



Press Release ***October 8, 2008***

For more information, contact:

Paul M. Nick
Chief Investigative Attorney
(614) 466-7090

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

DELAWARE COUNTY COMMISSIONER VIOLATED ETHICS LAW

Delaware County Commissioner James D. Ward was found guilty on Tuesday, October 7, 2008 of a criminal conflict of interest ethics violation upon his no contest plea before visiting Judge William Finnegan of Marion County for misusing his county-issued cell phone over three years on non-government calls for his private car sales business.

Pursuant to a plea agreement with prosecutors, Judge Finnegan ordered Ward to pay a \$500 fine on the first degree misdemeanor and also to pay \$1000 in restitution to the Delaware County General Fund for his misuse of the county-issued phone.

Delaware County Prosecutor David Yost had forwarded to the Ethics Commission information he had received that Ward used his county cell phone as the phone contact on a campaign fundraising invitation, which led to the examination of the Ward's misuse of the county phone. The Commission's investigation found that Ward received a county-issued cell phone in 2003. In 2004, Ward deactivated his home telephone line, gave a personal cell phone he then had paid for to his son, and began using the county-issued cell phone as his only telephone for his private car sales business. County policies limited private use and required reimbursement for non-county calls. The Commission's investigation totaled the value to Ward of his non-official use of the phone to over \$2000.

Delaware County Common Pleas Judge Everett Krueger appointed Franklin County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien, his assistants David Buchman and Steven Schierholt, and Ethics Commission Chief Investigative Attorney Paul M. Nick as Special Prosecutors on the case. Prosecutors and the Commission also examined allegations that Ward used his position as a County Commissioner to obtain a county job for his son, but found there was insufficient evidence to determine that Ward violated the Ethics Law.

The Ohio Ethics Commission was created thirty-five years ago, in 1973, when the Ethics Law was enacted. The Commission is an independent state oversight agency, charged with administering the Ethics Law to promote ethics in public service and to strengthen the public's confidence that Government business is conducted with impartiality and integrity, apart from personal and business conflicts to the public interest. The Commission has jurisdiction over the majority of public servants at local and state levels.