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PRESS RELEASE

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TALLAHASSEE—March 13, 2019—Meeting in Tallahassee on March 8th in closed session, the Florida Commission on Ethics took action on 23 matters, Chair Guy Norris announced today. A finding of probable cause is not a determination that a violation has occurred. Such a determination is made only after a full evidentiary hearing on the allegations.

Probable cause was found to believe Midway City Manager **LESLIE STEELE** failed to file her Form 1 disclosure within 30 days of being appointed to her position with the City, but the Commission will take no further action on the allegation because she was not informed about the requirement when she was appointed. The Commission found no probable cause to believe she misused her position or used information not available to the general public when she had her father assist her with the City's budget

and present the information on her behalf at a City Council meeting. No probable cause also was found on allegations she misused her position to amend the City Charter and reimbursed herself for funds expended for a City program.

The Commission found no probable cause to believe Greenville Town Clerk **KIM REAMS** misused her position when she hired someone to clean Town office space and paid them out of petty cash. An allegation she had a conflicting contractual relationship because that employee rents an apartment from her was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

The Commission also considered a complaint filed against Osceola County Commissioner **BRANDON ARRINGTON**. It was alleged he had a prohibited business relationship with the County and a conflicting contractual relationship due to his private employment with the Osceola Center for the Arts when it was simultaneously receiving funding from the County. It also was alleged he had a voting conflict when he voted on the County budget, containing line item funding for his private employer. The allegations were dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

No probable cause was found to believe Atlantic Beach Interim City Manager **KEVIN HOGENCAMP** misused his position or used information not available to members of the general public to be appointed to serve as Deputy City Manager.

The Commission found probable cause to believe **THOMAS McQUEEN**, as a Commissioner of the East Lake Tarpon Special Fire Control District, had a prohibited business relationship and a conflicting contractual relationship when he acted in his private capacity, as a business owner, to sell an assessment product to the District.

A complaint filed against Escambia County Public Safety Department Business Operations Manager **TAMIKA L. WILLIAMS** was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause. The allegations were that she misused her position to benefit her daughter's soccer team; solicited and accepted ice cream treats for staff with the understanding her official action would be influenced or accepted the treats when she knew or should have known they were given to influence her; misused her position to obtain the ice cream; solicited a gift from a lobbyist or vendor of the County; accepted a prohibited gift; or failed to report a gift as required by law.

Probable cause was found to believe former Candidate for the Florida House of Representatives, District 115, **RHONDA REBMAN-LOPEZ** failed to make accurate and complete disclosures on the 2017 Form 6 she filed when she qualified to run for office. However, due to the circumstances of this complaint and the fact that Ms. Rebman-Lopez amended her disclosure, the Commission will take no further action on the allegation unless she requests an evidentiary hearing.

The Commission found no probable cause to believe **DANIEL HENDRICKSON**, as a member of the Ft. Myers Beach Local Planning Agency, filed an incomplete 2017 Form 1 disclosure.

Probable cause was found to believe **THEODORE R. SCHINDLER, II**, former candidate for Fire Commissioner and a former Ft. Myers Beach Fire Control District Commissioner, filed an incomplete and inaccurate 2017 Form 1 disclosure.

No probable cause was found to believe Marathon City Councilman **DANIEL ZIEG** misused City resources when he appeared in a campaign video for a candidate for the Monroe County Commission.

In a self-initiated investigation – required by statute – the Commission found probable cause to believe Boyette Springs Special Dependent District Trustee **JOHN VAUGHAN** willfully failed to timely file his 2016 Form 1 disclosure form.

In another self-initiated investigation – required by statute – the Commission found probable cause to believe North Miami Personnel Board Member **MARY C. ESTIME-IRVIN** willfully failed to timely file her 2016 Form 1 disclosure form. Ms. Estime-Irvin also serves as an alternate member of the North Miami Board of Adjustment.

The Commission voted to dismiss a self-initiated investigation concerning a willful failure to file a 2016 Form 1 disclosure by **CHRISTINE FARRAR**, as a member of the Board of Supervisors for the Four Seasons at Crystal Springs Community Development District, as the investigation revealed she no longer holds public office or public employment. Holding public office or employment is necessary to maintain the Commission's investigatory jurisdiction.

A self-initiated investigation concerning an alleged willful failure to file the 2016 Form 1 disclosure by Emerald Coast Utilities Authority Member **ELVIN McCORVEY** was dismissed due to Mr. McCorvey's death.

A complaint filed against **ROB FIELDS**, Chief Information Officer for Florida Virtual School, was dismissed because the investigation revealed Mr. Fields never was a public officer or employee subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission.

The Commission reviewed eight complaints for legal sufficiency. These reviews are limited to questions of jurisdiction and determinations as to whether the contents of the complaint are adequate to allege a violation of the Code of Ethics or other laws within the Commission's jurisdiction. As no factual investigation precedes the reviews,

the Commission's conclusions do not reflect on the accuracy of the allegations made in these complaints. The Commission dismissed the following complaints for lack of legal sufficiency: **RICHARD SCOTT**, former Governor; **BRIAN HAAS**, State Attorney, 10th Judicial Circuit; **SPENCER LOFTON**, Mayor, White Springs; **KIMBERLY DANIELS**, Representative, District 14, Florida House of Representatives; **CHASE PICOTTE**, Employee, Florida Atlantic University; **RYAN LYNCH**, Editor-in-Chief, Florida Atlantic University Press; **JULIE MEADOWS-KEEFE**, Ethics Officer, City of Tallahassee; **WILLIAM GANZ**, Mayor, Deerfield Beach.

PUBLIC SESSION

During its public session meeting, the Commission voted to adopt the Joint Stipulation between the Commission Advocate and former West Palm Beach Director of Communications **ELLIOT COHEN**, finding he violated ethics laws by misusing his position to solicit business for his publicity company. The Commission also found he violated the law by using information from the City which was not available to the public, to benefit his company. A violation also was found because of his company's contract with the entity operating the City's CRA. A civil penalty totaling \$4,500 will be recommended for imposition by the Governor.

In another stipulation adopted by the Commission, University Place Community Development District Chairman **RICHARD B. ROMANOFF, JR.**, a civil penalty of \$2,000 will be recommended to the Governor for two violations of Florida's ethics code. Mr. Romanoff was found to have violated the laws due to his private company entering into a service agreement with the District.

Former Tallahassee City Manager **RICARDO “RIC” FERNANDEZ** also entered into a settlement agreement with the Advocate that was adopted by the Commission. Mr. Fernandez was found to have violated Florida’s gift law by failing to report a gift of a discounted catering rate for his daughter’s wedding reception. He also violated laws by soliciting football tickets from a vendor or lobbyist of the City and by accepting prohibited gifts from a vendor or lobbyist of the City when he accepted football tickets to four college football games. A civil penalty of \$6,000 and public censure and reprimand will be recommended to the Governor for the violations.

A settlement agreement entered into prior to consideration of probable cause was adopted by the Commission. **ALFREDO SANTAMARIA**, as a candidate for Miami-Dade County Commission, violated Florida’s financial disclosure laws by filing an inaccurate 2017 Form 6 when he qualified for office. A civil penalty of \$750 will be recommended to the Governor for the violation.

The Commission granted the Advocate’s Motion to Dismiss a complaint filed against former Apopka Mayor and Councilman **JOSEPH KILSHEIMER**.

The Commission adopted a formal opinion regarding a former employee of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Commission determined the employee is not prohibited from accepting employment with a company having contracts with DCF because of the specific circumstances of the inquiry in light of several relevant statutes.

Contact the Commission's office to obtain rulings on appeals of automatic fines imposed for late submission of financial disclosure reports submitted by public officers and employees. (See Item VII on the March 8th meeting agenda posted on the Commission's website.)

The Florida Commission on Ethics is an independent nine-member commission formed in 1974 to review complaints filed under the statutory Code of Ethics and to answer questions from public officials about potential conflicts of interest through its issuance of advisory opinions.

If the Ethics Commission believes a violation of the law may have occurred, it may decide to hold a public hearing. If it concludes a violation has been committed, it may recommend civil penalties including removal from office or employment and fines up to \$10,000 per violation.