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**Office of the Inspector General
Miami-Dade County**

Memorandum

To: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor
The Honorable Chairperson Joe Martinez
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: Christopher Mazzella
Inspector General

Date: July 15, 2005

Re: Vanessa Bravo, Hialeah City Council Member, Pleads to Campaign Financing Fraud

Attached is a news release issued by the Office of the Inspector General announcing the plea of Vanessa Bravo in connection with an election fraud involving the District 13 Miami-Dade County Commission race this past fall.

The joint investigation by the Office of the Inspector General, the State Attorney's Office, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement resulted in the plea of Bravo, who is a practicing attorney and a Council member of the Hialeah City Council. She was charged with providing *indirect contributions to the Jorge Roque campaign in the names of friends and others*. The false contributor information allowed the Roque Campaign to qualify for and receive \$75,000 from the County's Campaign Trust Fund. The joint investigation has, thus far, led to the arrests and prosecutions of others, as well.

As you may recall, the OIG previously reported to you that its review of the Campaign Financing Trust Fund detected serious weaknesses in the administration and oversight of the eligibility process for qualifying for County funds. The aforementioned plea highlights these weaknesses and we hope the BCC will act upon our specific recommendations on how to strengthen the campaign financing rules.

This investigation continues and additional arrests are expected.

cc: Mr. George Burgess, County Manager
Mr. Robert A. Ginsburg, County Attorney
Ms. Alina Hudak, Assistant County Manager
Mr. Lester Sola, Supervisor of Elections
Ms. Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit & Management Services

Clerk of the Board (copy filed)



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

NEWS RELEASE

Hialeah City Councilwoman Pleads to Campaign Fraud Charges

The Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office (SAO) and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) announced today the plea and resignation of a City of Hialeah elected official following a joint investigation.

Vanessa Bravo (Bravo), a Hialeah City Councilwoman, was adjudicated guilty on a misdemeanor count of Making Contributions in the Name of Another in violation of Florida State Statute 106.08. The charge stemmed from an investigation into fraudulent contributions used to obtain County Campaign Trust Fund monies by the Jorge Roque Campaign for County Commission this past November.

In a separate but related investigation into the Hialeah City election held in 2003, Bravo, along with fellow Hialeah City Councilwoman, Cindy Miel and Adriana Narvaez, who was defeated in her campaign for the Council, are the subject of two complaints filed with the Florida Commission on Elections. The complaints arise out of their acceptance of illegal contributions from a local developer.

Bravo, elected to the Hialeah City Council in 2003, helped the Jorge Roque Campaign obtain County funds by fraudulently providing contributors necessary to meet the County Campaign Trust Fund eligibility criteria. Bravo purchased money orders, filled them out using friends' names, and submitted them to the Roque Campaign. In addition to Bravo, Roque's sister-in-law, Rita Picazo, and former State Representative Nilo Juri have already been charged with crimes uncovered during the investigation of the Roque Campaign. The County awards eligible candidates for County Commission up to \$75,000 in Trust Fund monies if they demonstrate a minimum of \$25,000 in contributions and provide the Elections Department with a list of at least 200 individual registered voter contributions.

Bravo pled no contest, was adjudicated guilty, and sentenced to one year of probation. As a special condition of probation, Bravo will resign her seat on the Hialeah City Council immediately. She will not be permitted to run for office during the term of her probation. In addition, she must pay for the costs of the investigation to the OIG and FDLE, as well as court costs.

In the Hialeah election investigation, it was determined that Bravo, Miel and Narvaez each accepted a \$20,000 personal loan from developer Ceferino Machado during the waning days of the November 2003 City election. Since the loans were determined to have been made for the purpose of influencing the election, they exceeded the \$500 limit on campaign contributions under Florida law. The candidates' failure to report the loans as political contributions also violated election statutes.

Inspector General Christopher Mazzella, in commenting on the charges brought against Bravo, expressed his disappointment in Bravo's abuse of the public trust as a municipal official in causing County funds to be illegally diverted to the Roque Campaign. Mr. Mazzella stated that this case highlights weaknesses in the current Campaign Trust Fund legislation and its importance that the Board of County Commissioners act upon the recommendations of the OIG to strengthen campaign funding rules. Mr. Mazzella said that the investigation is continuing into the County election and additional arrests are expected.

Media Opportunity – Inspector General Mazzella will be available for a media opportunity today, between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. at the OIG office.