



**Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust**

**Investigative Report**

Investigator: Robert Steinback

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|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Case K14-066                        | Case Name: Cira Leslie               | <u>Date Open: July 17,</u><br>2014 | <u>Date Closed:</u> |
| Complainant(s):<br>Magaly Rodriguez | Subject(s): MDPD Sgt.<br>Cira Leslie | <b>CASE<br/>CLOSED</b>             |                     |

**Allegation(s):**

Date: 12/5/2016

Complainant Magaly "Maggie" Rodriguez (Rodriguez) alleges that Miami-Dade County Police Sgt. Cira Leslie (Leslie) inappropriately utilized her status as a police officer to gain an advantage in the rescue of specific animals in crisis and delivering them to Leslie's animal rescue organization, A Better Life, Inc., over that of Rodriguez' animal rescue organization, LoveMyFurbaby Inc. Rodriguez also alleges that Leslie improperly initiated a code enforcement claim against her dog-shelter operation.

**Relevant Ordinances:**

Complainant alleges a violation of the Miami-Dade Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics ordinance, 2-11.1 (g) Exploitation of official position prohibited. *No person [covered by this section] shall use or attempt to use his or her official position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself or herself or others except as may be specifically permitted by other ordinances and resolutions [of] the Board of County Commissioners...*

**Investigation:**

***Interviews***

**Maggie Rodriguez** – July 15, 2014 by telephone.

Rodriguez said Leslie is a sergeant for the Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) in the Northwest section. She said Leslie is a director of A Better Life Rescue, Inc. pet rescue, a 501 C (3) organization.

Rodriguez works with LuvMyFurbaby Inc. pet rescue, also a not-for-profit organization. Rodriguez said Leslie on several occasions seized dogs from people as a rescuer in cases in which she was also involved as a police officer. Rodriguez said Leslie has “used her position to file complaints against rescuers.”

Rodriguez said she has filed public records requests. She claims Leslie will go out of her Northwest district on animal rescue cases, specifically referencing the Southwest region, where Rodriguez’ organization generally operates. Rodriguez said she was in the process of getting a certificate of occupancy for her dog-shelter operation. The investigator understood Rodriguez to say that Leslie had accused her of boarding the animals without air conditioning and electricity. She said Leslie was speaking on behalf of MDPD.

Rodriguez mentioned another case of a suspect hoarder (of rescued animals) who was arrested, and said Leslie was there as a rescuer. Rodriguez said Leslie had information about the arrest and went in and took animals that were inside the home. Rodriguez said Leslie was overlapping her positions as police officer and rescuer. Rodriguez said Leslie took the possession of rescued dogs and adopted them out.

Rodriguez said that in another case there was a request that Miami-Dade animal services to pick up an animal, but ruled the call unfounded. But Leslie took the dog anyway, Rodriguez said. The investigator had the impression that these were cases that Rodriguez had heard about but lacked first-hand knowledge.

Rodriguez said her complaint was that Leslie went to the building department and suggested that Rodriguez be fined. The fire marshal imposed a \$10,000 fine. She believes the county, at Leslie’s behest, is looking for reasons to cite her.

**Rodriguez** – September 1, 2015, by telephone.

The investigator spoke again with Rodriguez, who said “I have backed away from her and her friends.” She believes Leslie violated her ethics as a police officer. “She has used her law enforcement (credentials) to go into someone’s house to take animals.” Rodriguez believes Leslie went to building department and code compliance to get them to file complaints against

her. Rodriguez said Leslie “is friends with someone who is against me. She has pull.”

Again, it was the investigator’s impression that the account of Leslie improperly seizing animals was second-hand information.

Investigator’s note: Subsequent attempts to reach Rodriguez to glean more details and evidence of her allegations were not fruitful.

**Cira Leslie** – August 5, 2016, deposition, with her attorney Terry Valdes (Valdes). Attended by COE Advocate Michael Murawski.

On the advice of her attorney, Leslie declined to answer any question other than her current job title and assignment, citing Fifth Amendment privileges.

**Document/Audio/Video Review:**

Received from Complainant Rodriguez, apparently through a Public Records Request of MDPD:

- An e-mail thread between Kathleen Labrada (Labrada), Chief of Operations and Enforcement, Miami-Dade Animal Services (MDAS), and Rodriguez, spanning April to May 2014, indicating in the subject line that Rodriguez’ organization “is in violation of the MDAS rescue contract.” The e-mail of April 29, 2014, signed by Labrada, reads, “Reporting a violation of the rescue agreement with MDAS. This Rescue, Luv My Furbaby, owned and operated by Maggie Rodriguez with the help of one Camille Recanti Loge is violating the contract with MDAS by pulling in animals for the use of another rescue. This rescue should be suspended.”
- An e-mail thread between Labrada and James Byers (Byers), Chief, Regulatory and Economic Resources Zoning and Public Works Plan Review Division. Summarized as follows:
  - May 22, 2014, 12:50 p.m.: Byers informs others in his department that “Sgt. Leslie of the Hammocks called in a complaint regarding numerous dogs being maintained at 13720 SW 143<sup>rd</sup> Court, unit 104 without any proper licensing.”
  - May 22, 2014, 4:45 p.m.: Byers informs Labrada and others that the operator of the unlicensed kennel is Magaly Rodriguez. He points out that the operation would need a public hearing, building permits and a site plan review if it does not conform to zoning requirements. He notes that Neighborhood Code4 Compliance “has issued warning notices, but no compliance at this time.”
  - May 22, 2014, 10:17 p.m.: Labrada informs Byers and others that “There were no cruelty related issues observed during our inspection.” There were 25 dogs found at the location, “all housed appropriately with access to food, water and shelter,” with air conditioning and fans present. “The kennel permit will be issued once the zoning issue has been addressed.”

Received from Florida Department of State Sunbiz data base:

- Corporate filing for LuvMyFurbaby LLC, with Maggie Rodriguez listed as Registered Agent and Manager, shown as “inactive” as of December 28, 2015
- Corporate filing for Luv My Furbaby Rescue, Inc., with Luz Cabrera listed as Executive Director, shown as “inactive” as of December 28, 2015. The relationship between these two corporations, if any, is unclear.
- Corporate filing for A Better Life Rescue, Inc., with Cira Leslie listed as President, shown as “active.”
- Electronic Articles of Incorporation and other documents for A Better Life Rescue, Inc.

Received from Miami-Dade Police Professional Compliance Bureau:

- Outside Employment Statements for Leslie dated June 15, 2011 for tax year 2010, and dated June 5, 2012 for tax year 2011, each identifying A Better Life Rescue as the outside employment. Leslie stated on each that her income from the outside employment was zero.
- Employee Profile for Leslie, listing 15 commendations, two (2) complaints, one (1) use of force notation, one (1) promotion (to sergeant in 2005) and three (3) disciplinary actions: one (1) in April 2008 rescinded, one (1) in April 2015 resulting in a record of counseling, and one (1) in October 2015 drawing a written reprimand.

Accompanying information included July 13, 2015, memorandum from Major Saima Plasencia denying Leslie’s request for Outside Employment approval, observing that: “Sergeant Leslie’s work in the animal rescue is admirable; however, there have been several instances in which her work has intertwined with her employment with the Miami-Dade Police Department. There have been several complaints to the Professional Compliance Bureau about Sergeant Leslie’s actions in her outside employment. As her outside employment has demonstrated a conflict which could be detrimental to the Department’s professional reputation, I am disapproving her Outside Employment Request.”

Earlier Outside Employment approval requests, including years 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, all of which were approved, are included. Leslie’s Outside Employment Statement for 2011 was provided separately by the Professional Compliance Bureau.

- Documents related to a complaint, received May 6, 2015, from Gina Ferro (Ferro) against Leslie regarding an alleged incident on May 1, 2015. Ferro, at one time a colleague of Leslie in the animal rescue field, stated that Leslie had learned of a lost dog whose finder could not keep the animal, and asked Ferro to pick it up for her. Ferro did so, and decided to keep the dog. Ferro alleges that Leslie then threatened to use her influence as a MDPD officer against Ferro if she did not surrender the animal to Leslie. The complaint in this allegation was “not sustained” based on a lack of evidence or independent corroboration of the allegation.

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| (Description of item reviewed including date)<br>Summary of findings |
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**Conclusion(s):**

Complainant Rodriguez, by the time of her second conversation with the investigator, was giving indications that she no longer wished to pursue her complaint. From that point on, the investigator was unable to elicit a response from Rodriguez, the last attempt coming just prior to the Leslie deposition.

Lacking the active cooperation of the complainant, the investigator has only been able to piece together fragments of the case alleged by the complainant. It appears that Rodriguez became aware of incidents involving Leslie and certain dog seizures – possibly, but not certainly, the Ferro case that developed into an Internal Affairs (IA) investigation. It does not appear that Rodriguez had any actual first-hand connection to the Ferro case. Ferro’s complaint was not sustained by the IA investigation for lack of evidence.

Nevertheless, Leslie’s outside employment authorization, granted in each of the four (4) years prior, was rescinded in 2015. Her supervisors cited animal-rescue related complaints as justifying their concern that Leslie’s off-duty work was interfering with her job duties. Only the Ferro complaint shows up in a review of the investigation report of Leslie’s case; there is no reference to Magaly Rodriguez.

It appears that Rodriguez’ animal rescue organization, LuvMyFurbaby, ran into certification problems with Miami-Dade Animal Services, and that Leslie apparently was an instigator of the County’s investigation of Rodriguez. There is no apparent cause to believe that Leslie, as an officer or as a private citizen, did anything improper by initiating the County investigation

of the situation at Rodriguez' kennel. Rodriguez initially claimed that Leslie somehow used her authority as a police officer to leverage her dispute with Rodriguez, but absent the complainant's continued cooperation, there is no way to assess or verify these vague allegations. After discussion with the Ethics Commission Advocate it was determined that this matter would be closed with no further action.

(Signature)

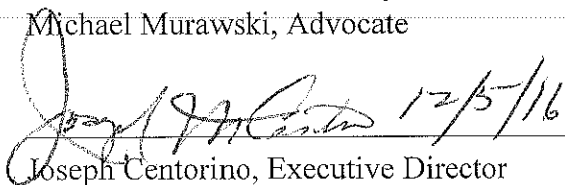


Robert Steinbaek, COE Investigator

Approved by:



Michael Murawski, Advocate



Joseph Centorino, Executive Director