



For Immediate Release: August 15, 2018  
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### **North Miami City Clerk settles travel fraud expense case**

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust today approved a settlement with North Miami City Clerk Michael Etienne, who was accused of exploiting his official position in connection with city travel. According to the complaint (**C 18-28-07**), in October 2015, Etienne requested and received funds to take part in a conference in California, but never attended. A month later, he requested funds to go to a professional conference in Omaha for May 2016, in which he charged the city for a personal side trip to Mount Rushmore. Etienne pleaded No Contest to two counts he exploited his official position. As part of the settlement, Etienne will accept a Letter of Reprimand and has paid a fine of \$500 and investigative costs of \$500 to the Ethics Commission. He also paid \$2,155.66 in restitution to the City of North Miami.

The Ethics Commission approved a Letter of Instruction to an AvAirPros Executive, Christopher Bradley, who while serving on a County selection committee, voted in favor of recommending a company that later hired his firm as a subcontractor. While finding that Bradley's "independence of judgment" was likely impaired, the COE issued the corrective Letter and dismissed the complaint (**C 18-10-02**) because Bradley's employment was disclosed to the County and neither the County's Procurement Division nor County Attorney's office recognized or objected to his participation on the selection panel. The Letter of Instruction defines the restrictions of participation on selection committees and encourages Bradley to use it to guide his future conduct.

The COE found No Probable Cause that Opa-locka City Commissioner Matthew Pigatt violated any provision of the Ethics Code when he questioned George Suarez, Jr., a candidate for Opa-locka City Commission, regarding whether Suarez's lawsuit against the city's water billing disqualified him from running for office. Since the investigation found no indication that Pigatt intimidated Suarez or exploited his position, the complaint (**C 18-25-07**) was dismissed.

No Probable Cause was found to a complaint (**C 18-29-07**) filed against North Miami Beach Mayor Beth Spiegel, who was accused of violating the "right to be heard" provision of the Citizens' Bill of Rights. The investigation determined that the complainant, Alter Gambarte, was actually permitted to speak for longer than the three-minute limit as announced by the City Clerk, even after the mayor had cautioned him to remain civil in his expression of dissatisfaction with city officials.

A complaint (**C 18-14-03**) filed against Miami City Commissioner Joe Carollo, accusing him of using contacts within city government to interrupt rallies of his one-time runoff campaign opponent, and then once elected, using various City of Miami Code Enforcement and other employees to "target" select businesses and events, was withdrawn by the complainant and, therefore, dismissed.

Two complaints (**C 18-26-07** and **C 18-27-07**) accusing a Doral solid waste official of abusing his position by promoting a certain employee were dismissed as Not Legally Sufficient because hiring and personnel matters are not within the jurisdiction of the Ethics Commission.

At the conclusion of his final meeting as Executive Director, Joseph Centorino expressed his gratitude for the support of the Ethics Commissioners and staff members during the seven years of his tenure, noting he has accomplished many of the goals he set, including expanding the agency's training, increasing awareness of the importance of civic engagement and providing detailed opinions to those who depend on the COE for guidance. He expressed concern about the public's failing trust in government at all levels, calling it the greatest threat to the survival of democracy, and encouraged the Ethics Commission to work more at the local level to increase public trust.

Miami-Dade County District 6 Commissioner Rebeca Sosa presented a proclamation declaring August 15, 2018, as "Joseph Centorino Day," as he has proven to be a "dedicated guardian of the public's trust." It noted that he championed the Honor Code and creation of an Ethical Governance Day and led the COE when voters expanded its quasi-judicial powers to include enforcement of the Citizens' Bill of Rights. COE Chairman Jeffrey Cutler presented a plaque honoring Centorino's "seven years of dedication and exemplary service." The commemoration added, "Your unwavering commitment to honesty, integrity and fairness left an indelible mark on your colleagues, commissioners and community."

Incoming Executive Director Jose Arrojo, who has served as a Chief Assistant Miami-Dade State Attorney, overseeing investigations and a staff of more than 100 attorneys and investigators, will assume the post on September 5, 2018.

*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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CAPTION: Honoring Joe Centorino's final Ethics Commission meeting as Executive Director are, from left: COE Commissioner Dr. Judith Bernier; Miami-Dade County District 6 Commissioner Rebeca Sosa; COE Commissioner Jan Jacobowitz; Mr. Centorino; COE Chair H. Jeffrey Cutler; and COE Commissioner Judge Lawrence Schwartz.