

EYE ON ETHICS

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



Issue 13 - September 2020 Happenings



Commission on Ethics & Public Trust by the Numbers:

This past FY 2019-2020, the Ethics Commission staff responded to over two hundred hotline, email, and hard copy reports of misconduct and handled 52 formal complaints.

Director's Message



Dear Friends & Colleagues,

We have just closed out the County's fiscal year and this is the time when the Ethics Commission publicly reports on the past year's work. The past fiscal year presented significant and unexpected challenges. Compliance with local orders limiting travel, group gatherings, and in-person contacts as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic necessitated changes to long-established work protocols.

We are proud to report, that the Ethics Commission was able to meet the demands of our new environment with only a very limited interruption in some of our services in the early months of the pandemic. Thereafter, we

Quick Links



Commissioners
Nelson C. Bellido Esq.,
Chair

adapted and found new ways to serve our clients in local government and the greater community.

We retooled and became more operationally proficient in the new pandemic restricted work environment. We have successfully transitioned from primarily in-person training to county-wide videoconference teaching. By partnering with the private sector, we also produced our own in-house ethics training product that is now available online. Our monthly Ethics Commission meetings, like those of all public boards, are now conducted via a videoconference platform.

We recently held two virtual contested evidentiary hearings. One matter involved a dispute between an elected official and candidate arising out of the Ethical Campaign Practices Ordinance and was presided over by a retired Circuit Court Judge. The second matter was an ethics enforcement action involving an elected official and was presided over by the five-person Ethics Commission.

On the ethics opinion front, we filled our vacant General Counsel position. Together with a prior increase in legal staff availability caused by bringing part-time Staff Attorneys to full-time employment, these staffing changes have increased the availability of our lawyers by over 2,800 hours per year. Last year we were able to provide over 150 ethics opinions to elected officials, board members, employees, and private parties transacting with the County and the various municipalities.

On the training and outreach front, the Ethics Commission's Annual Report was produced and distributed last year for the first time in many years, and our electronic newsletter, *Eye on Ethics*, is now widely distributed each month throughout the County. We hosted over seventy training and outreach events serving elected officials, candidates, boards, employees, and community groups. We also continued our efforts to reach lesser served communities through Spanish language media including articles in *Negocios* Magazine and an appearance on Mega Television's *2020 Con Tomas Regalado*.

Finally, on the enforcement front, the Ethics Commission staff responded to over two hundred hotline, email, and hard copy reports of misconduct and handled 52 formal complaints. Noteworthy cases included an exploitation case resulting in a guilty plea to criminal charges and the resignation of an elected official, a case that resulted in the shutting down of an unauthorized pay-to-park scheme in the County Fire Department, and a case that identified a dysfunctional Community Advisory Committee in the County's Public Housing Department and resulted in the Board of County Commissioners shutting it down.

This coming year, we are confident that will be able to continue to evolve and refine our procedures to better serve the community during this continuing health crisis.

Best regards,
Jose Arrojo

Dr. Judith Bernier,
Vice Chair
Judge Lawrence A.
Schwartz
Jan Jacobowitz, Esq.
Wifredo Gort


Executive Director
Jose J. Arrojo, Esq.

Advocate
Michael P. Murawski, Esq.

General Counsel
Martha Perez, Esq.



**Florida Commission
on Ethics**




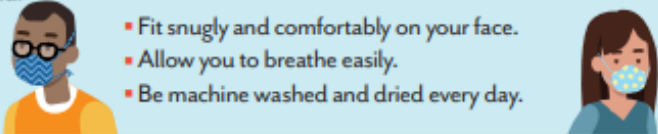
COVID-19: Back-to-Work Safety

Protect Yourself

FloridaHealth.gov/COVID-19 • Florida Department of Health

Wear a cloth face covering over your mouth and nose. Go to [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and search "cloth face coverings" or scan the code with your phone app. Face coverings should:



- Fit snugly and comfortably on your face.
- Allow you to breathe easily.
- Be machine washed and dried every day.



Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed or gloved hands, or when you adjust or remove your face covering or safety glasses.

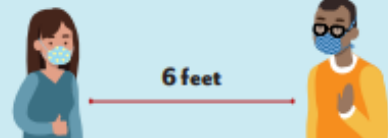
Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a 60% or more alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Clean hands:

- Before and after shifts and breaks.
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- After using the restroom.
- Before eating.
- Before and after preparing food.




Keep 6 feet between you and your co-workers or customers.

- Avoid groups of 10 or more during work meetings and breaks.
- Don't shake hands with co-workers or customers.
- Don't share drinks or food, and don't carpool, with co-workers.
- Keep your distance from co-workers or customers who look sick.



Don't share work surfaces, phones, computers, supplies or work tools with co-workers—if possible. If you must share, disinfect surfaces and things before you use them. Also:

- Disinfect surfaces and things that customers touch.




If you feel sick or have COVID symptoms, stay home or go home.


- Call your health care provider and follow-up with your supervisor.
- Go to [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and search for "COVID symptoms" or scan the code with your phone app.

COVID Symptoms:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell



For health and safety steps for specific occupations, go to [CDC.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/worker-safety-support](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/worker-safety-support) or scan the code with your phone app.



Executive Director Presents at 2020 IAFCI Conference

COE Executive Director, Jose Arrojo, recently conducted a virtual presentation to the Florida Chapter of the International Association of Financial Crimes Investigators (IAFCI), at their most recent Florida Training Conference. Mr. Arrojo's presentation, *Cautionary Ethical Red*



Alerts! Ethics Codes as Investigatory Resources, covered topics such as Basic Concepts of Personal and Institutional Ethics, Exploitation of Position, Bribery and Unlawful Compensation, Potential Conflicts of Interest, and Mandatory Disclosure.

The International Association of Financial Crimes Investigators (IAFCI), a non-profit international organization founded in 1969, provides services and an environment within which information about financial fraud, fraud investigation and fraud prevention methods can be collected, exchanged and taught for the common good of the financial payment industry and our global society. Chapters have been formed across the United States, Canada, Europe, Central and South America, Africa and Asia with members from all levels of law enforcement, prosecution, security and every segment of the financial transaction industry.

September Ethics - Commission Meeting Actions



Summary of the Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics & Public Trust Meeting Held on September 9, 2020

The Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public held a virtual Commission Meeting on September 9, 2020 by way of the ZOOM platform. The following actions took place:

Miami-Dade Inspector General Recognized

The Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) recognized retiring Miami-Dade County Inspector General, Mary Terpstra Cagle, for almost forty years of public service, and her support for the Ethics Commission.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Jose Arrojo provided the Commission an update on the Ethics Staff Office move to their new location at the Overtown Transit Village North Tower. Mr. Arrojo mentioned that the move is almost complete, and that staff is now working out of the new location.

Executive Director Jose Arrojo provided the Commission with an update on the Board of County Commission's September budget meetings and the COE 20-21 FY budget.

Loressa Felix was introduced as a new COE Staff Attorney. Ms. Felix spent seven years as an Assistant State Attorney and was ultimately assigned to investigate and prosecute first degree and life felonies. She also spent four years in private practice as a principal in her own firm and as a firm associate.

No Probable Cause Found in Case Involving North Miami Beach Commissioner

C 20-18-04 (b): The Ethics Commission unanimously found No Probable Cause that North Miami Beach Commissioner Michael Joseph violated the Truth in Government or the Public Records Section of the Citizen's Bill of Rights.

Hearing Date Set for Case Involving State Representative Michael Grieco

The COE set September 25th as the hearing date to begin the Public Hearing in case (C 18-17-04)

involving State Representative Michael Grieco. The case will be heard virtually via Zoom.

No Probable Cause Found in Complaint Filed Against City of South Miami Attorney

C 20-28-07: The Ethics Commission unanimously found No Probable Cause that City of South Miami Attorney, Thomas Pepe, violated the Public Records Section of the Citizen's Bill of Rights. Former Mayor of South Miami, Horace Feliu, the complainant, alleged that Mr. Pepe did not provide public records in a timely manner and attempted to charge a sum that exceeded the allowable cost provided by law.

No Probable Cause Found in Complaint Filed Against Interim Village of El Portal Attorney

C 20-30-08: The Ethics Commission unanimously found No Probable Cause that Village of El Portal City Attorney, Norman Powell, violated the Miami-Dade County Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics. The complaint alleged that Mr. Powell negotiated his own contract with the Village after verbally agreeing to serve as the Interim Village Attorney.

Complaint Filed Against Miami-Dade County Mayor Dismissed

C 20-30-08: A complaint filed against Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez was found to be Not Legally Sufficient and was dismissed. The complaint alleged that Mayor Gimenez exploited his official position, in violation of the County Ethics Code, by permitting Miami-Dade County Commissioner Eileen Higgins the use of public assets and funds to further her campaign.

Probable Cause Found in Complaint Filed Against Award-Winning Architect

C 20-27-07: The Ethics Commission unanimously found Probable Cause that architect, Bernard Zyscovich, violated the Lobbying Section of the Miami-Dade County Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics.

Complaint Filed Against County Commissioner Withdrawn

C 20-29-07: A complaint filed against Miami-Dade County Commissioner Esteban Bovo was withdrawn by the complainant, Juan Carlos Planas.

No Probable Cause in Case Against Commissioner



Hearing Examiner Rosa Rodriguez (Circuit Judge Retired) found No Probable Cause that City of Aventura Commission Seat 5 Candidate, Rachel Saltzman Friedland, violated the Mandatory and Voluntary Fair Campaign Practices provisions of Section 2-11.1.1 of the Miami-Dade County Ethical Campaign Practices Ordinance.

The complaint was filed by City of Aventura Commissioner Gladys Mezrahi, who is running for re-election. She alleged that Saltzman Friedland responded to an email originally sent to Friedland by Aventura Commissioner Robert Shelley and made several statements, including that she {Mezrahi} posted misinformation about the issue of school on Yom Kippur on social media. The complaint also alleged that Saltzman Friedland took credit for "other people's work" by promoting misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic and that she "refused to do anything to protect Aventura's children" because she allegedly refused to engage in the community effort to oust a convicted sex offender from the community because she knew the sex offender personally from their time growing up in Colombia.

The expedited hearing was held virtually and was attended by Complainant Commissioner Mezrahi

and her counsel Benedict Kuhene, Respondent Saltzman Friedland, and members of the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust.

COE Partners with Miami-Dade Public Schools



In support of 2020 **Ethical Governance Day**, the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust (COE) has produced a short video message from COE Executive Director, Jose Arrojo, that will be distributed to area high schools. The video delivers a message regarding the role of the COE in our community and stresses the importance of civic participation and engagement as a means of promoting better and more ethical government.

The COE and the Miami-Dade County Public Schools continues to be committed to teaching students ethical values that empower them to be role model citizens. [Click here to watch](#)

[the Executive Director's video..](#)

Ethics Commission in the News

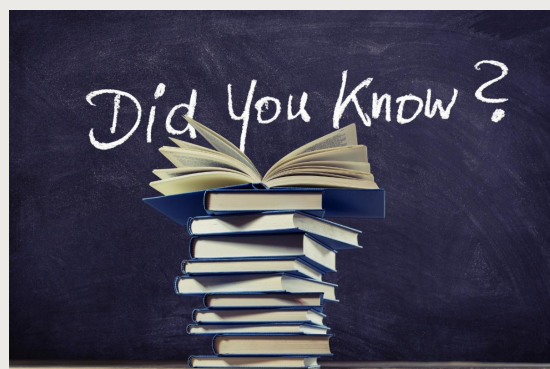
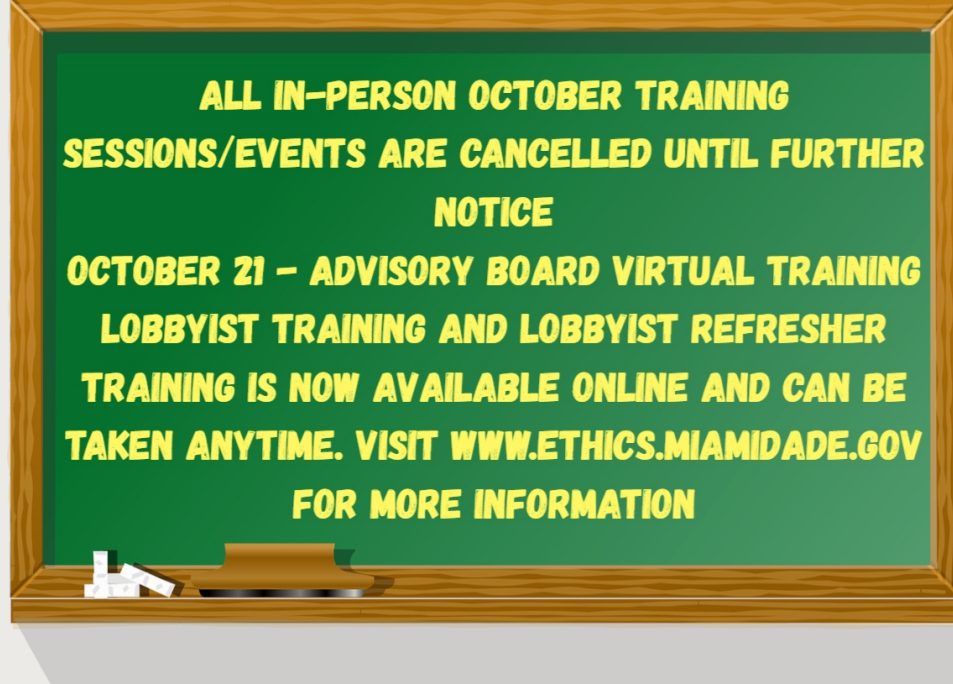


To read the article click on the link below:

Two Families Fight for Open Seats on Medley City Council

Miami Herald, September 15, 2020

Educating the Community / Upcoming Events



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.

Miami-Dade County Commission on
Ethics & Public Trust
Phone: 305-579-2594
Email: ethics@miamidade.gov
Website: www.ethics.miamidade.gov

Start Spreading the News



Share



Tweet