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TALLAHASSEE—March 11—Meeting in Tallahassee on March 6 in closed session, the Florida Commission on Ethics took action on 97 matters, Chair Jon M. Philipson announced today. Fifteen 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 **DENNIS J. BLACK**, former Senior Appraisal Review Specialist for the Lee County Property Appraiser's Office (LCPA). No probable cause was found to believe Mr. Black violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or misused his position to obtain alleged non-public information from LCPA before for use in his private purpose. An allegation that he used information gained by his official

position, which was not available to the general public, was also dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

No probable cause was found on allegations **CRAIG MARGELOWSKY**, as a Watergrass Community Development District II Board member, violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or misused his position when he voted to renew an agreement to provide a local public high school swim team the use of the Community Development District lap pool.

Probable cause was found on an allegation that **ZANE TEETERS, JR.**, Mayor for the Town of Astatula, violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit and misused his position when he used the Town's seal, letterhead, and his title to threaten a former town council member who, in his resignation letter, named Mr. Teeters as the primary reason for resignation.

The Commission found no probable cause to believe that **BRADLEY WEISSMAN**, former Village Attorney for the Villages of Biscayne Park, violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or misused his position when an unlicensed private investigator was retained to investigate allegations against the former Village Chief of Police. In a related complaint, no probable cause was found on an allegation that **ALBERT CHILDRESS**, former Village Manager for the Village of Biscayne Park, misused his position in the hiring of the private investigator.

No probable cause was found on allegations that **JAMES ELENSKY**, City Manager of Haines City, violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or misused his position when he provided direction

on an investigation being handled by the Criminal Investigation Division with the Haines City Police Department regarding a City Commissioner.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against the Vice President of the Harrison Ranch Community Development District, **THOMAS BENTON**. Probable cause was found on allegations that he failed to accurately disclose ownership of an LLC and the income he received from it on his 2023 and 2024 Form 1 disclosures. However, the Commission elected to take no further action on both allegations due to the particular circumstances of the matter. An allegation that he had a conflicting contractual relationship that created a continuing or frequently recurring conflict between his private interests and public duties was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against **JULIANNE GIELLA**, Harrison Ranch Community Development District Supervisor. Ms. Giella was alleged to have colluded with a former employee of Harrison Ranch, who was the Supervisor of a neighboring Community Development District, to secure a contract for services that would benefit both of them. No probable cause was found on four allegations, including: soliciting or accepting something of value based upon an understanding that her vote, official action, or judgment would be influenced; accepting compensation, payment, or thing of value when she knew or should have known it was given to influence her vote or official action; misused her position to secure a special privilege or benefit; and violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit.

No probable cause was found on an allegation that **SANTIAGO AVILA, JR.**, Mayor for the City of Deltona, violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse

of office for a disproportionate benefit and misused his position when he promoted a website that links to his campaign website, from his "official" Facebook page.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against Trial Court Administrator for the 17th Judicial Circuit of Florida, **JOSEPH D'AMICO**. No probable cause was found on allegations that he failed to accurately complete the real property section on his 2024 Form 1 disclosure.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against **FABIAN BASABE**, a Member of the Florida House of Representatives. No probable cause was found on an allegation that he misused his position or violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit regarding a legislative intern.

In a complaint filed against **ARTHUR CZYSZCZON**, City Commissioner for the City of Treasure Island, the Commission found no probable cause to believe that Mr. Czyszczon had a voting conflict regarding an ordinance that financially affected a property owned by a company where he was a corporate officer.

In a complaint filed against **DEBORAH LUX**, Mayor of Punta Gorda, the Commission found no probable cause to believe she misused her position when she used her personal Facebook page to offer her thoughts on matters of public interest and opinions on political opponents.

No probable cause was found on an allegation that **DARRIN MOSSING**, District Manager for the Villages of Westport Community Development District, misused his position regarding contracts for security services.

The Commission rejected the recommendation of its advocate and found no probable cause to believe that **JEFFREY MERRY**, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office Master Deputy, misused his position or used non-public information gained by his public

position by sharing an unredacted photograph and personal information of an individual obtained from the Florida Driver and Vehicle Information Database (DAVID). An allegation that he violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit related to the information obtained from DAVID resulted in a finding of no probable cause because there was no benefit to Mr. Merry or any other entity listed in the constitutional amendment provision.

The Commission reviewed 82 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, and whether the allegations are based on personal knowledge or information other than hearsay. 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 **FRANKLIN W. MARTZ, II**, Altamonte Springs City Manager; **CLAYTON JOHNSON**, Department of Children and Families Quality Assurance Specialist; **GEANETTA SALTER**, Department of Children and Families Operation Program Manager; **ANGELA COLON**, Department of Children and Families Child Protective Investigator Supervisor; **CHANDRIEKA ROBINSON**, Department of Children and Families Child Protective Investigator; **ANGELINA PEREZ**, Indiantown Village Council Member; **BRANDON BLACKBURN**, Eagle Lake Community Redevelopment Agency Board Member; **MADISON STOCKS (NELSON)**, Bay County Sheriff's Office Investigator; **DIANE LAMB**, Center Hill City Clerk; **BILLY BOWLES**, Center Hill City Council Member; **DEANNA NAUGLER**, Webster City Manager; **ALFRED JEROME FLETCHER**, North Port City Manager; **SHANIQUE ROSE**, Orlando

District 5 Interim City Commissioner; **HAROLD FERNANDEZ PRYOR**, State Attorney for the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit; **ADRIAN SEGURA**, Miami-Dade County Fire Rescue Chief Fire Officer; **SUSAN STAFFORD**, Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission Member; **GEORGE LANDRY**, St. Lucie County Administrator; **BILL BRASWELL**, Polk County Commissioner; two complaints against **BEVERLY NASH**, Quincy Mayor; **JAMES BEVILLE**, Second Judicial Circuit Assistant State Attorney; **DeANTHONY SHAMAR**, Quincy Police Department Sergeant; **LANE STEPHENS**, Quincy Mayor Pro Tem; **MICHAEL THOMAS**, Edgewater City Councilmember; **FRANK SEBESTYEN**, Vista Lakes Community Development District Chairman; two complaints against **AUDRA CURTS-WHANN**, Crystal River City Manager; **MICHAEL JERRAHIAN**, St. Lucie County Building Official; **JOSUE GUEVARA**, St. Lucie County Senior Code Enforcement Officer; **FELIX JIMENEZ**, Inspector General of the Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General; **DARREN GRAY**, Seminole County Manager; **CLIFFORD LABBE**, Indian River County Sheriff's Office Captain; **ERIC SCOTT FLOWERS**, Indian River County Sheriff; **REBECCA BAYS**, Citrus County Commission Chairman; **JACK HILLIGOSS**, Lake Wales Mayor; **JAY RADTKE**, Fourteenth Judicial Circuit Medical Examiner; **REGINALD JAMES**, Gadsden County Interim County Administrator; **JARET LANDON WILLIAMS**, Fort Meade City Commissioner; two complaints against **BERNICE ELNA FISCHER**, South Palm Beach Mayor; **MONTE BERENDES**, South Palm Beach Vice Mayor; **JANE CASTOR**, City of Tampa Mayor; **ROBBI COARSEY AVERY**, City of Trenton Mayor; **LUCY COLEMAN**, Trenton City Commissioner; **JANICE BRODA**, Indian River Mosquito Control District Commissioner; **TROY KENT**, Volusia County Councilman; two complaints against **THOMAS E. BENTON**, Harrison Ranch Community Development District Vice

Chairman; **GEORGE E. FUENTE**, Hialeah Police Department Chief; **DENISE D. GRANT**, City of Lauderhill Mayor; two complaints against **ANDREW CONNORS**, Titusville Mayor; **KIM DOWNING**, Haines City Commissioner; **AL TAYLOR**, Titusville Board of Adjustments and Appeals Chairman; **JIM DEAN**, Jackson County Administrator; **JAMEY WESTBROOK**, Jackson County Commissioner; **DAVID WHEELER**, Jefferson County Planner; **STEWART COOKSEY**, Jefferson County Planning Commissioner; **MARY-ELLEN HARPER**, Levy County Manager; **ROY SIEGER**, Flagler County Airport Director; **DEVONTA KNIGHT**, Quincy City Commissioner; **SCOTT LITTLEFIELD**, Quincy Police Department Lieutenant; **ERIC HINSON**, Gadsden County Commissioner; **RICHARD ASH**, former Quincy City Manager; **GEORGETTE DANIELS**, Quincy Finance Director; **HEIDI PETITO**, Flagler County Administrator; two complaints against **KIM SABOL**, St. Lucie County Fire District Attorney; two complaints against **BRIAN GONZALEZ**, St. Lucie County Fire District Assistant Fire Chief; two complaints against **JEFFERY LEE**, St. Lucie County Fire District Chief; **JEFF BROWER**, Volusia County Council Chair; **REBECCA MORRIS-HAID**, Jackson County Property Appraiser; **RODNEY BARRETO**, Florida Wildlife Commissioner; **BEN TEW**, Town of Norma and Town of Esto Town Clerk; **ASHANTI JONES**, Department of Children and Families Former Hearing Officer with the Appeals Hearings Section; **ALLISON SMITH-DOSSOU**, Department of Children and Families Former Hearing Officer with the Appeals Hearings Section; **DARRYL ADAMS**, Sterling Hill Community Development District Manager; **SHANE ABBOTT**, Florida State Representative; and **JENNIFER MULLER**, City of Jacksonville Labor Relations Officer.

PUBLIC SESSION

During its public session meeting, the Commission considered the Recommended Order in a Petition for Costs and Attorney's Fees filed by **MICHELE MYERS**, Mayor of Crescent City. The Commission voted to remand the case back to the Division of Administrative Hearings, for the Administrative Law Judge to determine each complainant's individual liability for reasonable fees and costs awarded in the Recommended Order.

The Commission took final action and adopted the Joint Stipulation entered into between former North Miami Beach City Commissioner, **PAULE VILLARD**, and the Commission Advocate. The Commission found Ms. Villard failed to certify her required ethics training on her 2021 Form 1. A civil penalty of \$500 and public censure and reprimand will be recommended for imposition by the Governor.

The Commission adopted a settlement agreement between the Commission Advocate and Gadsden County Commissioner, **RON TERRIOUS GREEN**. The agreement finds that Mr. Green had a conflicting contractual relationship when he approved multiple contracts between the County and an individual who was his landlord. A civil penalty of \$1,500 and public censure and reprimand will be recommended for imposition by the Governor.

The Commission voted to grant the withdrawal of a formal opinion request made by Jason Teal, City of Jacksonville City Council Secretary, on behalf of City Council Member Joe Carlucci.

The Commission adopted a formal opinion concluding that the annual financial disclosure requirement of a specified state employee who is ordered to active-duty military service and granted a four-year leave of absence from public employment will be required to file his annual CE Form 1 for each year of his absence within 90 days upon returning to public employment or the end of his military activation orders.

During its public session meeting, the Commission took action on appeals of automatic fines assessed for late submission of financial disclosure reports submitted by public officers and employees. Contact the Commission's office to obtain rulings (Item IX. on the March 6 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.