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Ethics Commission seeks Charter change

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) today approved a resolution for an amendment to the Citizens' Bill of Rights to go before voters in November that would include the right to *copy* public records, in addition to the right to *inspect* them. The Citizens' Bill of Rights was incorporated as part of the County Charter when it was adopted in 1957, long before the common use of duplication equipment and processes. In 2012, voters gave the Ethics Commission the power to enforce provisions of the Citizens' Bill of Rights. This proposal, if adopted, would give the public the right to copy County and Municipal records consistent with Florida Public Records law, and empower the COE to enforce the expanded provision. "This change would enable the Ethics Commission to provide an additional avenue for the enforcement of public records violations," said Executive Director Joseph Centorino. The resolution must be approved by the Board of County Commissioners for it to appear on the general election ballot later this year.

Also today, the Ethics Commission approved a change in its Rules of Procedure to provide more information to those who file complaints. The new process requires that, within five business days of receiving a complaint, staff will send written confirmation, the assigned number of the complaint and a form explaining the procedures, investigation and notice of hearing and final disposition of the complaint to the filer. The process change and proposed Charter amendment were prompted by suggestions from the public.

Miami-Dade County's recently-appointed Transit Director does *not* have a conflict of interest associated with her husband's employment in a firm that does business with the County, according to the response to a Request for Opinion (**RQO 15-06**) approved today by Ethics Commissioners, but they recommended several steps to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Alice Bravo's spouse, Walfrido Pevida, is a salaried employee of Stantec Consulting Engineering Corporation, which contracts with the Roadway Engineering and Right of Way Division of the Public Works Department, which is now under Ms. Bravo's direction. Because Mr. Pevida does not have an ownership stake or financial interest in the company, as defined by County, State and Federal rules, and because he is not involved with any County projects, Stantec may continue to contract with the County. However, the Ethics Commission urges that Stantec adopt an internal policy to ensure that Mr. Pevida avoid participating in any County project and does not receive financial benefits related to Stantec's County business, that Ms. Bravo recuse herself from any decision-making regarding Stantec, and that the Transit Department create procedures to ensure that employees of that agency are not overseeing or administering contracts that involve their family members. Ms. Bravo must also file a statement with the County Clerk disclosing her spouse's employment with Stantec.

The newest member of the COE's investigative staff was introduced to Ethics Commissioners today. **Nilda Olmo** is a licensed private investigator who has provided surveillance, protection, and research and analytic work for several local agencies, including Sekura, Blackwolf Security Consultants, Inc., and Trujillo Investigations, Inc. After graduating from Florida International University with a degree in Criminal Justice, Ms. Olmo spent 15 years as an investigator for the

Public Defender of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida. The Coral Gables resident began her investigative work for the Ethics Commission on January 4, 2016.

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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