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"A Public Office is a Public Trust"

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PRESS RELEASE

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TALLAHASSEE— April 27, 2022—Meeting in Tallahassee on April 22nd in closed session, the Florida Commission on Ethics took action on 26 matters, Chair John Grant 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.

No probable cause was found to believe **ED CONROY**, Howey-in-the-Hills Councilor, misused his position by demanding a speed limit sign be removed and later urging the termination of a town employee who refused to remove it. The Commission also found no probable cause to believe he violated the voting conflicts law by voting to approve a wastewater agreement that would provide sewer services to a property he owns. An allegation he misused his position in relation to the vote also was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

The Commission rejected the recommendation of its Advocate and found probable cause to believe Cedar Hammock Fire Control District Commissioner **JOHN STEVENS** misused official resources of his office while campaigning for re-election. The Commission also found probable cause to believe Mr. Stevens misused his position to coerce an employee into supporting his campaign.

The Commission considered a complaint filed against **EDDIE COLE**, Town of Eatonville Mayor. An allegation he misused his position to intervene in a workplace investigation to benefit a friend was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause. An allegation Mr. Cole signed an Eatonville Community Redevelopment Agency check, without board approval and to benefit a friend also was dismissed with a finding of no probable cause.

In a complaint filed against **KARLTON O. JOHNSON**, Principal of Blanche Ely High School in Pompano Beach, the Commission found no probable cause to believe he misused his public position by failing to report alleged inappropriate behavior between a coach and player, in violation of a mandatory reporting requirement.

The Commission found no probable cause to believe Charlotte County Commissioner **JOSEPH TISEO** misused his position to influence zoning and code compliance matters to benefit a family member. In related complaints filed against **DAVID SANTIMAURO**, Charlotte County Code Enforcement Officer, **ANDRES DESCHENES**, Charlotte County Compliance Officer, and **SHAUN CULLINAN**, a Charlotte County Planning and Zoning official, the Commission found no probable cause regarding allegations they misused their position by failing to take action on zoning matters and intentionally overlooking code compliance issues to benefit Mr. Tiseo's family member.

The Commission reviewed 18 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: **TERRY L. RHODES**, Executive Director, Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles; **MICHELLE FLEMING**, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Suwannee County; **DONN STEVE HUTCHINSON**, Road Superintendent, Dixie County; **W.C. MILLS**, County Commissioner, Dixie County; **JAMES MCKNIGHT**, City Manager, City of Cocoa Beach; **DEMETRIUS BROWN**, Police Officer, Cocoa Beach Police Department; **SHIRLEY KNIGHT**, Supervisor of Elections, Gadsden County; two complaints against **KEITH DOWDELL**, City Commissioner, City of Quincy; two complaints against **JANICE SHACKELFORD CLEMONS**, City Clerk, City of Quincy; two complaints against **RONTE HARRIS**, City Commissioner, City of Quincy; **JOEL FOREMAN**, County Attorney, Columbia County; **PATRICIA HARDESTY**, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Seminole County; **REUBEN MARTY**, Deputy Sheriff, Volusia County Sheriff's Office; **TYLER ST. JOHN**, Deputy Sheriff, Volusia County Sheriff's Office; **CAREY LOVE**, Captain of the Diversified Investigative Services Division, Seminole County Sheriff's Office.

PUBLIC SESSION

During its public session meeting, the Commission considered the Recommended Order of an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) from the Division of Administrative Hearings in a complaint filed against **CARMINE MARCENO**, Sheriff of Lee County. The Commission adopted the Recommended Order finding Mr. Marceno did not violate the Code of Ethics by accepting a prohibited gift valued at more than \$100 from a vendor of his agency or failing to disclose the receipt of a gift that exceeded \$100 in value.

The Commission adopted a settlement agreement between the Commission Advocate and **DENNIS WARD**, State Attorney for the Sixteenth Judicial Circuit. The agreement, filed prior to a finding of probable cause, finds Mr. Ward violated financial disclosure laws by filing inaccurate 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 Form 6 disclosure forms. The Commission recommended a civil penalty of \$2,000 (\$500 per allegation) be imposed by the Governor.

The Commission voted to grant the Advocate's Motion to Dismiss a statutorily required, self-initiated investigation concerning a willful failure to file a Form 1 Statement of Financial Interests for the years 2018 and 2019 by **CYNTHIA LYNN HOWARD**, member of the Board of Governors of the Florida Workers' Compensation Joint Underwriting Association. The motion was granted on the basis that Ms. Howard resigned from the board in March 2022. Because holding public office or employment is required to maintain jurisdiction under the statute, the Commission no longer possesses jurisdiction in the matter.

The Commission voted to grant the withdrawal of a formal opinion request made by the Broward County School District because material changes in the facts and circumstances rendered the request moot.

A formal opinion adopted by the Commission determined that the revolving door restrictions in the Code of Ethics do not apply to former employees of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority.

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 April 22nd 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 \$10,000 per violation.