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Office of the Inspector General
Miami-Dade County

Memorandum

To: The Honorable Alex Penelas, Mayor
Miami-Dade County

The Honorable Dr. Barbara Carey-Shuler, Chair
and Members of the Board of County Commissioners

From: Christopher Mazzella
Inspector General

Date: November 7, 2002.

Re: OIG Investigation of Fraud Against the MDHA and Housing Recipients.

Attached please find the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) Press Release regarding an OIG investigation of fraud perpetrated on the Miami-Dade Housing Agency (MDHA) and its Section 8 housing recipients. The press release issued today summarizes an investigation wherein the subject defendant, in essence, extorted Miami-Dade County housing recipients by threatening the loss of housing unless they paid extra money to the subject. These demands not only violate Section 8 program rules but also amount to criminal extortion. Charges were filed with the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office and the subject was arrested yesterday, November 6, 2002.

During the course of our investigation, it has come to my attention that these abuses are widespread and there is a general reluctance on the part of victims to report this type of criminal activity. The charges brought against this defendant involve victims from four separate commission districts. The victims and corresponding districts are outlined below:

Commissioner Dr. Barbara Carey-Shuler, Chair - District 3

Bernice Bautista - 575 NW 52 St., Miami, FL 33142 (Front)
Tawana Mullins - 575 NW 52 St., Miami, FL 33142 (Rear)
Linda Addison - 4736 NW 16 Ave., Miami, FL 33142

Commissioner Katy Sorenson, Vice-Chair - District 8

Shaneka Cowart - 13402 SW 116 PL., Miami, FL 33176

Commissioner Bruno A Barreiro – District 5

Annie L. Young - 1747 SW 4th St., Miami, FL 33135
Yasmin Heyaime - 1745 SW 4th St., Miami, FL 33135

Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson – District 1

Alizia Morris - 2470 NW 152 St., Miami, FL 33054
Keenila Spiller - 2471 NW 152 St., Miami, FL 33054

Although this specific case impacts four districts, I want to again reiterate that this is a county-wide problem. Therefore, I have enclosed the press releases and solicit your assistance in bringing public awareness to this serious matter. Perhaps through such efforts, other victims will report these abuses to my office.

Thank you for your assistance and continued support.

Cc: Mr. Steve Shiver, County Manager, Miami-Dade County

Ms. Barbara Jordan, Assistant County Manager, Miami-Dade County

Mr. Rene Rodriguez, Director, Miami-Dade Housing Agency

Clerk of the Board (copy filed)

Section 8 Housing Arrest

A scheme to defraud Miami-Dade County of Section 8 Housing funds and to extort money from residents receiving Section 8 Housing assistance was stopped by the Office of Inspector General after a lengthy investigation that resulted in the arrest of Yokasta Martinez, a Miami resident.

According to an affidavit filed by a Special Agent of the Office of Inspector General, Martinez, while acting as an authorized agent for Section 8 Housing property owners, threatened to throw families out of their residences if they did not pay her money in addition to their rent. Faced with the prospect of returning to a homeless shelter, one Section 8 tenant paid the extortion demands. Martinez is also charged with defrauding Miami-Dade County by requiring at least five Section 8 tenants to pay more rent than was authorized by Section 8 Housing regulations. Specifically, Martinez has been charged with one count of Organized Fraud/\$20,000 or More, Less Than \$50,000 in violation of s.817.034(4)(a)2 and two counts of Threats/Extortion in violation of s.836.05. Both charges are second-degree felonies.

The attached affidavit sets forth in detail the unlawful scheme and locations of the affected properties.

Inspector General Christopher Mazzella noted that in the course of this and other investigations, it has become apparent that residents receiving Section 8 Housing assistance are reluctant to report irregularities. Mr. Mazzella stressed the importance of reporting fraud that hurts our community and said his office is committed to investigating such misconduct expeditiously. He requests that complaints involving Section 8 Housing fraud is reported to his office either directly at (305) 375-1946, or through the Inspector General hotline telephone number (305) 579-2593.