

EYE ON ETHICS

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



Issue 23 - Eye on Ethics Newsletter



Commission on Ethics & Public Trust by the Numbers:

The past fiscal year, the Ethics Commission increased training and outreach offerings to 84 live, virtual, and hybrid events. This represents a continuing year-over-year increase dating back to FY 2018-2019.

Director's Message



Dear Friends & Colleagues,

The Ethics Commission begins 2022 with newly elected board leadership. Nelson C. Bellido has completed his two-year term as Chairperson and will remain on the board as a Commissioner.

The Commission voted unanimously to select Dr. Judith Bernier as its new Chairperson. Dr. Bernier previously served

as the Commission's Vice-Chair and her overall service dates back to her original appointment in 2014. Dr. Bernier is the Director of the Florida International University Center for Labor Research and Studies.

Quick Links



Commissioners

Dr. Judith Bernier, Chair
Wifredo Gort, Vice Chair

The Commission also voted unanimously to select Wilfredo "Willy" Gort as its new Vice-Chair. Mr. Gort, formerly a long-serving elected official in the City of Miami, has served on the board as a Commissioner since being appointed by the Miami-Dade County League of Cities in 2019.

On the training front, the Ethics Commission ended the last year by hosting a webinar that explored "Representational Issues Regarding Local Government Witnesses in Ethics & Criminal Investigations." The webinar was approved for CLE credits by the Florida Bar. Also in December, we partnered with long-term collaborators at the Miami-Dade County League of Cities and provided in-person ethics training for dozens of newly elected local officials and their staff. Special thanks to the City of Coral Gables for hosting the event.

We started the new year with a training program titled "Investigation and Administrative Prosecution of Ethical Misconduct by Police Officers." This very well attended program explored the interplay between ethics investigations into police officers and the Policeman's Bill of Rights, which governs the processing of complaints against officers by their employing departments. Special thanks to internal affairs and command staff officers in the cities of Doral and Coral Gables, and legal advisors for the Miami-Dade and City of Miami police departments.

The Ethics Commission recently published its Annual Report for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The report serves as the agency's required annual accounting to the Board of County Commissioners and details total numbers in training & outreach, ethics guidance, and investigations. Significant cases and accomplishments are also detailed. If you would like an electronic copy of the Annual Report, please contact the Commission at: ethics@miamidade.gov

Finally, continuing to collaborate with elected officials as regards local legislation, the Ethics Commission is working with County elected officials and staff on revisions to the Ethics Code's provisions regarding gift solicitations by employees. Also, the Commission is seeking revisions to the Code's definition of "immediate family" to include siblings. The latter would expand conflict of interest prohibitions on County and municipal officials and employees to include their brothers' and sisters' interactions with County government.

Look for us soon in Opa Locka, South Miami and North Miami Beach, where we will be partnering with municipal counsel and officials and providing ethics training to municipal officials and staff.

Best regards,
Jose

Nelson C. Bellido Esq.
Judge Lawrence A.
Schwartz
Charlton Copeland, Esq.

Executive Director
Jose J. Arrojo, Esq.

General Counsel
Martha Perez, Esq.

Advocate
Radia Turay, Esq.



FAQ



Let's Help Stop the Spread of Coronavirus



Our best shot

**FOR A STRONG,
HEALTHY
COMMUNITY.**

COE Chairman Recognized



The Commission on Ethics board and staff recognized Nelson C. Bellido for his two-year term as Chairperson at their most recent monthly meeting. Mr. Bellido, a partner in a Miami-based law firm, started his career as a prosecutor at the Miami-Dade County State Attorney's Office, was Director of the Cuban American Bar Association, and has served on the Miami-Dade County Fair and Exposition Board of Directors for the past ten years. He was originally appointed to the Commission by the Chief Judge of the Circuit. Chairman Bellido was recognized for his leadership and for his continued voluntary service to the Commission and the citizens of Miami-Dade County. He will remain on the board as a Commissioner.

COE Offering it's Services Directly in the Community



Commission on Ethics (COE) community outreach representatives recently went to West Perrine's Circle Plaza and Rainbow Housing Development to take part in the award-winning Walking One Stop, a collaborative partnership with Community leaders, Police, and Social Services that seeks to deliver federal, state, and local social and economic services to the doorstep of residents. One Stop "Walkers" assess the needs of residents and those needs are often addressed immediately on-site.

The COE will continue its partnership with the Walking One Stop in order to further its goal of informing and educating those in Miami-Dade communities where confidence in local government may be at greater risk because of existing distrust. The next Walking One Stop event that the COE is

COE Staff Profile



The Commission On Ethics (COE) team recently welcomed new Staff Attorney, Etta Akoni, a South Florida native, born and raised in West Park, formerly known as Carver Ranches in nearby Broward County.

Etta developed her early interest in law and public service while attending a Pre-Law Magnet program at Fort Lauderdale High School. This early exposure helped Etta see the many ways she could have a fulfilling legal career and serve her community at the same time.

After high school, Etta attended Nova Southeastern University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Finance. She also had the distinct honor of being the 2007 Student Commencement Speaker at her graduation ceremony. "I will never forget the honor I felt after being selected from a pool of so many bright young leaders," recalls Etta.

Etta continued her studies the University of Florida School of Law where she served as the Vice President of the Black Law Student Association, was an Executive Research Editor for the University of Florida Journal of Law and Public Policy, served as an Executive Board Member for the University of Florida Law College Council, and regularly volunteered with the Alachua Civil Rights Restoration Project.

After graduating from law school in 2010, Etta returned to her South Florida home to practice law. For nine years she was an Assistant State Attorney at the Miami Dade State Attorney's Office (SAO) and had the opportunity to work in various roles within the office. She was initially assigned to the trial court divisions where she led all segments of criminal prosecutions, including all phases of jury and bench trials, taking and defending depositions, litigating appeals of county court cases in circuit court, and litigating felony post-conviction motions.

Etta also had the pleasure of serving as a prosecutor in the SAO's Community Outreach Division where she worked with community leaders and organizations as well as government officials to help build trust in, and an understanding of, the process of prosecution. She was also able to connect the resources of the SAO to the community by way of projects, events, education, training, and delivering information about the process of prosecution to minority and underserved communities.

In her last position with the SAO, Etta worked in Criminal Intake where she facilitated ongoing criminal investigations by primarily assisting police officers and investigators from regulatory agencies with legal issues that arose during their criminal investigations and reviewed cases from citizens to determine if charges could be filed. While Criminal Intake was an in-office position, Etta treasured that it still "allowed me to directly connect to the community by being able to interact with people who came to the SAO seeking justice."

After leaving the SAO, Etta practiced civil litigation in the subrogation division of a home-owners insurance company handling all aspects of her civil cases from initial investigation, discovery, hearings, and mediation. She then served as Associate General Counsel and a Deputy Director handling legal matters and assisted in outreach efforts for a local non-profit organization that ran multiple business entity operations including a thrift store and a homeless shelter for women and children.

While Etta has had the opportunity to work in a variety of areas of the law, service to the South Florida community is and has been an integral part of her life and career. This is why she is proud that in addition to her work as a Staff Attorney, she will now assist the COE with its community outreach efforts.

"I am excited to work for the Ethics Commission to educate, serve, and protect my community," says Etta. "I love that the COE works to protect the public's trust in government. In the short time I have been here, I have learned so much about the intricacies of our government and I hope that in years to come my work with the COE will further the mission of ethical governance."

January Ethics - Commission Meeting Actions



Summary of the Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics & Public Trust Meetings Held on January 19, 2022

The Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public Trust held Commission Meetings on January 19, 2022. The following actions took place:

New Ethics Commission Chair and Vice Chair Selected

The Ethics Commission voted unanimously to select Dr. Judith Bernier as its new Chairperson replacing Nelson C. Bellido who will continue to serve on the board as a Commissioner. Dr. Bernier previously served as the Commission's Vice-Chair and has served on the board since her appointment in 2014. Dr. Bernier is the Director of the Florida International University Center for Labor Research & Studies.

The Commission also voted unanimously to select Wifredo "Willy" Gort as its new Vice-Chair. Mr. Gort, formerly a long-serving elected official in the City of Miami, previously served on the board as a Commissioner since being appointed by the Miami-Dade League of Cities in December 2019.

Ethics Commission Adopts Resolution to Amend Ethics Code

The Ethics Commission considered and adopted a resolution to be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners recommending that the County Ethics Code be amended to include "siblings" in the definition of immediate family members.

Ethics Commission is Briefed on Revisions to the Ethics Code's Gift Section

The Ethics Commission was briefed on proposed revisions to the Ethics Code's Gift section and limitations on County and municipal employees' ability to solicit gifts on behalf of local governments in the performance of their official duties. The proposal is pending before the Board of County Commissioners.

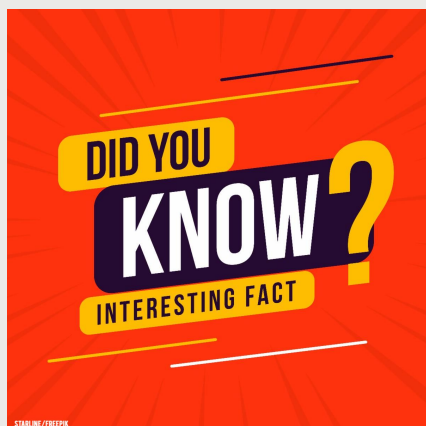
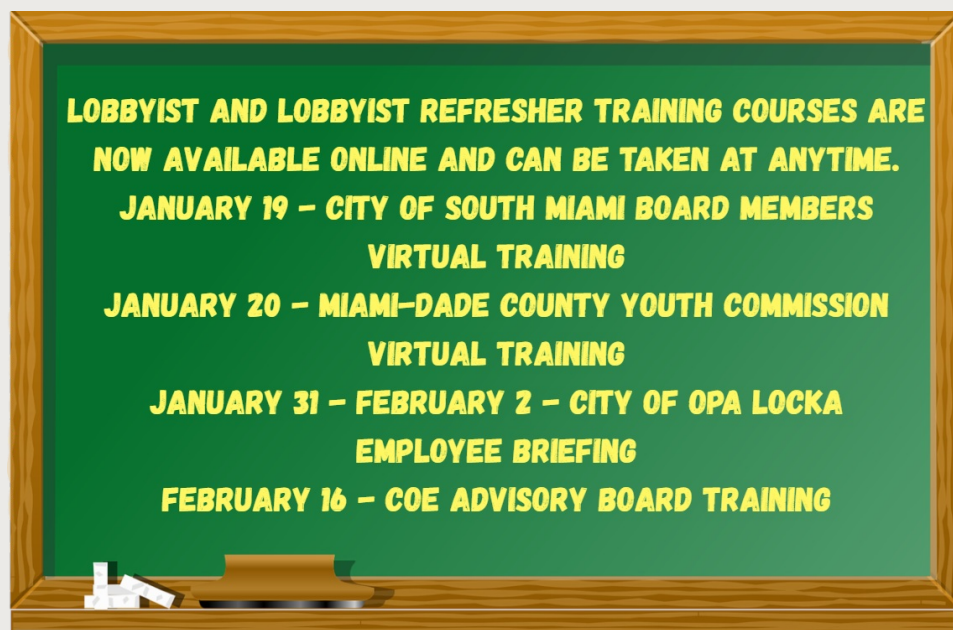
Complaint Filed Against City of Miami Commissioner Dismissed

C 21-29-11: A complaint filed against City of Miami Commissioner Alex Diaz de la Portilla, was found to be Not Legally Sufficient and was dismissed. The complainant, a former City of Miami Code Compliance Officer, alleged that she was wrongfully terminated from employment with the City. The City of Miami has not adopted an employee protection ordinance enforceable by the Ethics Commission.

Complaint Filed Against Sunny Isles Beach Mayor Withdrawn

C 21-30-11: A complaint filed against Sunny Isles Beach Mayor, Dana Goldman, was withdrawn at the request of the complainant. The complaint alleged that then mayoral candidate Goldman violated the Fair Campaign Practices provision of the County's Ethics Ethical Campaign Practices Ordinance while running for office.

Educating the Community / Upcoming Events



The enforcement unit of the Ethics Commission has the authority to initiate its own investigations separate and apart from formal complaints which may be filed by the general public. These investigations may be predicated on the receipt of anonymous tips, hotline calls, newspaper articles or from other sources of information.

Miami-Dade County Commission on
Ethics & Public Trust
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