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PRESS RELEASE

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TALLAHASSEE—March 12—Meeting in Tallahassee on March 7 in closed session, the Florida Commission on Ethics took action on 47 matters, Chair Luis M. Fusté announced today. Eighteen of those matters were probable cause hearings. 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.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against **ERIC ARROYO**, former Sarasota City Commissioner. The Commission declined to proceed further because it cannot be determined from the complaint whether this claim was based on personal knowledge or information other than hearsay, as required by Section 112.324(1)(a), F.S., for a complaint to proceed.

Probable cause was found to believe that **KIRK BRADLEY REAMS**, former Jefferson County Clerk of Courts, abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit and misused his position when he used county funds for political contributions, personal endeavors, non-county-related activities, and unauthorized expenditures.

The Commission held a probable cause hearing on multiple allegations regarding Avon Park Mayor **JAMES GARRETT ANDERSON**. Probable cause was found to believe Mr. Anderson violated ethics laws by doing business with his agency when a company he had an ownership interest in did the roof repair on the City's wastewater treatment plant. An allegation he had a conflicting contractual relationship that created a continuing or frequently recurring conflict between his private interests and the performance of his public duties also resulted in a finding of probable cause. Probable cause was found to believe he filed inaccurate 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022 Form 1s by failing to select a reporting method on his disclosures to indicate if he was reporting based on the dollar value or percentage method. However, the Commission elected to take no further action on all the allegations due to the particular circumstances of the matter. An allegation he filed an inaccurate 2021 Form 1 disclosure was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

No probable cause was found on an allegation that **JOHN ERIC HOOVER**, Port Richey Mayor, had a voting conflict that would inure to his special private gain or loss when he voted on an agenda item about a proposed amendment to zoning requirements in an area where he owned property. An allegation he misused his position when he attempted to act as a liaison between the City and a City resident

regarding two open code enforcement cases was also dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against Lake St. Charles Community Development District (CDD) Manager **ADRIANA URBINA**. No probable cause was found to believe Ms. Urbina abused her position to obtain a disproportionate benefit and misused her position when family members contracted with the CDD or when payments for work completed by those family members were paid through a company in which she had ownership. Allegations Ms. Urbina was doing business with her agency or had a conflicting contractual relationship that created a continuing or frequently recurring conflict between her private interests and the performance of her public duties also were dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

No probable cause was found on an allegation that **DAVID NOYES**, Canoe Creek K-8 Principal, misused his position and public resources regarding a facilities use permit that was pulled for a charity event.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against former Broward County School Board Member **TOREY ALSTON**. No probable cause was found on a voting conflict allegation regarding a vote on a measure for the Broward County School Board to comply with sharing tax revenues with charter schools in the district, while he had an ownership interest in a company that was consulting with one of the charter schools listed as a recipient of the tax funding.

In a complaint filed against former Orange County Firefighter **DENNIS HARRIS, JR.**, the Commission found probable cause to believe Mr. Harris abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit and misused his position when he recorded military

leave on his Orange County Fire Rescue timesheet for times he was not in ordered training or active duty.

No probable cause was found on an allegation that **GENE BAILEY**, former Calhoun County Commissioner, misused his office when he used his county-issued email to provide documents opposing an upcoming vote on an RV park development site, to an adjacent property owner who was opposed to the project.

The Commission rejected the recommendation of its advocate and found no probable cause on an allegation that **JOHN MEEKS**, Levy County Commissioner, violated Florida's Constitution and financial disclosure laws by filing an inaccurate 2020 Form 6 disclosure.

In a complaint filed against Marion County School Board Member **SARAH JAMES**, the Commission found no probable cause to believe Ms. James abused her position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused her position when she requested a flyer be posted at the school district bus compounds, advertising for summer bus driver employment opportunity at the childcare center she owns.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against **HEATHER LINDSAY**, Mayor of the City of Milton. No probable cause was found to believe Ms. Lindsay abused her position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused her position by her handling of a grievance filed by a city employee.

No probable cause was found to believe that **MELISSA BLAZIER**, Collier County Supervisor of Elections, abused her position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused her position when she used County-funded video footage and on-duty County employees in a personal campaign advertisement.

In a complaint filed against Palm Beach County Sheriff **RIC L. BRADSHAW**, the Commission found no probable cause to believe Sheriff Bradshaw abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused his office to feature Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office staff and office property in his campaign advertisements.

No probable cause was found to believe that **MARCOS R. LOPEZ**, Osceola County Sheriff, abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused his position when he wore his Sheriff's Department uniform during his campaign.

The Commission rejected the recommendation of its advocate and found no probable cause on an allegation that Delray Beach City Commissioner **ROBERT D. LONG** filed an inaccurate 2023 Form 1 disclosure.

In a complaint filed against former Fernandina Beach City Commissioner **DANIEL STURGES**, the Commission found no probable cause to believe Mr. Sturges abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused his position by having uniformed City police officers participate in campaign advertisements and by using the City seal in campaign mailers.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against **JEFF HUBBARD**, Coquina Water Control District Board of Supervisors Chair. Probable cause was found to believe that he abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit and misused his position when he sent District workers and equipment to remove and level out ditch dirt at his son's residence. The Commission declined to proceed further on other allegations within the complaint because it cannot be determined from the complaint whether the claims were based on personal information or information other than hearsay, as required by Section 112.324(1)(a), F.S., for a complaint to proceed.

The Commission reviewed 28 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: two complaints against **ALEX REY**, former St. Pete Beach City Manager; **BILL BRASWELL**, Chair, Polk County Commission; **THOMAS DELNAY**, Lee County Deputy Building Official; **JEFFREY M. GOOD**, former Holmes County Commissioner; **ROBIN IGNACIO GOMEZ**, Madeira Beach City Manager; **CADE RESNICK**, Winter Springs City Commissioner; **PEDRO PEREZ**, Homestead Police Department Detective; **FERNANDO MORALES**, Homestead Police Department Internal Affairs Captain; **ALLEN WILSON**, Broward County Assistant Director of Human Resources; **VANESSA MAJOR**, Broward County Addiction Recovery Center Assistant Director; **MARSHA ELIGON**, Broward County Addiction Recovery Center Admissions Director; **PAULA THOMSON RAPPE**, University of West Florida Professor; **WILLIAM REDNOUR**, Volusia County Friendship Elementary School Principal; **CARMEN BALGOBIN**, Volusia County Superintendent of Schools; **DOMINIQUE GREEN**, Cory Lake Isles CDD Office Administrator; **KEVIN GARRIOTT**, Clearwater Building Official; **WILL WEATHERFORD**, University of South Florida Board of Trustees Chair; **KATHY HEBDA**, Florida Department of Education Chancellor; **ANTHONY GEORGE**, Indian River State College District Board of Trustees Chair; **GLORIA J. DEBERRY**, Fort Walton Beach City Council Member; **CHRISTOPHER A. LOPEZ**, Highland Meadows 2

Community Development District Board Member; **STEVEN MANERS**, Florida Gaming Control Commission Regional Program Administrator for the Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering; **JAMES WATTS**, Fort Meade City Commissioner; **EDWARD WALKER DEAN**, Fort Meade City Manager; **JAMES SCHAILL**, Fort Meade City Commissioner; **JOHN TOBIA**, former Brevard County Commissioner; and **CHRISTOPHER COLLINS**, Stuart Vice Mayor and City Commissioner.

PUBLIC SESSION

During its public session meeting, the Commission took final action and adopted a Joint Stipulation entered into between Broward County Sheriff **GREGORY TONY** and the Commission Advocate. The Commission found Sheriff Tony misused his public position when he provided false information on his application to renew his driver's license while serving as a law enforcement officer. Public censure and reprimand will be recommended for imposition by the Governor.

The Commission also adopted a settlement agreement between the Commission Advocate and **MICHAEL ANDREW WHITE**, former Town of Inglis Mayor. The agreement finds Mr. White had a conflicting contractual relationship because of a land purchase agreement he had with the Town. A civil penalty of \$500 will be recommended for imposition by the Governor.

A settlement agreement, in a complaint filed against **BOWEN KOU**, former Candidate for Florida Senate, finds Mr. Kou violated Florida's Constitution and disclosure law by filing an inaccurate 2023 Form 6. The Commission recommended a civil penalty of \$1,500 for imposition by the Governor.

The Commission also took final action and adopted a Joint Stipulation entered into between former candidate for Palm Beach County Sheriff **LAURO ERNESTO DIAZ** and the Commission Advocate. The Commission found Mr. Diaz violated Florida's Constitution and financial disclosure laws by filing an inaccurate 2023 Form 6 disclosure. The Commission recommended a civil penalty of \$500 for imposition by the Governor.

The Commission voted to grant the Advocate's Motion to Dismiss a complaint filed against **JAMES M. COUEY**, former Bayshore Gardens Park and Recreation District Board of Trustee.

A formal opinion was adopted by the Commission regarding a City Commissioner's service as the President of a non-profit organization.

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. (Item VIII. on the March 7 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 \$20,000 per violation.