

Public servants get new honor code

By SUSAN DANSEYAR

County commissioners have honored a request by the Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public Trust to enforce a public service honor code, requiring elected and appointed officials and employees to report "grossly unethical conduct" their colleagues commit.

Unanimously approved by the commission Oct. 20, the legislation took effect Monday. It expands a 1964 administrative order requiring county employees to report crimes committed by their colleagues. All elected and appointed county officials and employees must adhere to the honor code and follow minimum standards, including:

- Serve and protect the public interest above any personal or institutional interest or loyalty.
- Act as the public's surrogate by protecting it against waste or fraud.

- Respect and uphold laws, ordinances, resolutions, rules and regulations that protect the public against abuses in county government by assisting law enforcement and other federal, state, county and local authorities charged with protecting the public trust.

- Report any information concerning activity that might constitute a crime of which he or she has personal knowledge.

County supervisors and ethics officers are to counsel and encourage employees to report violations of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Code to the



Photo by Maxine Usdan

"Public servants have a higher ethical duty," Joe Centorino has said.

Commission on Ethics and Public Trust and any waste, fraud or other abuse of public resources to the County Office of the Inspector General.

The mayor's office may use the administrative process of the county for violations of the honor code committed by all appointed officials or employees subject to the authority of the mayor.

The Ethics Commission will have jurisdiction over violations of the honor code committed by elected county officials and all other county officials and employees not subject to the administrative authority of the mayor.

The Ethics Commission may impose a letter of reprimand or letter of instruction following its determination that the honor code was violated. But that wouldn't

prevent county commissioners or any department head from taking additional action or imposing a penalty.

An elected or appointed official or employee who is in doubt on interpretation or application of the honor code can ask for a binding opinion from the Ethics Committee.

Early in 2014, the Commission on Ethics and Public Trust began discussing a resolution for commissioners to institute. Ethics Commission Executive Director Joe Centorino, who initiated the honor code resolution, previously told Miami Today: "I have always believed that public servants have a higher ethical duty than people in the private sector. They have a duty that is paying their salary to do something. They can't be an idle spectator."