

Ethics legislation would put obligation on county workers

BY LIDIA DINKOVA

Proposed legislation that calls for Miami-Dade County employees to report "unethical" actions is moving forward.

The legislation requires county employees to report on colleagues who commit something "grossly unethical" while on the job.

The Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public Trust is to ask commissioners to vote to institute the legislation, said Ethics Commission Executive Director Joe Centorino. The resolution, he said, should come up on a commission agenda within two months.

"We hope that it's going to see the light of day pretty soon," Mr. Centorino said.

Commission Chairwoman Rebeca Sosa has agreed to sponsor the resolution, he added. Mr. Centorino proposed the aptly named "honor code" for county employees earlier this year.

Since then, he has worked with county attorneys to hone in on a more specific definition of "grossly unethical" misconduct.



"We hope... it's going to see the light of day pretty soon." Joe Centorino.

"We felt that we need to refine the concept a little more and provide a little more guidance as to what types of issues would fall under" the honor code, Mr. Centorino said. "The resolution talks about that it will apply to grossly unethical misconduct and criminal violations,

but it doesn't really define. So we've put some meat on the bones." That includes adding a dollar amount threshold that would guide staff as to what constitutes "grossly unethical" misconduct. For example, if an employee misuses county prop-

erty, the dollar amount Miami-Dade lost because of this misuse should reach a given threshold.

"We are not talking about a piece of paper," Mr. Centorino said. "The value of the mistused property should have some threshold that should trigger this."

Included in the proposed legislation to come in front of the commission: An implementing order, or a document that would outline how to reprimand unethical behavior.

Plans are for county staff to enforce the honor code. The implementing order would spell out the administrative procedure that a department's director would follow should an employee commit something that constitutes "grossly unethical" misconduct.

If there's doubt whether an action truly is "grossly unethical," the implementing order would dictate that county administration turn to the Ethics Commission, Mr. Centorino said. The commission would then issue an opinion on the case.

The proposed honor code

would also apply to county contractors. The Ethics Commission drafted the honor code for county employees and doesn't plan to bring it to any local government aside from Miami-Dade County. But if a municipality is interested in implementing the legislation, it may do so, Mr. Centorino said.

So far, he added, one municipality has expressed interest in the honor code — the Town of Miami Lakes in Northwest Miami-Dade.

The proposed resolution expands on a 1964 county administrative order that requires county employees to report crimes their colleagues commit. If adopted, the legislation would bring that requirement one step further to include "grossly unethical" misconduct.

Mr. 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."