

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

July 8, 2004

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

COTA OFFICIAL RESIGNS AND AGREES TO RESTITUTION

Former COTA Board Member Ernest Sullivan has agreed to permanently resign from his consulting arrangement with COTA, and together with General Manager Ronald Barnes, will pay back all compensation that Sullivan received during his hire as a consultant. That arrangement generated an investigation by the Ohio Ethics Commission under state Ethics Laws.

In an agreement secured by the Ethics Commission, COTA officials, Sullivan and Barnes, admit that Sullivan's hire violated Ethics Laws, and both Sullivan and Barnes agree to share the cost of full restitution of taxpayers' funds used to pay for the consulting contract. Under the agreement, the Ethics Commission will not recommend misdemeanor prosecution of the violations as long as the terms of the agreement are fulfilled, but will conduct an ethics educational session for the COTA Board and senior staff.

David E. Freel, Executive Director of the Ethics Commission, stated, "COTA has acknowledged that this hire was a conflict of interest and a violation of the Ethics Law. The Ethics Law serves to protect the public's interest and the Commission entered into this agreement to assure all taxpayers' money is returned to COTA."

The employment violated restrictions against conflicts of interest because prior to Sullivan's resignation from the publicly funded COTA Board, Sullivan discussed and agreed to his appointment as Vice President of Transformation Technology. These discussions occurred

while Sullivan was involved as a member of the Board in the development of the job's goals and objectives. The agreement also violated public contract provisions which prohibit a public official from using his public authority to secure employment services for the public entity he serves.

"We're pleased to have this matter resolved," Barnes said. "COTA is committed to meeting the letter and spirit of the law, and that is reflected in this settlement."

Former COTA Board member, Ernest Sullivan, commented, "I feel good about resolving this matter with the Ohio Ethics Commission. COTA's mission is a vital one and I hope my contributions to affect 1.2 million dollars in cost savings will lead to more constructive actions."

The Ethics Commission opened this investigation in May, upon public allegations of an Ethics Law violation, and after the Chairman of the COTA Board of Trustees asked the Commission to examine the matter. COTA fully cooperated with the Commission's examination. Copies of the agreement are available from the Ethics Commission.

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.

