



Memorandum

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To: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor
The Honorable Chairperson Bruno A. Barreiro
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From:  Christopher Mazzella, Inspector General

Date: March 19, 2008

Subject: Former County Employees Arrested for Defrauding the County's Tuition
Reimbursement Program Sentenced, IG06-17

In early March 2006, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), at the request of the Human Resources Department (HR), formerly the Employee Relations Department (ERD), began a probe into the County's Tuition Reimbursement Program (the Program) due to possible employee misconduct in not reporting grants, as required by Program rules. In addition to hundreds of referrals made to HR where we identified overpayments, the OIG investigation also resulted in five County employees being charged with submitting falsified documents (i.e. falsified grades to show grades of a "C" or higher) in order to qualify for Program reimbursement. We are pleased to report that all five criminal cases are all now closed, and the five former County employees have all entered pleas and were sentenced to probationary terms, which included restitution to Miami-Dade County.

In November 2006, the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury indicted four (4) County employees, Lisa Cameron-Smith (Cameron-Smith), Hollis Horton (Horton), Tangalh Eason-Jenkins (Eason-Jenkins), and Jennifer Bryant (Bryant) due to the OIG investigation. The investigation uncovered that the employees submitted falsified copies of transcripts in order to fraudulently receive reimbursement from the County. Cameron-Smith was responsible for oversight and processing of tuition reimbursement for County employees at the ERD, Horton was a Tuition Reimbursement Coordinator for the Department of Planning & Zoning, and Eason-Jenkins and Bryant were Clerk of Courts employees. Public funds stolen by these County employees exceeded \$30,000. The Grand Jury indictments charged them with Organized Scheme to Defraud, Official Misconduct and Grand Theft.

In June 2007, all four entered pleas and were sentenced to two (2) years probation with the special conditions that they pay restitution to the County, complete 200 hours of community service, and pay the OIG costs of investigation.

Two months later, in August 2007, Marbely Garcia, an employee of the Water and Sewer Department was arrested and charged the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office with Organized Scheme to Defraud, Official Misconduct and Petit Theft in connection with submitting falsified documents relating to her grades in order to receive reimbursement according to Program rules. Last month Garcia entered a plea of guilty and was sentenced to eighteen (18) months of probation with the special condition that she repays \$919.00 in restitution to the County and costs of investigation to the OIG. Garcia's plea brings to a close the pending criminal cases resulting from the investigation.

As of October 2007, the OIG investigation has revealed approximately \$415,000 in overpayments. These overpayments have been reported by the OIG to the County Manager's Office and HR for appropriate action. Just as importantly, the Program's paperwork and process deficiencies illustrated in the Grand Jury's Report are in the process of being corrected. New procedures to ensure verification in the areas of grants, scholarships, and student grades have been enacted. Uniform training is also being provided to departmental tuition refund coordinators regarding the new procedures.

cc: Mr. George Burgess, County Manager
Mr. Denis Morales, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Ms. Alina Hudak, Assistant County Manager
Mr. Alex Munoz, Assistant County Manager
Mr. Subrata Basu, Interim Director, Department of Planning & Zoning
Ms. Angela Maher, Director, Human Resources Department
Mr. John Renfrow, Director, Water & Sewer Department
Mr. Harvey Ruvlin, Clerk, Circuit and County Courts
Ms. Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit & Management Services
Mr. Charles Anderson, Commission Auditor
Clerk of the Board (copy filed)