



miami-dade election reform coalition

April 29, 2003

Via FAX

The Honorable Dr. Barbara Carey-Shuler
and the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners
Stephen P. Clark Center
111 N.W. 1st Street, Suite 220
Miami, Florida 33128

Dear Chairwoman Dr. Barbara Carey-Shuler and Members of the Board of County Commissioners:

The Miami-Dade Election Reform Coalition (MDERC) writes to express its deep concern about the recent reorganization of top positions within the Elections Department and implications of the reorganization on the integrity of the national search process to hire a new Supervisor of Elections.

We believe the Miami-Dade County Manager and the Elections Department have subverted the will of the citizens by conducting a "national search" for a new Supervisor of Elections while at the same time reorganizing the Elections Department to create a new Director of Elections position to which the new Supervisor will be co-equal or subordinate.

The search for the next Supervisor of Elections was intended to bring a new vision to an Elections Department plagued by recent scandals. This new position was to be responsible for the daily operations of the Department and to lead the Department into a "new elections era" for Miami-Dade County. The *sub rosa* creation of a new Elections Department position that is co-equal to or above the Supervisor of Elections undermines the very goal that the search process, including the appointment of a search committee, set out to achieve.

The reorganization of the Elections Department is troubling for several reasons. Not only does it make the process of the national search for a new Supervisor of Elections seem a façade, but also it leaves the citizens of this County with an Elections Department that is much more likely to maintain the status-quo of County elections administration. After the debacles of the Presidential Election of 2000, the Primary election of September 2002, and the enormously expensive elections of November 2002, we believe that the management of elections in our County needs new blood. It appears that the recent reorganization of the Department was intended to ensure maintenance of the status quo despite the ongoing search process.

The background on this unfortunate outcome is as follows. After the resignation of David Leahy as Supervisor of Elections, a committee was selected to locate a qualified candidate to replace him. Under the direction of Mr. Leahy this group met several times over the course of months, reviewing resumes. Subsequent to this, MDERC sources in the Elections Department reported that meetings were held on April 2nd or 3rd with Elections Department personnel, informing the staff that Mr. Leahy had hand-picked his successor and that she would not be in a position to institute any changes, as she would be reporting to the newly created position of Director of Elections. This position was to be filled by Lester Sola. It was understood by the community and the selection committee that Mr. Sola was to serve as the interim Supervisor until a new Supervisor was selected. He neither applied for nor was considered for the position of Supervisor of Elections.

The selection committee conducted candidate interviews on April 24, 2003. During these interviews one candidate asked about the chain of command in the Elections Department, leading to a discussion of the new and undefined Director of Elections position. Assistant County Manager Alicia Cuervo-Schreiber described the new position as being equal or superior to the Supervisor post, though she indicated that the exact hierarchy had not yet been determined. The new structure would be defined based on the final candidate selected. This statement of hierarchy was a surprise to members of the selection committee, as the job description upon which the search was based listed the position thus: "General direction is received from the County Manager[.]" The creation of this new position causes a change in the job description for the Supervisor's position, without notification to the selection committee charged with working to fill the position.

From the creation of a sham selection process that included community participation in order to calm public outrage, to the redefining of Departmental hierarchy during the interview process, to the announcement to Elections staff that no change will be forthcoming, it is clear that the leadership of the Department engaged in deception at all stages of this process. The MDERC, representing a varied constituency of County residents, had hoped that Mr. Leahy's resignation, together with the selection of a candidate from outside the current rank and file of the Elections Department, would lead to real change and a renewed sense of commitment to the voters of Miami-Dade County.

We feel confident that the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners shares our vision of making Miami-Dade County not only a leader in our state, but also a leader nationally in elections administration. We also know that the Commission shares our concern that all voters be able to cast their ballots and have their votes counted. Leaders within the County Elections Department leadership have all too often failed to achieve those goals.

We ask that the Commission initiate a formal inquiry into the reorganization of the Elections Department and its implications for the search for a new Supervisor. The investigation should commence immediately so that both the citizens of our County and the selected candidate for the Supervisor's post have the opportunity to learn more about the Department's reorganization process before a final decision is made. The investigation should be conducted as expeditiously as possible with the results reported to the Board of County Commissioners with time provided for public comment.

We look forward to your timely response to this urgent need. Thank you very much for your dedication to effective government in our County.

Sincerely,

/S/

Cheryl Roberts, MDERC Communications Director
on behalf of the Miami-Dade Election Reform Coalition