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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

ETHICS COMMISSION INVESTIGATION LEADS TO GUILTY PLEA BY FORMER CORONER WILLIAM A. COX

An Ohio Ethics Commission investigation into the unethical conduct of the former Summit County Coroner William A. Cox culminated today when Cox pled guilty to two fourth degree felony counts of having an unlawful interest in a public contract. Cox also pled guilty to seven misdemeanors of the first degree for violating other ethics laws, including two counts of soliciting or accepting improper compensation, one count each of improper use of authority to secure a thing of value and improper solicitation and receipt of a thing of value, and three counts of failure to disclose sources and amounts of income.

The investigation resulting in guilty pleas involved allegations that, while he was Summit County Coroner, Cox personally profited from the use of Summit County facilities, resources, and personnel in autopsies contracted with other counties and through his private medical practice. While relevant statutes allow county coroners to perform such exams, the coroner is required to charge for the use of county facilities and personnel and deposit the funds into a special fund to purchase necessary costs for the laboratory and is prohibited from personally receiving compensation beyond the amount paid to reimburse the county.

According to David E. Freel, Executive Director of the Ohio Ethics Commission, "By entering these guilty pleas today, the former Summit County Coroner accepts responsibility for the unethical misuse of his office and the violation of the public trust that resulted. This plea hopefully represents a full resolution of this unethical conduct and may begin to restore public confidence in the actions of its public officeholders."

As a result of the guilty pleas, Cox is faced with possible maximum penalties of eighteen months imprisonment and/or a \$2500 fine on each of the two felony counts, and six months

in prison and/or a \$1000 fine on each of the seven misdemeanor counts. Cox is also barred from holding any public office, public employment, or a position of public trust for seven years, although a public agency may retain Cox to act as a physician or expert in the conduct of his medical practice. Cox also agreed, as a part of the plea agreement, that he will cooperate with, testify, and assist in the prosecution of any matter for which he was responsible as coroner at no charge to the county.

The guilty pleas resulted from an extensive investigation by the Ohio Ethics Commission. As a result of this investigation and those of the Summit County Sheriff and the Auditor of State, Robert D. Horowitz, the Stark County Prosecutor, was appointed special prosecutor and Paul Nick, the Ethics Commission's Investigative Counsel, was appointed Special Assistant Prosecutor.

The Ohio Ethics Commission is an independent agency of state government charged with interpreting and administering the Ohio Ethics Law for many state and local public officials and employees. The Commission has been serving the public, and state and local governments, since its formation as part of the Ohio Ethics Law in 1973.