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Fire Captain fined for using station as his private garage

The Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public Trust today agreed to settle a complaint (**C 16-19**) accusing a Miami-Dade Fire Rescue officer of exploiting his official position by parking and electrically charging his personal recreational vehicle in the station he commands. Capt. Nelson Paganacci was charged with abusing his power by requesting the removal of a department truck from a garage bay at Fire Station 53 in Kendall to make room for his RV and avoid paying fees for private storage for almost a year – from August 2015 through May of this year – and using the station’s electricity to charge the vehicle. Capt. Paganacci did not contest the ethics violation of “exploitation of official position” and agreed to pay a \$500 dollar fine and accept a Letter of Instruction.

The COE also agreed to settle a complaint (**C 16-33**) against Leonardo Figueroa, an inspector for Miami-Dade’s Public Housing and Community Development Department, who has been providing private services for his own consulting company since 2009 without filing the required Outside Employment statements. As part of the agreement, Figueroa will plead no contest, pay a \$500 fine to the Ethics Commission and will submit the required forms for 2013 and 2014 within ten days.

A Letter of Instruction issued to Miami City Commissioner Ken Russell for violating the public records provision of the Citizens’ Bill of Rights was approved by the COE. Commissioner Russell was accused of failing to provide a requested list of small gifts he had received from various donors after his election last year. At last month’s meeting, the COE dismissed the complaint (**C 16-17**), because the list was inadvertently misplaced during Mr. Russell’s staff transition and the violation was considered unintentional and Russell has properly disclosed the gifts valued at more than \$100. However, the Letter advises the first-term politician that “care should be taken to safeguard all public records” and to ensure that his staff is properly instructed in the maintenance of public records.

The Ethics Commission approved the nomination of **Lisa Deyarza as the 2016 Ethical Governance Day Teacher of the Year**. The veteran instructor for Miami-Dade County Public Schools created the Legal Studies Magnet Program at Miami Lakes Middle School a dozen years ago and initiated a school wide annual Mock Trial Competition. Ms. Deyarza has led her students to win multiple awards in civic competitions including “We The People,” “Mock Trial,” “Model United Nations” and “Project Citizen” and has encouraged their participation in community projects. The award is part of the Ethics Commission’s 5th annual **Ethical Governance Day**, which is tomorrow, Thursday, October 20th. More than 200 civic activists will attend government and economics classes in dozens of Miami-Dade senior high schools to share with students the importance of civic activism. Ms. Deyarza will be honored in a separate ceremony next week.

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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