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Formal Letters Spell Out Ethics Concerns

A public reprimand was issued today to Opa-Locka Mayor Myra Taylor, who last month agreed to pay a fine of \$1,500 as part of a settlement with the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE). The complaint (**C 11-16**) found that in late 2009 and early 2010, then-Vice Mayor Taylor engaged in voting conflicts by promoting a funding resolution that benefited the non-profit corporation in which she served as sole officer, founder and president. While recognizing the value of politicians involving themselves with worthwhile causes, the reprimand states that “public officials must exercise due care to separate the duties of public office from the activities of the non-profit or community organization... to avoid even the appearance of using the official position to secure special privileges or exemptions for other persons and organizations.” The letter notes, “There is no doubt that respondent had a personal interest in the Civil Rights Supper. In fact, she pontificated about such interest at the City’s December commission meeting.” The COE also chastises Taylor for ignoring the advice of her own city attorney, stating that if she “heeded that advice, we would not be reprimanding her today.”

A complaint (**C 11-27**) filed against the mayor of Miami Lakes was dismissed as not legally sufficient because it’s based on the Miami-Dade Citizen’s Bill of Rights, which the Ethics Commission has no authority to enforce. Alan Rigerman filed the complaint against Michael Pizzi claiming he was not recognized and not permitted to speak at Town Council meetings in June and July, despite registering to do so. Bill of Rights issues may only be resolved through a Circuit Court lawsuit. However, the Ethics Commission will issue a letter of instruction, reminding Miami Lakes officials of the value of citizen input at public meetings.

A lieutenant in the Miami-Dade Corrections Department has charged his agency with failing to provide all documents contained within a public records request he made. Aaron Jackson is suing the County for retaliation for filing a racial discrimination claim and requested all e-mails from several Corrections officials from February 1, 2010. While the department did provide documents, Jackson claims in a complaint (**C 11-26**) that he has copies of e-mails from that date that were not provided and asserts that they were intentionally excluded. The Ethics Commission ruled that since the complaint concerns the Citizen’s Bill of Rights, it may not proceed to a probable cause determination and should be dismissed. However, the COE will also provide a letter of instruction to the Corrections Department regarding Public Records Law.

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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