

THE NEW ETHICS BEAT

The Newsletter of the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust

19 West Flagler Street Suite 820 Miami, FL 33130 ■ www.miamidade.gov/ethics

Executive Director's Corner

FALL 2008

Ethics, Integrity and Accountability (EIA) Task Force

In March of 2008, the Miami-Dade Ethics Commission celebrated a milestone—ten years of service as a local government watchdog. Although we have come a long way since our inception, we understand that our efforts to restore public trust in government have just begun. With a decade under our belt, we felt it was essential to ask outsiders to assess our operations and suggest ideas to enable us to become more effective. As a result, the Ethics, Integrity and Accountability Task Force was created to examine the path to take to create a stronger, more consequential Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust. The Task Force consisted of seventeen members. Prominent judges, local government attorneys, law and government professors, the president of the Miami-Dade League of Cities, a union leader, and a citizen activist were some of the interests represented on the task force. After meetings that lasted beyond one year, the final report emphasized closing loopholes in the current County ethics ordinance, advocating campaign finance reform at the County level, and recommending legislation to enhance the powers of the Ethics Commission.

In order for any of these changes to go into effect, the Board of County Commissioners will have to amend the existing laws or create new ordinances. For the past six months, we have attempted to educate the various stakeholders and policymakers about the significance of these reforms. [\[continued on page 3\]](#)

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THE COMMISSION

Kerry E. Rosenthal, Chair

Dawn Addy, Vice Chair

Judge Seymour Gelber

Magda Abdo-Gomez

Erica Wright

Robert Meyers, Executive Director

“BEAT BITS”

Public Procurement Conference

On March 14, 2008, The Miami Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust, in collaboration with Florida Atlantic University, the Public Procurement Research Center, the American Society for Public Administrators (ASPA) (South Florida Chapter), and the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP), held a one-day conference on Ethics and Accountability in Public Procurement. Topics presented were Contract Administration, Ethical Issues in Public Procurement, Best Practices, and the future of Public Procurement. The event attracted over 150 attendees.

Whistleblower Workshops

The National Association of Counties (NACo) recently recognized the Ethics Commission with a third Achievement Award for its Whistleblower Workshops. The workshops, which began in October 2007, provide essential information to County officials and personnel concerning amendments to the County whistleblower ordinance. The new law establishes additional safeguards for employees willing to report serious acts of official misconduct and special procedures for those who believe they have suffered retaliation after filing a whistleblower complaint.

Erica Wright

Featured Commissioner



Erica Wright was appointed to the Commission on Ethics by the Chief Judge of the Eleventh Circuit Joseph Farina in 2008. Her primary areas of practice include city, county, and local government law; business transactions; corporate social responsibility; and government and community relations.

Previously, Ms. Wright has served as an assistant city attorney for the City of Miami and as acting city attorney and city attorney for the City of Sunny Isles Beach. She has been Florida Bar board certified in the area of City, County, and Local Government Law since 2004.

Ms. Wright is a past president of the Gwen S. Cherry Black Women Lawyers Association. She serves on the Board of Directors of the University of Miami School of Law Alumni Association. She is also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the Planned Giving Council of Miami-Dade County, and other organizations.

Ms. Wright obtained her Juris Doctorate from the University of Miami School of Law and obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree from Spelman College.

1998-2008

Ten-Year Measures

Ethics opinions—2,383
Investigations—674
Filed complaints—351
Outreach Activities—1,835

Awards & Special Recognition

- Ethics Commission invited by U.S. Department of State to conduct anticorruption training in Nicaragua
- Ethics Forums recognized by National Association of Counties (NACo)
- Ethics Commission staff selected to participate in National League of Cities Leadership Training Institute
- Model Student Ethics Program included in Corruption Fighters' Tool Kit, published by Transparency International (only program from U.S. cited)
- Ethics Commission invited to La Paz, Bolivia, to conduct training on ethics and anticorruption measures

EIA Task Force [continued from page 1]

We hope to elicit support from the public as well when these items go to public hearings in the spring of 2009. It is unlikely that the entire slate of ethics initiatives will be approved, but I am optimistic that most, if not all, of the recommendations will at least make it to the public hearing stage. Tougher ethics laws in Miami-Dade County will demonstrate that the County remains committed to the values of openness, transparency, and accountability in the manner in which it conducts the public’s business.

Ethical Dilemma (“Deal” or “No Deal”)

A change order has been submitted to the Miami-Dade Housing Agency (MDHA) that involves a change in the scope of services for a building maintenance contract.

The change order requires an increase in Community Small Business Enterprise (CSBE) participation of 5% or \$500,000. The prime firm, Nails and Boards (NAB), is one of the best performing and most admired companies in the community. The firm is politically active and a frequent contributor to community causes.

The owner of NAB has box seats at American Airlines Arena. He extends an invitation to you and your family to attend the end of basketball season finals between the Miami Heat and the New York Knicks. You have been a Heat fan all your life, and this is a dream come true. You accept the invitation, and are enjoying the game.

After halftime, the owner of the company mentions that he would like you to revisit the 5% CSBE requirement. He wants to complete the project with his own company workforce and not have to provide the \$500,000 worth of work to a CSBE.

The Miami Heat is winning. How do you respond?

Ethics Commissioners and staff members regularly participate in local, regional, and national events:

October 2008, **Mayor’s Workshop on Building Public Trust through Accountability, Ethics and Transparency.** Robert Meyers, COE Executive Director, and Robert Thompson, COE Community Outreach Coordinator, both facilitated panel discussions that focused on nonprofit organizations.

December 2008, **30th Annual COGEL Conference.** Vice-Chair Dawn Addy and Commissioner Erica Wright represented the COE in Chicago.

December 2008, **Southeast Florida National Institute of Government Purchasing (SFNIGP).** Robert Meyers, Executive Director, spoke on Ethics, the Sunshine Law, the Public Records Act, Standards of Conduct and Conflicts of Interest at the county, state, and federal levels.

FUTURE ETHICS COMMISSION EVENTS:

- Media Ethics Conference
- Campaign Skills Seminars



WORDS TO THE WISE

Certain County & Municipal Personnel & Non-Exempt Advisory Board Members.[†] Financial Disclosure is satisfied by filing any **one** of the following—

- **2008 Federal Income Tax Return** for individuals or most recent federal income tax return for corporations
- **Financial Statement** (Miami-Dade Co. Form)
- **Source of Income Statement** (Miami-Dade Co. Form)
- **Statement of Financial Interests** (STATE FORM 1)

File by **July 1, 2009**, 12:00 noon.

County personnel file with the Miami Dade Elections Dept., 2700 NW 87th Ave., Miami, FL 33172 **or** P.O. Box 521550, Miami, FL 33152-1550.

Municipal personnel file with their respective municipal clerk.

[†] County Attorney and Assistant County Attorneys; County Manager, Assistant County Managers, and Special Assistants to the County Manager; Heads or Directors of County Departments and their Assistant or Deputy Department Heads; Employees of the Miami-Dade County Police Dept. with the Rank of Captain, Major, and Chief; Building and Zoning Inspectors; Any Architect, Professional Engineer, Landscape Architect, or Registered Land Surveyor performing services for Miami-Dade County pursuant to a contract; Local Autonomous and Semi-Autonomous Personnel, Boards, and Agencies who were not required to file under State law; Local Personnel who perform quasi-judicial functions who were not required to file under State law; Local Advisory Personnel, whose sole or primary responsibility is to recommend legislation or give advice to the Board of County Commissioners, including Members of any County Board, who were not required to file under State law (except those exempted by ordinance or resolution); Candidates for certain County and Municipal Elective Office.

Note also, candidates file at the same time qualifying papers are filed. Consultants file within 30 days of execution of their County contracts, and by July 1st every year thereafter.

Contact the Ethics Commission

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Our website:
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“Relativity applies
to physics,
not **ethics**.”