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## PRESS RELEASE

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TALLAHASSEE—February 1, 2023—Meeting in Tallahassee on January 27<sup>th</sup> in closed session, the Florida Commission on Ethics took action on 40 matters, Chair John Grant announced today, including 10 complaints considered for probable cause. 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.

In a complaint filed against Tarpon Springs City Commissioner **JACOB KARR**, the Commission found probable cause to believe he misused his position and official resources by involving himself in a billing dispute between a contractor and a resident. However, the Commission will take no further action on the allegation based on the totality of the facts in this matter and the disciplinary action already taken against Mr. Karr by his fellow Commissioners.

In a complaint against filed against former Florida Department of Education (DOE) Senior Education Program Director **KATRINA FIGGETT**, the Commission rejected the recommendation of its Advocate and found no probable cause to believe Ms. Figgett misused her position when she approved the purchase of equipment, gift cards, and a payment to a DOE employee from a non-profit organization that had given DOE a grant, when she served as the supervisor of the Computer Science certification training project grant during the pandemic. An allegation Ms. Figgett violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of a public position to obtain a disproportionate benefit resulted in a finding of no probable cause.

Probable cause was found to believe Quincy City Commission Member **ANGELA GRANT SAPP** had a conflicting contractual relationship by signing a promissory note for a personal loan from the City Manager; however, the Commission decided to take no further action based on the circumstances of the matter. No probable cause was found to believe she abused her office to obtain a disproportionate benefit or that she misused her position when she accepted the loan from the City Manager and then voted to retain him at a later meeting. Allegations she took the loan from a subordinate employee when she knew or should have known the loan was given to influence her official action or vote, were dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against former candidate **TERESSA CERVERA**, who ran for Circuit Court Judge in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit. No probable cause was found to believe she violated Florida's Constitution and financial disclosure law by filing an inaccurate 2021 Form 6.

No probable cause was found to believe Tampa City Council Member **JOSEPH CITRO** abused his office to obtain a disproportionate benefit or that he misused his

position when he attempted to enter a sold out gala. An allegation he misused public resources by using his aide to help him obtain the ticket was also dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

The Commission found no probable cause to believe Polk County Utilities Director **TAMARA RICHARDSON** had a prohibited conflict of interest by simultaneously holding public employment and serving on the Board of Directors for the Florida Governmental Utility Authority.

The Commission found no probable cause to believe Lee County School Board Member **CHRISTINE PATRICCA** misused her public position to prevent another board member from obtaining copies of public records. Additionally, no probable cause was found on an allegation Ms. Patricca hired a School District employee to repair the air conditioning unit in her home.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against Holmes Beach Chief of Police in **WILLIAM L. TOKAJER**. Allegations he misused his public position by leaking information that would lead to a public records request was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause. No probable cause was also found on an allegation Mr. Tokajer used information not available to the general public and gained by reason of his public position for his benefit or for the benefit of another.

Probable cause was found to believe Town of Inglis Mayor **MICHAEL ANDREW WHITE** had a conflicting contractual relationship because of a land purchase agreement he had with the Town. Allegations that Mr. White violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office to obtain a disproportionate benefit or that he misused his position throughout the negotiations, purchase, or transfer of the parcel of land was

dismissed with a finding of no probable cause. Additional allegations Mr. White used the town vehicle for his personal use resulted in a finding of no probable cause.

Probable cause was found to believe former Volusia County Council Member **HEATHER POST** violated Florida's Constitution and disclosure law by failing to timely file her 2021 Form 6.

After reviewing the results of a self-initiated investigation – required by statute – the Commission found probable cause to believe **CHARLES A. SAFDIE**, Miami-Dade County Community Council 2 and Zoning Appeals Board Chair, willfully failed to timely file his 2018 Form 1.

The Commission reviewed 29 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: **SHELIA BURCH**, Franklin Correctional Institution Property Room Sergeant; **JOE VILLANELLA**, Ponce Inlet Town Council Member; **JAKE RICHARDS**, Port St. Joe Chief of Police; 2 complaints against **WEBSTER BARNABY**, Florida Representative for District 29; **MARK STEWART**, City of Sebring Council Member; **DAVID LEIDEL**, **KELLY COSGRAVE**, **KATHY DOHERTY**, **RACHEL LOVETT**, **SARAH PALLONE**, **STEFAN SHULT**, and **LORIE SMITH**, Community Redevelopment Agency of Sebring Commissioners; **VANESSA GEORGE**, White Springs Town Manager; **AUDRE J. RUISE**, White Springs Town Clerk; **TIMOTHY BURGESS**, Florida Highway Patrol Lieutenant; **LAURA VAUGHAN-BOSCO**, Seminole County Assistant Chief Prosecutor

and Juvenile Division Chief; **DAWN COURTRIGHT**, Seminole County Assistant State Attorney; **MARIANNE BARNEBEY**, Bradenton City Council Member; **JOE LACASCIA**, Polk County Mayor; 2 complaints against **WILLIAM E. CLAGUE**, Manatee County Attorney; **MARISSA NEFF**, Lake County Assistant State Attorney; 2 complaints against **RON DESANTIS**, Governor of Florida; **SAMUEL G.S. BENNETT**, Town of Pierson Mayor; **MICHAEL KOLODY**, New Smyrna Beach City Commission Member; **RICHARD RAMSAY**, Monroe County Sheriff; and **DENNIS WARD**, State Attorney 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit.

### **PUBLIC SESSION**

During its public session meeting, the Commission considered a settlement agreement entered into between the Commission Advocate and Manatee County Commissioner **VANESSA BAUGH**. The Commission adopted the agreement finding Ms. Baugh misused her position and public resources to assign vaccine distribution priority to serve specific individuals and zip codes, contrary to Manatee County's COVID-19 vaccination policy. A civil penalty of \$8,000 and public censure and reprimand was recommended to the Governor for imposition.

The Commission took final action on a complaint against **HOMER BRADLEY HARVEY**, former Wakulla County Property Appraiser. The Commission adopted a final order finding Mr. Harvey misused his position to receive unauthorized compensation in excess of his statutorily prescribed salary, misused the credit card of the Property Appraiser Office's to make personal purchases, and underreported income on his 2017 and 2018 Form 6s. A civil penalty of \$40,000, restitution to Wakulla County in the amount of \$209,236.30, public censure and reprimand, and removal from public office was recommended to the Governor for imposition.

The Commission granted the appeal and waived the \$7,150 in automatic fines assessed on **KEYSTONE/GOLDEN STATE STRATEGIES**, an executive branch lobbying firm, for the late filing its 2022 first and second quarter compensation reports.

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.