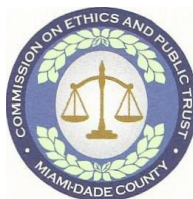


MIAMI-DADE COMMISSION ON ETHICS AND PUBLIC TRUST

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June 20, 2023

Sent via email

To: Lilianaguarg@gmail.com
Natalianeira@gmail.com

Liliana Gutierrez
825 NW 126th St.
North Miami, FL 33168
Mother of Natalia Neira, Park Planner,
Department of Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces

Re. INQ 2023-77, Limitations on Doing Business with the County

Dear Ms. Gutierrez,

Thank you for contacting the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (“COE”) and requesting our guidance regarding your ability to contract with the County’s Public Housing and Community Development Department (“PHCD”) as a vendor/landlord under the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (“ERAP”),¹ administered by PHCD.

Facts

You would like to contract with PHCD as a vendor/landlord under the ERAP, which is administered by PHCD. You are not employed by Miami-Dade County, but your daughter, Natalia Neira, works as a Park Planner at the Miami-Dade Department of Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces (PROS). Her job duties primarily include mapping of park facilities and resources and demographic analysis. Her PROS job duties do not include any oversight or administration of the ERAP, and you do not have any other family members working for the County who administer or oversee the program.

¹ The ERAP is a federally and locally funded program that provides rental assistance for up to eighteen (18) months for eligible tenants in arrears on rent payments due to COVID-related financial hardships. See <https://www.miamidade.gov/global/housing/emergency-rental-assistance-program.page>.

Issue

Whether the Miami-Dade County Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance (“County Ethics Code”) would prevent you from contracting with PHCD to participate in the ERAP as a vendor/landlord.

Discussion and Opinion

Generally, sections 2-11.1 (c) and (d) of the County Ethics Code permit County employees to transact business with the County, so long as the contract does not interfere with the full and faithful discharge of the County employee’s duties, the County employee does not participate in negotiating or awarding the contract, and the County employee’s job duties will not require him or her to be involved with enforcing or overseeing the contract. However, the County Ethics Code prohibits a County employee from transacting business with the County department for which he or she works. Specifically,

[the limited exclusion from the general prohibition on County employees contracting with the County] shall not be construed to authorize an employee or his or her immediate family member to enter into a contract with Miami-Dade County or any person or agency acting for Miami-Dade County, if the employee works in the county department which will enforce, oversee or administer the subject contract.

County Ethics Code § 2-11.1(c)(2).²

Here, after reviewing the facts presented to us, we conclude that **you may contract with PHCD** to participate in the ERAP as a vendor/landlord. Your daughter’s employment as a park planner at PROS will not require her to be involved in the administration of the ERAP. Accordingly, because her employment with PROS does not involve any administration or oversight of the ERAP, and she will never have occasion to review, approve, or administer ERAP applications, her employment with PROS does not give rise to a conflict of interest. *See* County Ethics Code § 2-11.1(c)(2). Provided that your daughter’s current or future job responsibilities with PROS or any other county department do not require her involvement in any aspect of the ERAP, you may contract with PHCD to participate in the ERAP as a vendor/landlord. *See* INQ 22--46.

Additionally, your daughter may not lobby the County in support of your participation in the ERAP. This means that she may not contact anyone within the County in an attempt to influence a decision about any contract that you are seeking with the County. *See* County Ethics Code § 2-11.1(m)(1).

² The term “immediate family” includes parents and children. *See* County Ethics Code § 2-11.1(b)(9).

Furthermore, the County Ethics Code prohibits County employees from exploiting their official position. This means that your daughter may not use her County position to secure special privileges or exemptions with respect to your participation as a vendor/landlord in any PHCD program. *See* County Ethics Code § 2-11.1(g).

This opinion is limited to the facts as you presented them to the Commission on Ethics and is limited to an interpretation of the Miami-Dade Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance only. Based on directives from the department that employs you, or under state law, other conflicts may apply. If you have additional questions regarding possible conflicts based on PROS directives, contact your supervisor or the Mayor's office. For an opinion regarding Florida ethics law, please contact the Florida Commission on Ethics, P.O. Drawer 15709, Tallahassee, FL 32317, phone number (850) 488-7864, <http://www.ethics.state.fl.us/>.

Please submit this opinion to the Public Housing and Community Development Department for inclusion in your file. The Commission on Ethics does not submit this memorandum on your behalf.

Sincerely,

Susannah Nesmith

Susannah Nesmith
Staff Attorney

cc: Commission on Ethics Legal Staff
Natalia Neira, Park Planner, PROS
John Vanegas, Accountant 3, PHCD
Simona Marlow, Senior HR Manager, PHCD

INQs are informal ethics opinions provided by the legal staff after being reviewed and approved by the Executive Director. INQs deal with opinions previously addressed in public session by the Commission on Ethics or within the plain meaning of the County Ethics Code. RQOs are opinions provided by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust when the subject matter is of great public importance or where there is insufficient precedent. While these are informal opinions, covered parties that act contrary to the opinion may be referred to the Advocate for preliminary review or investigation and may be subject to a formal Complaint filed with the Commission on Ethics and Public Trust.