



Memorandum

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To: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor
The Honorable Chairperson Bruno A. Barreiro
and Members, Board of County Commissioners
The Honorable Joseph P. Farina, Chief Judge, Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida
Mr. Harvey Ruvin, Clerk, Circuit & County Courts

From:  Christopher Mazzella, Inspector General

Date: July 28, 2008

Re: Former Clerk of the Courts Employee Sentenced

Olga L. Avila (Avila), arrested this past January after a joint investigation by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office (SAO), pled guilty and was sentenced today to community control (house arrest) followed by probation. Avila, who was terminated earlier from her 16-year tenure as a Courtroom Clerk I, was convicted and sentenced today on 27 felony counts for running a "quickie divorce" scheme to make some money on the side. Avila pled guilty to charges of Unlawful Compensation, Official Misconduct, Notary Fraud and Unlicensed Practice of Law.

The investigation commenced at the request of the Hon. Harvey Ruvin, Clerk of the Courts of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, who advised the OIG that Avila might have received compensation for completing and filing Family Court documents. The OIG investigation uncovered that Avila abused the process of a Family Division program, the "Self-Help Program" (Self-Help). Self-Help was established to ensure that individuals without legal representation obtain and file the appropriate forms.

Avila promised to provide unrepresented litigants a quick divorce for a cash fee of \$670. Avila's scheme involved falsifying and fraudulently notarizing documents, attesting to residency requirements, and using her access and friends at the Miami-Dade County Courts to by-pass the procedures of Self-Help to expedite the divorce proceedings. Unknowingly relying on falsely sworn pleadings, judges ordered the final dissolution of marriages. Some of the parties, believing they were divorced, entered into new marriages.

Avila was sentenced to four years of house arrest and probation. During her period of supervision, she shall perform 100 hours of community service, make a monetary

donation to charity, and pay the OIG costs of investigation. Moreover, she is prohibited from seeking re-employment with Miami-Dade County.

The OIG is grateful to Mr. Ruvlin and to the Honorable Joseph P. Farina, Chief Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, for their cooperation during the investigation, and for their swift response in taking corrective action to restore the integrity of the Self-Help Program. The OIG investigation into past abuses is continuing.

cc: Mr. George Burgess, County Manager
Ms. Alina Hudak, Assistant County Manager
Mr. Denis Morales, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
Ms. Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit & Management Services
Mr. Charles Anderson, Commission Auditor
Clerk of the Board (copy filed)