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News Release

For Immediate Release
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January 9, 2013
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Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics Issues 2012 Annual Report

The Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics (COE) has released its annual report for calendar year 2012. A complete copy of the report may be found on the COE website <http://www.palmbeachcountyethics.com/publications.htm>. The following information is contained in the annual report:

In 2012, COE staff processed 84 advisory opinions, 16 sworn complaints and 33 inquiries based on anonymous or attributed unsworn "tips" and other information provided by the citizens of Palm Beach County. Additionally, staff handled 58 advisory opinion requests by referring the requesting party to prior COE opinions directly addressing the submitted issues. The office hotline received 560 calls, and visits to the COE website exceeded 394,000 for the year. COE staff made 102 referrals to other local, state or federal governmental agencies. The COE is currently fully staffed with five full-time employees.

In 2012, COE staff participated in more than 40 live training sessions for public employees, officials, vendors and lobbyists, as well as 15 community presentations, forums, workshops and other events before civic and social organizations, nonprofits and professional associations. Staff completed a training compliance audit of the county and all municipalities. Eight entities were found to be not in compliance with the Code of Ethics. Currently, staff is working with municipalities to assist administrators in their establishment by policy of a mandatory training schedule for all public officials and employees. The audit results can be found on our website at <http://www.palmbeachcountyethics.com/audits.htm>

COE staff has asked the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners to proclaim March 7, 2013, Ethics Awareness Day. In addition to offering outreach programs throughout the month of March, the COE will present several public events to celebrate ethics within our community. Programs will be scheduled at the Palm Beach County Governmental Center and will include panel discussions, public Q & A, and an ethics bowl team demonstration by the winning teams selected by the Palm Beach County School Board to participate in the National Ethics Bowl finals.

On the legislative front, effective April 2012, a revised Lobbyist Registration Ordinance became effective in Palm Beach County and 35 of its municipalities. This ordinance regulates certain lobbying activities, sets forth registration requirements for lobbyists and their principals, and establishes rules and guidelines for annual mandatory lobbying expenditure reporting. Central registration and expenditure databases maintained by Palm Beach County Administration have been established and are accessible to the public.

Throughout 2012, the COE continued its efforts to save taxpayer dollars by utilizing cost saving initiatives such as the COE Volunteer Advocate Program in conjunction with the Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County. Former prosecutors and public defenders, now in private practice, continue to volunteer their time to process complaints before the Ethics Commission on a pro bono basis. This year, the Legal Aid Society will be recognizing two COE advocates for its 2012 Ethics in Government pro bono award. In regards to staff, operational and procurement costs, the COE continues to come in under budget, resulting in a fiscal year 2011-2012 savings of approximately \$70,000. A complete copy of the report may be found on the COE website: <http://www.palmbeachcountyethics.com/publications.htm>

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