

OHIO ETHICS COMMISSION
William Green Building
30 West Spring Street, L3
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2256



Telephone: (614) 466-7090
Fax: (614) 466-8368

www.ethics.ohio.gov

Press Release ***January 19, 1999***

For more information, contact:
Ohio Ethics Commission
(614) 466-7090

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

COLUMBUS COUNCILWOMAN FOUND GUILTY ON ETHICS CHARGE

Following a comprehensive investigation by the Ohio Ethics Commission, Les Wright, former Columbus City Councilwoman, entered a no contest plea today to a conflict of interest charge before Judge David Johnson of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas. Judge Johnson found Wright guilty of the criminal charge, and set sentencing for March 2, 1999. Wright entered into a plea agreement to resolve felony and misdemeanor charges against her referred by the Ohio Ethics Commission to the Franklin County Prosecutor. Wright's plea included her agreement to resign from office. The ethics charges were brought because Wright sponsored and voted for two grants totaling \$116,565 for Metropolitan Residential Services. Three weeks after receiving the second grant for \$59,285, MRS purchased a building co-owned by Wright and former City Council President Jerry Hammond.

"The Commission members were particularly troubled by the fact that, on four separate occasions, Councilwoman Wright voted in favor of grants to Metropolitan Residential Services, when she was aware that MRS was purchasing the property she owned," stated Santiago Feliciano, Jr., Chair of the Ohio Ethics Commission. The Commission recommended referring the case to Franklin County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien on December 4, 1998. "The case is a textbook conflict of interest situation because the council member chose to remain blind to the conflict caused by her own financial interests," Feliciano stated.

"The purpose of the Ethics Law is to prevent this kind of conflict of interest from occurring, or to assure that the conduct is punished if it does take place," explained David Freel, Executive Director of the Ethics Commission. "Ultimately, the Ethics Law protects the public's interest by insuring the fair and impartial actions of public servants."

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.