

Jon M. Philipson
Chair
Dr. James Bush, III
Vice Chair
Paul D. Bain
Luis M. Fusté
Michael H. Hellman
Laird A. Lile
Ashley Lukis
Jeremy M. Rodgers
Linda Stewart



State of Florida
COMMISSION ON ETHICS
P.O. Drawer 15709
Tallahassee, Florida 32317-5709

325 John Knox Road
Building E, Suite 200
Tallahassee, Florida 32303

"A Public Office is a Public Trust"

Kerrie J. Stillman
Executive Director

Steven J. Zuilkowski
Deputy Executive Director/
General Counsel

(850) 488-7864 Phone
(850) 488-3077 (FAX)
www.ethics.state.fl.us

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
September 17, 2025

CONTACT PERSON:
Lynn Blais or
Kerrie J. Stillman
850.488.7864

May be accessed online at www.ethics.state.fl.us

TALLAHASSEE—September 17—Meeting in Tallahassee on September 12 in closed session, the Florida Commission on Ethics took action on 46 matters, Chair Jon M. Philipson announced today. Five 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 **KEVIN POWELL**, former Director of Building Development for the City of Tarpon Springs. No probable cause was found to believe that Mr. Powell abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused his position when he performed work in his private capacity for a company he owned while simultaneously working for the City. An allegation that Mr. Powell had a

contractual relationship with a business entity that was subject to the regulation of or doing business with his agency was also dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

The Commission considered a complaint against Columbia County Sheriff Captain, **TODD LUSSIER**. No probable cause was found to believe Mr. Lussier solicited or accepted anything of value based on an understanding that it would influence his official actions. Further, no probable cause was found on allegations Mr. Lussier abused his position to obtain a disproportionate benefit or misused his position to influence the outcome of a friend's traffic stop.

The Commission found no probable cause to believe that **VICTOR CRUZ**, Member of the Concorde Estates Community Development District (CDD) Board of Supervisors, violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or misused his position when CDD records reflected \$0 non-ad valorem tax for himself and his neighbor. An allegation Mr. Cruz had a conflicting contractual relationship when the CDD Attorney represented him in his divorce proceeding was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

No probable cause was found on an allegation that **JONATHAN GRIFFITH**, former Palatka Interim City Manager, had an employment or contractual relationship with a business entity that was subject to the regulation of the City of Palatka when a company he has an ownership interest in purchased property in the City, and submitted a rezoning application to the City's planning department.

No probable cause was found on an allegation that **GEORGE JACOB THOMAS**, Fort White Mayor, misused his position by failing to utilize the rating procedures used by

the City Councilmembers for the selection of a candidate to fill a vacancy on the Town Council.

The Commission reviewed 41 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 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: **MARK MATHES**, Fellsmere Water Control District Manager; **MARCOS R. LOPEZ**, Osceola County Sheriff; **JAVIER CISNEROS**, Fort Pierce Utilities Authority Director; **BADIA STRACHAN**, Concorde Estates Community Development District Board of Supervisors Vice-Chair; **ALONZETTA SIMPKINS**, Gadsden County Commissioner; **LAUREN JOHNSON**, Palm Coast Acting City Manager; **MARY ANN DELGADO**, Venetian Isles Community Development District Vice Chair; **TAMMIE TALLEY**, Duval County Public Schools Director of Athletics; **MARY LOU HOOVER**, Key West City Commissioner; **KEN BURKE**, Sixth Judicial Circuit Clerk of Court and Comptroller; **WILLIAM BARRS**, Treasure Island Fire Chief and Acting City Manager; **TRACEY MILLER**, Martin County Schools Deputy Superintendent; **DARRIN MOSSING**, Village of Westport Community Development District Manager; **TAMMY VASQUEZ**, Treasure Island Vice Mayor; **ANGELA OWENS**, Kennedy Middle School Principal; **BARBARA LANGDON**, North Port City Commissioner; **CHARLES W. BURKETT**, Surfside Mayor; **ART GONZALEZ**, Biscayne Park Village Commissioner; **BRYAN HUNTINGTON**, Village of Biscayne Park

Vice Mayor; **VERONICA AMSLER**, Village of Biscayne Park Commissioner; **JONATHAN E. GROTH**, Village of Biscayne Park Mayor; **JORGE E. ROSERO**, Village of Biscayne Park Interim Police Chief; **JOHN W. MINA**, Orange County Sheriff; **YASHEKIA SCARLETT**, Village of Westport Community Development District Chair; **VICTOR D. CRIST**, Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Clerk of Court; **MARIA PIERCE**, Town of Sewall's Point Human Resources and Finance Director; **SEAN FLANAGAN**, Coconut Creek Deputy Building Inspector; **MICHAEL SCOTT**, **RICK WILSON**, and **BILL BRASWELL**, Polk County Commissioners; **ROBERT K. MCCANN**, Manatee County Commissioner; **STACEY M. BUTTERFIELD**, Polk County Clerk of Courts and Comptroller; **ANNE HUFFMAN**, Haines City Commissioner; **HORACE L. JONES**, Escambia County Development Services Director; **DANA PAIGE**, Volusia County Director of Human Relations; **AARON VAN KLEECK**, Volusia County Director of Emergency Services; **ALEX ANDRADE**, Former Milton City Attorney and current State Representative; **CHRISTI HOLLINS**, Southern Manatee Fire Rescue Firefighter; **DORI HOWINGTON**, Deltona City Commissioner; **KEVIN RUANE**, Lee County Commission Vice Chair; and **BEVERLY NASH**, City of Quincy Mayor.

PUBLIC SESSION

During its public session meeting, the Commission took final action and adopted the Joint Stipulation entered into between Fort Pierce Senior City Planner **VENNIS GILMORE** and the Commission Advocate. The Commission found Mr. Gilmore had a conflicting contractual relationship that created a continuing or frequently recurring conflict between his private interests and the performance of his public duties when an entity of

which he was a member and President was awarded a bid from the City. A civil penalty of \$1,000 and public censure and reprimand will be recommended for imposition by the Governor.

The Commission adopted a formal opinion that a school board member selling services directly to district students would create a prohibited conflict of interest under Florida law, even if sales are limited, because it risks compromising impartiality. Volunteering to educate students on topics related to the business is allowed if done without promoting the business through logos or materials. However, marketing the business to students on school property or digital platforms by a school board member would be prohibited by statute. Hiring district employees for the member's private business would also create a prohibited conflict of interest. Finally, a school board member's business sponsoring a school team in exchange for logo placement on shirts would create a prohibited business relationship; however, a donation would not be prohibited by the Code of Ethics.

A formal opinion adopted by the Commission determined that a school board member would not have a conflict of interest from pre-existing contracts between the school board and the member's private employer, including future renewals with the same terms. However, new agreements with different terms made after their appointment, would create a prohibited conflict. The opinion also provided guidance about the member's participation and voting on matters involving their employer.

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.