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Miami Commissioner settles charges of unreported income

The Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust has reached a settlement with Miami City Commissioner Angel Gonzalez, who has admitted to not reporting all of his earnings as required by law. The Independent Advocate for the Commission filed the complaint (C 09-003) against the politician for failing to state rental income on four properties he owns and leases. A review of Gonzalez's records shows he had been receiving approximately \$3,800 a month in rent since 2005, but failed to report that on annual financial disclosure forms for the years 2005, 2006, and 2007. As part of the settlement, Commissioner Gonzalez will plead no contest, pay a \$2,500 fine, file amended financial disclosure forms and receive a letter of instruction by the Commission on Ethics.

A public hearing will be scheduled on a complaint (C 09-05) filed by the Independent Advocate against Kentward Forbes after the Commission found probable cause. It alleges that the Board Member of the Naranja Lakes Community Redevelopment Agency failed to disclose income he received from various sources on financial disclosure forms filed for 2005, 2006 and 2007 as required by law. Forbes told investigators he had no primary source of income, but state records show he is the registered agent for several incorporated entities, including "Citizens Integrated Voices Inspiring Changes," "Civic Services" and "Naranja Optimist Club, Inc." through which he received several thousand dollars for consulting services and community organizing.

A complaint of "whistle-blower retaliation" by an administrative secretary for Miami-Dade Fire Rescue (C 09-06) was dismissed because the Commission ruled it was legally insufficient. The employee was placed on administrative leave with pay, pending the outcome of an investigation. That does not constitute adverse personnel or disciplinary action under the county's whistleblower ordinance.

The Commission ruled there was no legal sufficiency in a complaint (C 09-07) filed against the mayor of North Miami Beach. A citizen had alleged that there were several improprieties or inaccuracies on campaign treasurer reports filed by Raymond Marin. A staff analysis found the allegations are not within the jurisdiction of the Miami-Dade Ethics Commission.

In other action today, the Ethics Commission ruled on a request for opinion (RQO-09-16) that a Miami-Dade Fire-Rescue lieutenant does not have a conflict of interest by providing hazardous material training through a private company which he co-owns, nor does the county have a conflict of interest by reimbursing employees for half of the tuition for attending his school. Miami-Dade County does not currently provide training for emergency responders about hazardous materials and weapons of mass destruction.

However, in response to a different request for opinion (RQO-09-17), the Commission determined there is a conflict of interest for the executive director of a Head Start center to be reimbursed for rental payments made to her husband, who owns the property in Little Haiti. The center has a contract with Miami-Dade's Community Action Agency to

provide educational, nutritional and health care services to some 120 pre-school children. But, county and federal rules state that Head Start agencies must operate “free of political bias or family favoritism” and that prohibits government reimbursement for payments made to the spouse of a contractor.

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 and outreach, the Commission seeks to empower the community and bolster public trust.

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