

**OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADVOCATE
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY COMMISSION ON ETHICS & PUBLIC TRUST
REPORT OF INVESTIGATION**

#K09-184

Date Opened: 12/23/09

Date Closed:

Investigators: Sylvia Batista and Breno Penichet

On December 21, 2009, the COE received information from the State Attorney's Office Public Corruption Unit setting forth various allegations of ethics violations committed by City of Sweetwater officials. The information was provided anonymously on three type-written pages written in Spanish.

The first allegation involves the illegal use of City-issued cellular telephones by Mayor Manuel Marono, Commissioner Orlando Lopez and Chief of Police Roberto Fulgueira by making numerous long-distance telephone calls to the Dominican Republic and China in 2006-2007.

The source further questions the legality of the Mayor's trips purportedly made on City business. Source mentions two trips—one to the Dominican Republic with Police Chief Fulgueira, and a trip to China with Commissioner Lopez. Source does not provide dates for the trips.

Source additionally alleges that there have been occasions on which the Mayor has used the Ronselli Park banquet hall and not paid the City's rental fee, specifically for a New Years Eve party on 12/31/07. The source further reports that the Mayor allowed the free use of the banquet hall on 05/19/07 by Nicaraguan Embassy functionaries and General Consul Carlos Montiel for a political event in

favor of Daniel Ortega. The aforementioned allegations constitute possible violations of the Miami-Dade County Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance Section (g) *Prohibition on exploitation of official position*.

The final allegation contained in the information that is within the jurisdiction of the COE involves Commissioner Orlando Lopez transacting business with the City by providing printed material through his company, Econographics . Pursuant to source, this business arrangement was discovered and stopped by then Vice-Mayor Abelaira. This allegation constitutes a violation of Section (c)(1) *Prohibition on transacting business with own government*.

The information contains several additional allegations involving nepotism and lawsuits lost by the City for acts committed by police and the Mayor. The nepotism cited by source does not contain the necessary elements of true nepotism with the exception of the Mayor's wife, Jenny Marono's employment with the City as Special Projects Coordinator. However, this issue was previously investigated by the COE and deemed permissible.

Public Records Request:

COE investigators submitted a public records request to the City requesting the following: