



For Immediate Release: August 9, 2017
Contact: Joseph Centorino, Executive Director
(305) 350-0613 or centori@miamidade.gov

Veteran Journalist Joins Ethics Commission Investigative Team

Award-winning political and international journalist **Susannah Nesmith** is the newest investigator for the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE). Nesmith, who joined the staff on August 1, was introduced at the monthly meeting of the Ethics Commission today. While most recently serving as a freelance reporter for publications including the *New York Times*, *BusinessWeek* and *Columbia Journalism Review*, and as Associate Editor for *As You Were*; *The Military Experience*, Nesmith has been a reporter and editor for the *Miami Herald* and a Foreign Correspondent for the Associated Press. She has covered local crime and courts in South Florida and international uprisings and natural catastrophes in Haiti, Iraq, Colombia, Venezuela and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The bilingual writer earned fellowships to study the coverage of aging, multimedia journalism education and civil law, and earned honors from the Society of Professional Journalists, the National Association of Black Journalists and the Florida Press Club. Nesmith has a Bachelor's Degree in History and Latin American Studies and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Nonfiction. Given Nesmith's experience, Executive Director Joseph Centorino told Ethics Commissioners, the agency is "very lucky to get her."

Director Centorino also announced that the Sixth Annual Ethical Governance Day will be held on Thursday, October 19, 2017. On that day, the Ethics Commission encourages citizens and community groups, public agencies, professional associations and private businesses to hold activities and events that focus on how to become more active in their governments. The COE places citizen activists in government classes throughout Miami-Dade senior high schools to talk with students about the importance of being informed and involved citizens. A resolution supporting that effort is set to go before the Miami-Dade School Board for approval this afternoon. Volunteer recruitment will begin shortly. Anyone interested in participating may contact the Ethics Commission by phone at 305-579-2594 or by email via ethics@miamidade.gov.

In other action today, the Ethics Commission clarified the definition of "contract-related duties" in its response to Request for Opinion **(RQO) 17-04** regarding a County employee's involvement with a for-profit business entity within two years of ending employment with that company which is, and has been, a service provider to the County. It stems from an investigation of an assistant director of the Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department who was hired this past January after nearly 13 years of employment with AECOM, one of the private contractors hired as part of the Consent Decree between the federal government and the County to upgrade the wastewater system. Even though the Assistant Director is not involved in contract negotiations with her former employer, she is ultimately responsible for overseeing AECOM's work and has been participating in bi-monthly meetings with the engineering firm. In order to avoid a violation of the so-called "reverse two-year rule," the Ethics Commission opinion advises that the individual in question be removed from any duties related to administration, authorization, meetings or any other decision-making authority involving her former employer at least until two years passes since her departure from the firm.

The Ethics Commission approved a settlement agreement to a complaint (**C 17-15**) that a senior account manager for Motorola Solutions, Inc., violated lobbyist registration requirements for both the City of Hialeah and Miami-Dade County. An investigation found that Lourdes Sori appeared before selection committees, the Hialeah City Council, the City Attorney, the Mayor and other staff members between October 2014 and June 2016 encouraging investment in her company's products without registering as a lobbyist. Ms. Sori stipulated to Probable Cause, pleaded No Contest to the charge and agreed to pay a \$500 fine.

The COE ruled as Not Legally Sufficient a complaint (**C 17-16**) filed against Sweetwater City Commissioner Marcos Villanueva by a former political adversary. Jose Mejia accused Villanueva of making slanderous, defamatory and false statements about him during commission meetings on May 23 and June 5, 2017. A review of the meetings showed that Mejia made accusations against the former police officer-turned-commissioner, who responded in kind. While the Ethics Commission staff considered Villanueva's action as inappropriate and unbecoming, it recommended dismissal of the complaint due to the lack of evidence of a legal violation.

Ethics Commissioners voted today to change the Commission's regular meeting day to the second Thursday of each month. The next meeting will be at 10 a.m. on Thursday, September 14, 2017.

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.

###