

EYE ON ETHICS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MIAMI-DADE COMMISSION ON ETHICS & PUBLIC TRUST



Issue 2 - October 2019



Commission on Ethics & Public Trust by the Numbers:

In FY 2018-2019 over 100 preliminary and formal investigations were conducted.

Director's Message



Dear Friends & Colleagues,

The Board of County Commissioners considered a \$70 million purchase of fire rescue helicopters last month. The process to purchase the helicopters, which is supposed to be sanitized, largely in the sunshine, and free from undisclosed lobbying, began in late 2014. By all measures, the process was not pretty. Nevertheless, the Ethics Commission's involvement in the procurement is a good example to hold up to those who are sometimes dismissive of the agency's impact on local governance.

The Ethics Commission began the investigation of the helicopter purchase in late 2016. Our staff interviewed multiple witnesses, reviewed thousands of documents, and referred the case for criminal review. The investigation revealed multiple violations of the Ethics Code's lobbyist and cone of silence provisions. Ultimately, we were able to identify repeated, prohibited contacts between a helicopter vendor employee who was not registered to lobby and senior Miami-Dade Fire Rescue personnel. The contacts were

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face-to-face over meals, over the phone, locally and on out-of-town trips. All of this is contained in a final investigative report and cover legal memorandum that has been publicly reported on.

As a result of our inquiry, the unregistered helicopter vendor employee lobbying the county was found to have violated the Ethics Code and fined several thousand dollars. However, that is only small part of what occurred as a result of the Ethics Commission shining a light into the crevices of a process involving tens of millions of dollars of public funds, a process that is supposed to be sanitized and in the sunshine.

While we do not have the authority to fire an employee of a private firm, the vendor fired the employee we charged and also sanctioned his supervisor. We do not have the authority to compel the Mayor or the Commission to abandon a multi-year procurement process, but the County did abandon two prior processes and has started what will be, we all hope, a third and final untainted procurement process. We don't have the authority to discipline or terminate a County employee, but the Mayor has publicly committed to a disciplinary review of the conduct of senior Fire Rescue officials, and at his direction, command staff officers have begun reviewing our files.

We will continue to shine a light into the crevices of local governance, investigate and sanction those who violate the Ethics Code, and provide objective factual reports to elected officials, policy makers, private parties and members of the public so they can act within their own authority to amplify the impact of our work.

Best regards,
Jose Arrojo

Nelson C. Bellido Esq., Vice
Chair
Dr. Judith Bernier
Judge Lawrence A. Schwartz
Jan Jacobowitz, Esq.

Executive Director
Jose J. Arrojo, Esq.

Advocate
Michael P. Murawski, Esq.



FAQ



2019 Ethical Governance Day Held at Miami-Dade Schools



Early this month, The Commission on Ethics partnered with Miami-Dade County Public Schools to once again place hundreds of civic leaders from the community into local high school classrooms to address students on the importance of civic participation and engagement as a means of promoting better and more ethical government.

This year, 225 volunteers, including elected officials, lawyers, and other community leaders fanned out to over two dozen high schools and engaged with hundreds of students. Students were given a civic involvement pep talk and encouraged to engage. This year's talking points also included the importance of voting as we celebrate the soon-to-come 100th year anniversary of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women's right to vote.

"It amazes me how every year we are able to attract so many volunteers to this yearly event," says Ethics Commission Administration Coordinator Rodzandra Sanchez who administers the program. "However, it does not surprise me as I've learned to understand in large part by way of this event, that our community leaders are clear in their belief that building a more inclusive and prosperous society requires the participation of our young people."

Special thanks to County Commission Vice Chairwoman Rebeca Sosa for sponsoring a Resolution of the County Commission supporting the event and to School Board Chairwoman Perla Tabares Hantman and Superintendent Alberto Carvalho for their continuing partnership.



To read articles click on links below:

[**After five years and 'ugly' process, Miami-Dade is still trying to buy helicopters**](#), MIAMI HERALD, October 3, 2019.

[**Como presentar una queja a la comision de etica del condado de Miami-Dade?**](#) NEGOCIOS MAGAZINE, October 12, 2019. (Spanish)

Commissioner Profile: Vice-Chair Nelson Bellido



The Vice-Chair of the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust thinks of the local governments of our community as living, breathing organisms "The Ethics Commission is a vital organ of our community," says Vice-Chair Nelson Bellido. "I would also compare it to antibodies making sure that a disease does not spread."

The son of Cuban immigrants who migrated to the United States in 1960, he was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1967. Mr. Bellido's father had been a trained commercial pilot in Cuba until the Communist Castro regime forced him to fly a crop duster. He and his co-pilot fled the island, arriving in Key West. Mr. Bellido's father found work in Chicago but the family returned to South Florida in 1971, eventually settling in Hialeah.

"My dad was a very proud man who was very thankful for the opportunities this country provided him," says Vice-Chair Bellido. "He worked several jobs, finding a way to make ends meet, and ultimately had a 30-plus-year career with the Dade County Water & Sewer Authority as a custodian, working full-time until he was 86 years old."

Mr. Bellido attended public schools in Hialeah, graduating from Hialeah Miami Lakes High School. He was the school's first alumnus to attend Duke University, where he received his bachelor's degree in 1989.

"I was very blessed that during this time, the Dade County Youth Fair supported and believed in me by awarding me scholarship money for seven years," recalls Mr. Bellido. "I felt it was very important to give back years later and today I proudly sit as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Miami-Dade County Youth Fair. I have made the growth of the Scholarship Program that now awards scholarships to students from all high schools in Miami-Dade County a cornerstone of my time as Chair the last two years."

An advisor at Duke with whom he is still good friends steered him toward law school and Mr. Bellido received his law degree from the University of Florida in 1992.

"During the revolutionary period in Cuba, my mother was studying to be a lawyer and her father was a lawyer, so that is where I guess the seed was planted, but I really wanted to be a doctor growing up because my brother was studying medicine and I wanted to follow in his footsteps."

After law school, Mr. Bellido returned to South Florida permanently, landing a job at the State Attorney's Office then run by future U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, with whom Mr. Bellido felt a deep connection due to their mutual passion for children's issues. During what he calls the "best years of my career," he prosecuted a variety of cases, from DUI's to felonies, eventually moving up the ranks to prosecuting murderers and career criminals.

Four plus years and hundreds of prosecutions later, Mr. Bellido moved into private practice. For the past 22 years, he has worked as a commercial litigator and insurance defense attorney in several prestigious Miami law firms. Today, he proudly serves as Managing Partner of the Miami office of Roig Lawyers.

Mr. Bellido was appointed to the Commission in July of 2010 by then Chief Judge Joel Brown. Vice-Chair Bellido served as Chair from December 2013 to December 2015 and is now on his third four-year term after being re-appointed by Chief Judge Bertila Soto.

Mr. Bellido stresses his commitment to "doing what's right" while serving on the commission by upholding the legacy of his friend, the late Commission Chairman Jeffrey Cutler, who recently passed away. "I have thought of Jeff every day since he passed. He stood for all that was good, and I feel I have the responsibility to continue his legacy of being a principled leader with unmatched integrity who is respectful to everyone that comes before the commission."

Educating the Community / Upcoming Events

Miami-Dade Lobbyist Training: Anyone who registers as a lobbyist for Miami-Dade County, Miami and certain other municipalities must undergo training provided by the Ethics Commission. You must create an account with the Ethics Commission, then sign up for a class and pay by credit card IN ADVANCE through this [system](#).

Lobbyist Refresher Course: Lobbyists who have completed the initial Ethics Course and have continuously registered as a lobbyist thereafter shall be required to complete a refresher Ethics Course every two years to meet requirements of Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami. Date of completion of most recent lobbyist ethics training course (original or refresher) is required. You must create an account with the Ethics Commission, then sign up for a class and pay IN ADVANCE on this [system](#).

Advisory Board Training: This training will be held on the third Wednesday of each month. Classes will alternate between 8-9:30 a.m. and 12-1:30 p.m. every other month. You must register before attending the class.

Clean Campaign Class for Elected Officials (with Miami-Dade Elections Department): This two-hour seminar to be held on November 20, at the Town of Surfside Commission Chambers, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., will feature representatives from the Ethics Commission and the Elections Department who will provide essential information to avoid legal pitfalls, correctly raise and report funds, properly keep records and understand the legal and ethical obligations of seeking public office. The class is free and open to the public. To RSVP, send an email to Robert Thompson at robthom@miamidade.gov

Elected Officials Training in Miami (with Miami Dade County League of Cities): This four-hour state mandated course will be held at Grapeland Heights Park in the City of Miami from 9AM - 2PM. The training will cover the Sunshine Law, Public Records, the State Code of Ethics Statute, and Article II, Section 8 of the Florida Constitution. For more information regarding this training session contact the Miami-Dade League of Cities at 305-416-4155.



The graphic features a yellow background with a red and orange border. On the left side, there is an image of two pencils. The text is centered and lists the following trainings:

- November 1 - Community Council Members Training, 1PM - 3PM**
- November 18 - Lobbyist Training, 9AM - 1PM**
- November 20 - Clean Campaign Class, 6:30PM - 8:30PM**
- November 25 - Lobbyist Refresher Course, 10AM - 12PM**
- November 25 - MDLC/Ethics Commission State Ethics Course Training, 9AM - 1PM**



Did You Know?

The "two year rule" of the County Ethics Code prohibits former local government employees from lobbying their former County or municipal employers for two years following the termination of their employment.

Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics & Public Trust

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