



For Immediate Release: May 5, 2016
Contact: Joseph Centorino, Executive Director
(305) 350-0613 or centori@miamidade.gov

Statement from Joseph Centorino, Executive Director:

In an effort to clarify misleading media reports, this statement is issued following the payment by Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez of the \$4,000 fine levied on him by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (COE) after months of needless delays.

In July of last year (2015), the COE determined that Mayor Hernandez violated the Citizens' Bill of Rights portion of the Miami-Dade County Charter, when he made statements at news conferences in English and Spanish in October 2011 that conflicted with testimony he gave during a federal trial in 2014 regarding his financial transactions with an individual convicted of running a Ponzi scheme. The charge against him cites the portion of the Charter entitled "Truth in Government," which states, in part, "No County or municipal official... shall knowingly furnish false information on any public matter, nor knowingly omit significant facts when giving requested information to members of the public."

Despite every opportunity afforded to him to confront the evidence against him, the Mayor chose not to cooperate with investigators and instead pled the Fifth Amendment as his excuse for not answering questions. He also did not appear at the public hearing to contest the charges. Instead, he publicly denounced the Commission's findings, despite having signed an affidavit in March of 2015 agreeing to comply with the Commission's regulations and authority. He then invited members of the media to record the delivery of his \$4,000 fine in dozens of buckets filled with loose coins – a contemptuous offer which the Ethics Commission declined to accept.

For his failure to comply with the Commission's order, the COE filed a lawsuit against Hernandez in civil court. After several months of legal maneuvering, he agreed through his attorney to a court order directing the Mayor to pay the fine to the County Clerk's office, which would, in turn, submit a check to the Ethics Commission. The deadline to do so was May 6, 2016. The fine was paid yesterday (May 4th). The coins were rolled and boxed and presented to a bank in the presence of a representative of the Clerk. Neither the Clerk's office nor the Ethics Commission counted any coins.

Mayor Hernandez has boasted in the media that he "won" his battle – an insupportable conclusion. He stated he was protesting this agency's politics, but the only "politics" involved in this charade was the Mayor's attempt to deflect attention from his ethical misdeeds. His attempt to demonize a public agency for his own ethical shortcomings created a spectacle that unnecessarily embarrassed the people of the City of Hialeah.

In the end, the Mayor acknowledged that he was liable for the fines imposed on him for his untruthful behavior and he paid them in full. The Ethics Commission refused to accept his bucket of coins, and, in the end Mr. Hernandez was forced to count his own pennies. The case is closed. The Ethics Commission did its job.

The Ethics Commission has requested all municipalities in Miami-Dade County to appoint an “ethics officer” to serve as a liaison to the COE. We hope Mayor Hernandez and the City of Hialeah will do just that and work together with the Ethics Commission to find additional ways to improve the public’s respect for, and trust in, local government.

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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