



Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust

Investigative Report

Investigator: Karl Ross

Case No.: K14-001	Case Name: Judge M. Hanzman - Gifts	Date Open:	
Complainant(s): Hotline tip, anonymous	Subject(s): Clerks in Division 9 of the Juvenile Justice Circuit	January 3, 2014	

Allegation(s):

On January 3, 2014, COE received anonymous information on the COE hotline regarding possible improper and/or unreported gifts to clerks reporting to Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judge Michael Hanzman of the Juvenile Justice Circuit.

The caller alleged Judge Hanzman had made cash gifts in the hundreds of dollars to those clerks working under him in the 9th Division of the Juvenile Court. The caller stated Judge Hanzman is wealthy and did not attribute any improper motive to the alleged gifts.

A case was assigned that day after it was determined that the clerks would be subject to the gift reporting requirement since they are employees of Miami-Dade County.

Relevant Ordinances:

The Miami-Dade County ethics code requires the quarterly disclosure of gifts in excess of \$100, per section (3) of the code pertaining to *Gifts* and the attendant disclosure requirements.

Investigation:

Interviews

On January 22, COE contacted the office of Judge Hanzman and asked him to respond to the information provided by the anonymous caller regarding alleged gifts.

On January 23, Judge Hanzman replied via e-mail as follows:

"The allegation is not true. I did give the clerks in my division Xmas gifts between \$50 and \$100 depending upon their length of service. No clerk received any gift in excess of \$100. I also gave gifts of \$50 to other Court personnel such as my Court monitor and corrections officers who serve my division. Please let me know whether the recipients of these gifts must be reported and I will promptly advise all recipients."

On January 24, a follow up e-mail was sent to Judge Hanzman requesting the names of all recipients employed by Miami-Dade County and the amounts of the gifts.

On February 11, Judge Hanzman's assistant responded to this request and provided the following names: Maria Kelker (Courtroom Clerk 2), Janice Minor (Courtroom Clerk 2), Jewline Hughes (Courtroom Clerk 1), Birdie Cecil (not a County employee), Sherryann Sturgeon (Court Records Supervisor 2).

On or about February 26, COE received information from the Human Resources Department, advising which banks the above employees use for direct deposit of their paychecks.

On March 21, a request was made through Judge Hanzman's office to interview the above-named employees. Judge Hanzman declined to assist further, and advised as follows:

"If you want to interview anyone contact them yourself and set up meetings. I am not going to be involved in this ridiculous dialogue any further. Regards."

On April 28, COE spoke with Sherryann Sturgeon (Sturgeon), who advised she reported to Judge Hanzman until October of last year. She agreed to an interview the following day.

On April 29, Sturgeon appeared for an interview. She advised that she has worked for the County since 1998, the whole time as a clerk with the Juvenile Justice Division. She said that she worked for Judge Hanzman from about July 2011 until late last year. She said she reports to Bertha "Birdie" Cecil, who is not a county employee, and Adriana Ochoa. She said that her department is overseen by Miami-Dade Clerk of the Courts Harvey Ruvin.

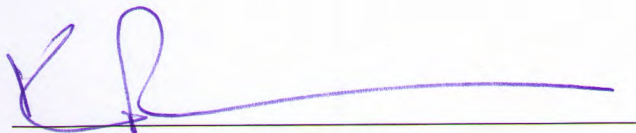
Sturgeon further advised that she had received gifts from Judge Hanzman in late 2012 and 2013. She stated that on both occasions she received \$50 cash. She said she believes that other co-workers who serve under Judge Hanzman have also received similar gifts. She said she has not discussed the amounts with any of her co-workers, but has no reason to believe the amount would exceed \$100. She said that other judges make similar offerings to their staff around the holiday season, and that this might alternatively take the form of a gift card or lunch. She said she did not deposit the funds in her bank account and, upon request, identified her bank.

Sturgeon said she did not believe there was any improper motive on the part of Judge Hanzman, other than to show his appreciation for the work done by staff. She provided the names of the other employees assigned to Judge Hanzman. She said she could not think of any reason why anyone would suggest the judge was giving hundreds of dollars to his assistants. She later called COE to advise that a clerk had been reassigned at the request of the judge sometime in late 2013, possible in October. She said the clerk was not happy with her evaluation – she was rated as a “satisfactory” employee – and then left soon after.

Sturgeon said she had not discussed the inquiry with Judge Hanzman.

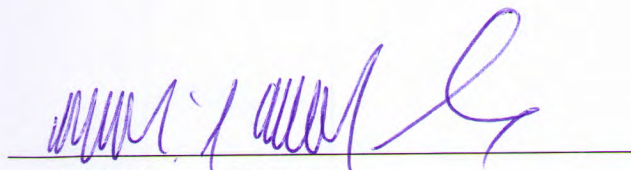
Conclusion(s):

Based on the foregoing, this matter is closed with no further action.

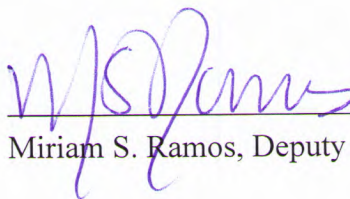


Karl Ross, COE Investigator

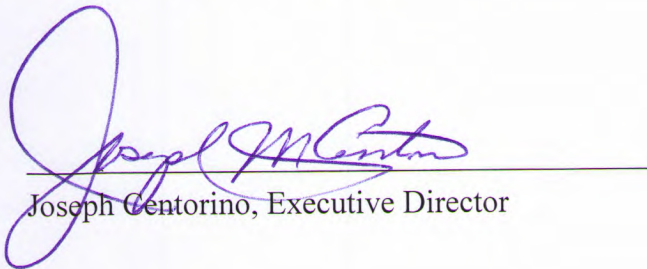
Approved by:



Michael Murawski, Advocate



Miriam S. Ramos, Deputy General Counsel



Joseph Centorino, Executive Director

5/6/14
Date

**CASE
CLOSED**