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TALLAHASSEE—December 8, 2021—Meeting in Tallahassee on December 3rd in closed session, the Florida Commission on Ethics took action on 36 matters, Chair JoAnne Leznoff 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.

The Commission found probable cause on an allegation that former Pembroke Park Mayor **ASHIRA MOHAMMED** misused her position and official resources to secure a benefit for herself and her private legal practice.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against Manatee County Commissioner **VANESSA BAUGH**. Probable cause was found to believe Ms. Baugh violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting the abuse of office to obtain a disproportionate benefit by placing her own name at the top of Manatee County's

randomly selected list of recipients to receive a COVID-19 vaccination. In addition, probable cause was found to believe Ms. Baugh misused her position or public resources to assign vaccine distribution priority to serve specific individuals and zip codes, contrary to Manatee County's COVID-19 vaccination policy.

No probable cause was found to believe Taylor County Building Inspector **JOHN PERKINS** misused his position to perform building inspections on a mobile home he owned.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against the Levy County Board of County Commissioners Chairman **JOHN M. MEEKS**. No probable cause was found on allegations Mr. Meeks had a prohibited conflict of interest arising from doing business with his own agency or maintaining a conflicting business or contractual relationship regarding his ownership of a local hardware store selling goods to Levy County.

Probable cause was found on four allegations to believe Broward County Commissioner **DALE V.C. HOLNESS** failed to report income received from two corporations he owns as well as secondary sources of income to these corporations on his 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 Form 6 disclosure filings.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against Commissioner of Agriculture **NICOLE HEATHER FRIED**. Probable cause was found on allegations she violated Florida's Constitution and financial disclosure law by failing to accurately disclose income on her 2017 and 2018 Form 6 disclosure filings.

No probable cause was found on allegations Yankeetown Mayor **JACK SCHOFIELD** violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or that he misused his position when he obtained an after-the-fact permit permit for structural renovations at his home at a reduced rate. No probable

cause also was found on allegations he abused his position for a disproportionate benefit and misused his position to expedite construction of his office by changing policy to provide for a no bid contact for construction and ensuring the project would not be subject to council vote. An allegation Mr. Schofield misused his position when he amended an employment contract of a Yankeetown employee were also dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

In a complaint filed against **JEAN HOLBROOK**, Yankeetown Deputy Mayor, the Commission found no probable cause to believe she violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit when seeking a construction permit. No probable cause was found to believe she misused her position to obtain an expedited construction permit at a reduced cost without complying with requirements.

Similarly, the Commission found no probable cause to believe Yankeetown Town Council Member **JEFF ST. JOHN** violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or that he misused his position when he applied for a permit to replace the roof at his primary residence or that he violated those laws by changing Town policy to provide for a no bid contact for construction of new Town Hall office space and ensuring the project would not be subject to a Council vote.

Likewise, the Commission dismissed a complaint, with a finding of no probable cause, alleging Yankeetown Town Council Member **DANNY PEARSON** violated the constitutional amendment prohibiting abuse of office for a disproportionate benefit or that he misused his position to receive special treatment during the permitting process. No probable cause also was found on allegations he misused his position or abused his office to receive a disproportionate benefit by changing Town policy to provide for a no

bid policy and expedited construction on a project at Town Hall and ensuring that the project would not be subject to Council vote.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against the North Miami Beach City Commissioner **MICHAEL JOSEPH**. The Commission rejected the recommendation of its Advocate and voted to dismiss allegations that Mr. Joseph filed inaccurate 2018, 2019 and 2020 Form 1 disclosures because the public interest would not be served by further proceedings before the Commission.

No probable cause was found to believe North Miami Beach City Manager **ARTHUR H. SOREY, III** failed to accurately report real property on his 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 Form 1 disclosures.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against the North Miami Beach City Commissioner **PAULE VILLARD**. The Commission determined the public interest would not be served by further proceedings and dismissed two allegations that Ms. Villard filed inaccurate 2019 and 2020 Form 1 disclosures. No probable cause was found on an allegation Ms. Villard failed to properly report her real property on her 2018 Form 1 disclosure.

In a referral from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Commission accepted the recommendation of its Advocate, finding no probable cause on four allegations regarding former State Senator and current State Representative **GERALDINE THOMPSON**. Two allegations Ms. Thompson misused her position by obtaining a State grant where a large portion of the grant would provide funding to her daughters or entities employing them were dismissed with a finding of no probable cause. Also dismissed with a finding of no probable cause were allegations related to violations of the voting conflict law concerning the votes to secure State grants during

the 2014 – 2015 and 2016 - 2017 budget years. The Commission also found no probable cause to believe Ms. Thompson misused her position to obtain a grant benefitting the Wells' Built Museum or her daughters during the 2014 – 2015 fiscal year.

The Commission considered the results of an investigation—required by statute—based on the findings of a random audit of **WILSON & ASSOCIATES, LLC**, an Executive Branch Lobbying Firm. The Commission rejected the recommendation of its Advocate and voted to find no probable cause to believe the firm filed an inaccurate 2019 first quarter compensation report.

The Commission also considered the results of an investigation of **DIANA HADI PADGETT GOVERNMENTAL COUNSULTING**, an Executive Branch Lobbying Firm, based on the findings of a random audit. The Commission found probable cause to believe the firm overstated compensation in all four quarters of 2019.

Another investigation based on the findings of a statutorily required random audit of the Executive Branch Lobbying firm **CJT STRATEGIES, LLC**, resulted in findings of probable cause by the Commission. The firm overstated compensation for a principal in the first and third quarters of 2019.

The Commission reviewed 19 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: **LORI VAN RIPER**, Director of Investigations, Florida Department of Education; **TAMMY SMITH**, Director of Investigations, Florida Department of Education;

CHRISTOPHER GREENE, former City Councilmember, Lake City; **EUGENE JEFFERSON**, City Councilmember, Lake City; **ANGELA NIXON**, State Representative, District 14; **DAISY RAISLER**, former Mayor, Lake Helen; **STEPHEN WITT**, Mayor, Lake City; **JAKE HILL**, City Council Member, Lake City; **KATYE CAMPBELL**, School Board Member, Brevard County; **JENNIFER JENKINS**, School Board Member, Brevard County; **MATT SUSIN**, School Board Member, Brevard County; **CHERYL MCDOUGALL**, School Board Member, Brevard County; **MISTY BELFORD**, School Board Member, Brevard County; **MARK MULLINS**, School Board Member, Brevard County; **JON ARGUELLO**, School Board Member, Osceola County; **SHIRLEY ERVIN JOHNSON**, Chair of the Board of Commissioners, Delray Beach Community Redevelopment Agency; **RACHEL SADOFF**, Clerk of Court, Brevard County; **ELIZABETH ANDERSON**, School Board Member, Duval County; **AUDREY GIBSON**, State Senator, District 6.

PUBLIC SESSION

During its public session meeting, the Commission considered a settlement agreement entered into between the Commission Advocate and former Orange County Commissioner **BETSY VANDERLEY**. The Commission adopted the agreement finding Ms. Vanderley violated the law by voting on a measure she knew would result in a special private gain or loss to a principal by whom she was retained. A civil penalty of \$1,000 will be recommended to the Governor for imposition.

A complaint filed against **RACHEL SADOFF**, Brevard County Clerk of Court, was dismissed for failure to constitute a legally sufficient complaint. As no factual investigation preceded the review, the Commission's conclusion does not reflect on the

accuracy of the allegations made in this complaint. The complaint was considered during public session because Ms. Sadoff waived confidentiality.

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.