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ELEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INSIDER PURCHASING SCAM COSTS COUNTY OVER \$100,000.

Miami – April 8, 2019

The Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office and Miami-Dade Police Department announce the charging of two individuals, a present employee and a former employee of the Miami-Dade County Animal Services Department (ASD), who allegedly were utilizing their position in the Animal Services Purchasing Department to enable vendors to receive payment for items that were ordered but not delivered. Both individuals allegedly profited from their actions.

Charged today were:

- Michael Garateix, a 12 year Miami-Dade County employee currently working as the Procurement Supervisor for the Miami-Dade County Animal Services Department, and
- Ralph Granja, a former 5 year Miami-Dade County employee who worked as a Buyer until September 26, 2018, for the Miami-Dade County Animal Services Department.

Garateix supervised Ralph Granja during the course of Granja's employment at ASD.

ASD personnel discovered potential improprieties in suspicious expenditures uncovered during a budgetary review and contacted the Miami-Dade Police Department Public Corruption Section to begin an investigation.

Despite having a complex series of computer checks and balances with various points of internal review within the ASD, the expenditures of sections of the Department were over budget. During the review process, invoices and payments for certain discontinued items were discovered. When the identified approving supervisor was questioned in regard to the purchase approval for the product, he advised that he did not request nor approve for the billed product because it was discontinued.

A review of the Department inventory revealed that the product had never been delivered to

the Animal Services Department. The police investigation revealed that some section supervisors were approving certain products outside the scope of their responsibility. The questionable computer purchase entries seemed to originate within the office used by Mr. Garateix and Mr. Granja.

Garateix and Granja had utilized the passwords of the facility, kennel, and clinic supervisors thereby obtaining the ability to approve purchases and bill invoices. This allegedly allowed Garateix and Granja to circumvent established procedures intended to prevent fraudulent invoices from getting paid. Both individuals allegedly received payment from a vendor for facilitating this process. Miami-Dade County was estimated to have lost in excess of \$100,000.00 in the approval of fraudulent invoices for Fiscal Years 2016 through 2018.

“The partnership between my prosecutors, the Miami-Dade Police Department, and the Miami-Dade Finance Department uncovered this employee theft case,” commented State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle. “No public employee should feel that they can get away with a theft by a few clicks of a computer keyboard. No theft will ever or can ever be tolerated.”

“This incident is a clear betrayal of the public’s trust. It is particularly disappointing when public employees use their position for personal financial gain. This serves as a reminder that the Miami-Dade Police Department and the Miami-Dade State Attorney’s Office will thoroughly investigate public corruption allegations in the pursuit of justice,” said Freddy Ramirez, Deputy Director of the Miami-Dade Police Department.

"The Animal Services Department (ASD) worked closely with the Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) in identifying this allegation," Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez said. "The ASD supported the MDPD and the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office with their investigation into the former Miami-Dade County employees. I am committed to fighting fraud and protecting our taxpayers' money."

Michael Garateix and Rafael Granja are charged with:

- 1 counts - Official Misconduct (3rd Degree Felony)
- 1 counts - Unlawful Compensation (3rd Degree Felony)
- 1 count - Organized Scheme to Defraud \$50,000.00 (First Degree Felony)
- 1 count - Grand Theft Over \$100,000.00 (First Degree Felony)

Michael Garateix is presently in custody and Rafael Granja remains at large.

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