



## **Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust**

### **Investigative Report**

**Investigator:**

<b>Case K-13-061</b>	<b>Case Name: Helena Sumpter</b>	<b><u>Date Open:</u> April 30, 2013</b>	<b><u>Date Closed:</u> May 16, 2013</b>
<b>Complainant(s): Anonymous</b>	<b>Subject(s): Helena Sumpter</b>		

**Allegation(s):**

COE Investigator Karl Ross on April 30, 2013, received an anonymous telephone tip from a woman who said she lived across the street from an employee in the office of Miami-Dade County Commissioner Dennis Moss. The caller alleged that this neighbor was receiving upgrades and improvements to the home – new cabinets, toilets, paint, etc. – through an unidentified county-funded program. She said that private contractors were doing the work. The caller did not identify the neighbor or the program purportedly funding the renovations. She did give the property address, which Investigator Ross recorded as 17501 SW 106<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The caller hung up on Investigator Ross before he could confirm the address or glean any further information. She did not answer when he attempted to call her back at the number recorded by the caller-ID system.



**Relevant Ordinances:**

It appears the caller was suggesting that the unidentified employee was in violation of Sec. 2-11-1 (g) of the Miami-Dade County Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics ordinance which states that “no [county official] . . . shall use or attempt to use his or her official position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself or herself or others except as may be specifically permitted by other ordinances and resolutions . . .” and perhaps other provisions of law.

**Investigation:**

The caller alleged that this across-the-street neighbor was receiving upgrades and improvements to the home – new cabinets, toilets, paint, etc. – through an unidentified county-funded program. She said that private contractors were doing the work. The caller did not identify the neighbor or the program purportedly funding the renovations, or how she became aware of the alleged funding source. She did give the property address, which Investigator Ross recorded as 17501 SW 106<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The caller hung up on Investigator Ross before he could confirm the address or glean any further information. She did not answer when he attempted to call the woman back on the number recorded by the caller-ID system.

This investigator subsequently attempted to call the woman on Tuesday, May 7, 2013, and was able to leave a voice-mail message, but this call was not returned. A check of county property records showed that the given address was vacant, and owned by a corporate entity. However, using a list of all the employees of Commissioner Moss’ office and cross-checking this with county property records, it was determined that Commissioner Moss’ Deputy Chief of Staff, Helena Sumpter, owns property at 17541 SW 106<sup>th</sup> Avenue (not 17501). The structure on the property



is listed as a duplex.

On the presumption that this was the employee and property to which the caller was referring, this investigator initiated a telephone call to Ms. Sumpter on Tuesday May 7, 2013. Ms. Sumpter confirmed that she is the property owner, but that her parents live there. She explained that the work recently done on the property was arranged through a privately funded non-profit organization called Rebuilding Together Miami Dade. She said her parents applied and were qualified for the program through the organization's normal processes.

The organization's website describes Rebuilding Together Miami Dade as the local affiliate of "the nation's leading nonprofit organization working to preserve affordable homeownership and revitalize neighborhoods by providing extensive rehabilitation and modification services to those in need at no cost to those served."

Later the same day, this investigator spoke by telephone with James McCants, Director of Community Affairs for Rebuilding Together Miami Dade. He confirmed that Ms. Sumpter's parents did, in fact, apply and qualify for the program under its usual guidelines. In response to this investigator's direct question, Mr. McCants said that Ms. Sumpter's parents were not moved to the head of the line or favored in any other way because of Ms. Sumpter's connection with Commissioner Moss or for any other reason.

Mr. McCants also noted that Rebuilding Together Miami Dade receives no county funding and has no county contracts, although he added that he expects the organization to apply for county grants in the future. He said that nearly all of the labor and supplies used to renovate homes for the elderly and disabled – those unable to



physically do the work themselves – is donated free of charge by private contractors.

Per COE Advocate Michael Murawski's request, this investigator asked for a copy of Rebuilding Together Miami Dade's application form and guidelines for the program, which Mr. McCants forwarded on May 15, 2013. Relevant guidelines include that the applicant must be aged 62 or over or disabled, fall beneath specified income ceilings, and both own and live in the property to be repaired.

This investigator determined from county records that Ms. Sumpter's parents, Ellis and Helena Sumpter, were both born in 1930 (aged 82) and co-own the property with their daughter. Also, Mr. McCants affirmed that Ellis Sumpter is substantially disabled.

**Conclusion(s):**

Mr. McCants of Rebuilding Together Miami Dade told this investigator that he believes he knows who lodged the initial complaint, describing her as a woman upset because she or a family member was unable to qualify for the agency's renovation program. Mr. McCants would not identify that individual.

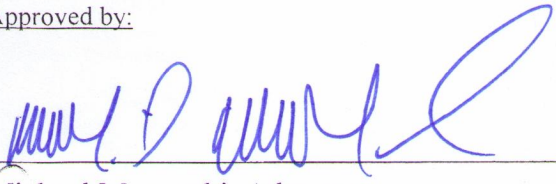
This investigation determined that Ms. Sumpter's parents qualified for the Rebuilding Together Miami Dade home renovation program without favoritism based on Ms. Sumpter's connection to County Commissioner Dennis Moss. No county taxpayer money was involved, since the program is neither a county-run nor county-contracted program.

Based on the foregoing, COE Deputy Counsel Miriam Ramos on this date concluded that the allegation is unfounded and recommended that this case and file be closed.

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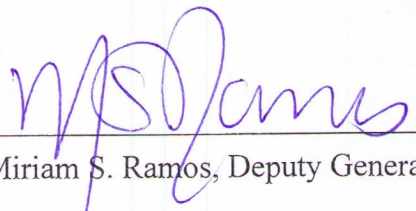
Robert Steinback, COE Investigator

Approved by:




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Michael Murawski, Advocate



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Miriam S. Ramos, Deputy General Counsel



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Joseph Centorino, Executive Director