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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

FORMER COLUMBUS PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR SENTENCED FOR ETHICS VIOLATIONS

Former Columbus school administrator, Sherry Bird Long, was sentenced Friday before Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Judge David E. Cain, to five years probation, 100 hours of community service, and fulfillment of a plea agreement to pay restitution of \$203,000 stemming from an illegal scheme she created for her family to do business with the schools. Of the amount, \$196,000 is payable to the Columbus Board of Education. In addition, Bird Long is prohibited from seeking or accepting public employment for seven years from the date of sentencing. Bird Long pled guilty on September 14, 2001, to one felony count of having an unlawful interest in a public contract and one misdemeanor count of unauthorized use of property, a theft-related offense.

Bird Long served as Instructional Information Services Director for Columbus Public Schools from January 1998 to April 2001. An investigation by the Ohio Ethics Commission revealed that Bird Long misused her public position with the Columbus schools by setting up a family business, E Z Enterprises, to do work for the schools over an 18-month period. The investigation found that Bird Long personally profited from the work she herself approved and hid her involvement from independent oversight. Bird Long used E Z Enterprises to set up computers and furniture purchased from the Dell Computer Company pursuant to an earlier school contract and installation agreement.

Ohio's Ethics Law prohibits a public official from self-dealing with their public agency and from using their position to authorize purchases or services for themselves, a family member, or a business associate. "The Ethics Commission determined factually that this was not some technical violation, and was extremely troubled by the defendant's on-going actions," said David E. Freel, Executive Director of the Ohio Ethics Commission. The Commission investigation found that \$235,000 paid by the Columbus schools to E Z Enterprises, was deposited into an account used by Bird Long to pay her and other family members, and for other family expenses, including a sport-utility vehicle and vacation

purchases in the Bahamas.

"The defendant personally profited from a hidden scheme for her and her husband to do school district work," Freel stated. "She used her position to set up the deal, then continued it far beyond any argument of immediate need. She created business invoices, then took them to her office and authorized them for payment. She hid her and her husband's ties to the business from officials, and in the end, even secured a \$20,000 advance of school money to the business."

Once the arrangement was uncovered in April 2001, Bird Long paid back the final \$20,000 year-end advance and fully cooperated with investigators. Bird Long has paid approximately half of the restitution, with moneys going to the Columbus Board of Education and \$6,500 to the Ethics Commission to pay the costs of its investigation.

The Ethics Commission is an independent agency of state government charged with investigating alleged criminal violations of Ohio's Ethics Law for most 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.