's original case was put on hold pending an appellate court decision regarding an outside agency's right to investigate police officers. In an opinion filed November 24, 2014, the Third District Court of Appeal overturned a lower court ruling supporting the Police Benevolent Association's contention that only the Miami-Dade Police Department can investigate complaints against officers. The decision confirmed the authority of the County Office of the Inspector General and other agencies, including the COE, to conduct non-disciplinary investigations into police officer activities.

Ethics Commissioners today approved the defense request for a continuance of the hearing on the complaint (**C 14-36**) against Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez for allegedly misrepresenting the nature of his business transactions in violation of the Citizens' Bill of Rights, because of his scheduled appearance in Tallahassee. A status report on the pending case will be made at the next COE meeting on May 13, 2015.

Complaints filed against two Doral City Council members were found Not Legally Sufficient because they do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Ethics Commission. A citizen accused Councilman Pete Cabrera and Councilwoman Sandra Ruiz (**C 15-11 & C 15-12**) of interfering with the city administration by getting involved in personnel decisions. While their actions may violate the Doral City Charter, the COE does not have the authority to enforce the charter.

The COE dismissed a complaint (**C 15-08**) "in the interest of justice" against a representative for a Miami Beach property owner who allegedly violated that city's ordinance by failing to register as a lobbyist before he appeared before the Historic Preservation Board in April of last year. Michael Marrero stated that he and his firm were retained on an emergency issue by Sea Spray Development to fight the proposed demolition of an Ocean Drive building the firm had just purchased, and his contact with the city on that matter was very limited. A Letter of Instruction will be issued, however, to reiterate lobbyist registration requirements.

As the date draws closer to "Ethics in Education: A to Z" – the two day conference touching on controversial and critical issues in all levels of schools -- COE Executive Director Joseph Centorino encouraged early registration today and noted the positive response received so far to the program. The conference, scheduled for May 1 and 2 at the University of Miami and at Miami Senior High School, will feature national and local leaders and experts, including Miami-Dade School Superintendent and National Superintendent of the Year **Alberto Carvalho**, Harvard Professor and former Baltimore Schools CEO **Andres Alonso**, nationally renowned New Jersey school reformer **Principal Baruti Kafele**, former Florida

Chief Justice Gerald Kogan, current Miami-Dade Court Judge and former Miami Dolphin **Judge Edward Newman**, UM head football coach **Al Golden**, former Miami Herald publisher and president of the Early Childhood Initiative **David Lawrence**, journalists **Glenna Milberg** and **Michelle Kaufman**, Florida ACLU executive director **Howard Simon**, Good Government Initiative CEO **Katy Sorenson** and other prominent educators and high ranking administrators in the field. The conference is generously sponsored by the Arsht Ethics Initiatives of the University of Miami Ethics Programs. For program details and registration, go to ethics.miamidade.gov.

Mr. Centorino also announced the appointment of Martha D. Perez as a part time staff attorney. Ms. Perez previously served as public safety legal advisor for the City of Hollywood, a traffic hearing officer for Broward County Courts, a hearing officer in the Broward County Animal Regulation Division and as an adjunct professor at St. Thomas University Law School. Her experience also includes ten years as a Senior Assistant City Attorney in Miami Beach and six years as an Assistant State Attorney for the 11th Judicial Circuit. Ms. Perez earned her Bachelor and Juris Doctor Degrees from the University of Miami. She will join the ethics commission staff next month.

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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