



Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com>

Fraud report Response

Christopher Weber <cweber@keyssao.org>

Thu, Feb 8, 2018 at 8:59 AM

To: Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com>

Cc: Dennis Ward <dward@keyssao.org>, Shillinger-Bob <Shillinger-Bob@monroecounty-fl.gov>

Ms.Blank:

The Sunshine law or Ch 119 FS, is quite detailed in the requirements of public entities regarding the retention and dissemination of public records. It also spells out the remedies for the failure of agencies in complying with the same. Available remedies for refusal to provide a record include, voluntary mediation, civil action and also the possibility of criminal sanctions if there is evidence of a public official "*knowingly*" violating the provisions of Ch 119 F.S. From my experience a civil action is the most common in gaining compliance.

While the Office of the State Attorney has certainly been active in assisting those individuals who feel that there have been violations of Ch 119 FS. Most, if not all of the time, it is due to people not receiving a timely reply to their request. With that in mind, when I received your complaint I followed up with the County Attorney immediately. The assurances made by that office that they are compiling the records is all I can expect at this point.

Criminal complaints made to this division are followed up on the basis of evidence presented that would indicate a violation of Florida Criminal Statute having had occurred. Mere accusations or allegations without a basis for follow-up are treated accordingly.

Should you have any information that the County Attorney or the Clerk of Court is holding records "*knowingly*" failing to provide them, please let me know. In addition, should you have evidence of a violation of criminal statute I would be happy to speak with you.

Respectfully,

Christopher Weber, Chief Investigator

State Attorney 16th Judicial Circuit

530 Whitehead St. Suite 201

Office 305-292-3509

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On Wed, Feb 7, 2018 at 4:49 PM, Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com> wrote:

I don't put much faith in the county's assurances, and if you are a credible law enforcement official then neither should you.

I know for a fact that the state attorneys office investigates public records complaints because an investigator came to question me when I worked at the District. That was initiated by a citizen complaint. Nothing came of it because the records the person wanted did not exist. The records I request do exist. SHARK was required by contract to provide them.

There's also that whole thing with Amy Heavilin's deleted emails. Wasn't Bob Shillinger the one who initiated that?

Whether an investigation happens or not sure seems to depend on who's complaining about who. How do you decide whose complaints to pursue and who is told to go away and file a lawsuit?

This is far from the first time the county has been unable or unwilling to produce public records they absolutely should have. It's an ongoing issue.

Bob Shillinger sent me documents that demonstrate county employees and contractors know, or should know, all about their legal obligations to the public. They just don't take those obligations very seriously. And why should they? There are clearly no consequences if they don't.

Please remember the animal control RFP that started this round of questioning will cost the taxpayers an additional \$175,000 per year. Every year. There is real financial damage caused by the county's negligence, stupidity, dishonesty, carelessness, malfeasance, fraud, whatever it is they're trying to hide. That one shady contract dwarfs the \$764 Chantel Winters stole from the transit system. Never mind, the millions squandered on questionable capital projects.

Best,

Margaret Blank

On Wed, Feb 7, 2018 at 11:14 AM, Christopher Weber <cweber@keyssao.org> wrote:

Ms. Blank:

I have been in contact with Assistant County Attorney Tricia Eables regarding your public records request. Ms. Eables assures me the County Attorney's Office is making every effort in complying with that request in a timely manner. Litigation to compel a response from Monroe County is certainly an option you have at your disposal should they fail to comply.

Respectfully,

Chris Weber

Christopher Weber, Chief Investigator

State Attorney 16th Judicial Circuit

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On Sat, Feb 3, 2018 at 12:28 PM, Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mr. Weber;

You've made it abundantly clear that you have no intention of looking into the suspicious procurement process that netted the FKSPCA an additional \$175,000 to do the same job they are already doing - running the Marathon animal shelter.

However, your reluctance to do your job doesn't make the situation any less questionable. Nor does it reduce the financial harm done to the taxpayers.

In an effort to research the 70% price increase, I requested several documents from Monroe County. The county has failed to provide the two most useful and important documents - audited financial statements from SHARK for 2014 and 2015. These documents would have provided information on how much it cost to run the shelter immediately before FKSPCA took over.

At this point, it would seem that county officials are failing to comply with the legal requirement to properly maintain public records and/or respond to public records requests. Therefore, I would like the state attorneys office to look into this matter. In case you're interested, additional details can be found [here](#).

Thanks in advance,

Margaret Blank

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Margaret Blank** <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com>
Date: Fri, Dec 1, 2017 at 7:31 PM
Subject: Re: Fraud report Response
To: Christopher Weber <cweber@keyssao.org>

Lol. Okay. It sounds like you copied and pasted an email from Bob Shillinger so I'll copy and paste my response to him.

Ahhh...only one animal shelter operator downloaded the RFP and nobody rethought the advertising strategy? You got one bidder - the same shelter operator you have now only they're asking \$175,000 more for the same job they're already doing. Nobody thought to reject the bid and re-advertise? Did anyone check out similar bids to see who submitted? Did anyone call around to see who else might be interested? Did anyone research what other governments pay for similar sized operations? Was there any reality check whatsoever?

How about the fact that the Marathon shelter will receive twice as much per animal as the other two shelters? Why is that? Did anybody bother to ask? Or were the shady commissioners too anxious to rush this through?

What about HACC's abysmal performance? Why would you put an RFP out for services at a shelter that's running fine but not do so for a failing shelter? Are there any performance metrics at all?

You must realize this reeks of collusion/bid rigging. And so soon after all those egregious ethics violations.

I don't care how many subscribers Demandstar has, you failed the taxpayers again. Not that you care.

Btw, companies that use Demandstar to look for bid opportunities have to pay a subscription. Your typical animal shelter operator isn't going to be cruising Demandstar. The county knows this (unless they're even stupider than I think they are). Demandstar is mostly for contractors - as in construction contractors. Look at the companies on the plan holder list. With the exception of FKSPCA they're all construction-related.

So if the county truly wanted to reach as many qualified bidders as possible for this particular RFP, they can't count on Demandstar to get the word out. The only other places they advertised were the Citizen and Keynoter/Reporter. Again, that's not enough reach to secure a competitive bid on this RFP. It shows in the end result. We pay 70% more for the same contractor to do the same job they're already doing. I suppose you could boil it down to simple incompetence, but nobody could really be this stupid.

It seems that your main concern is whether the county followed the letter of the law in advertising the bid - not the fact that there are enormous red flags waving all over the place. That being the case, perhaps you should look into the sale of the Hickory House. The taxpayers took \$1 million loss on that one.

Best,

Margaret Blank

On Fri, Dec 1, 2017 at 9:00 AM, Christopher Weber <cweber@keyssao.org> wrote:

Ms.Blank:

Thank you for your recent report regarding the animal shelter and the bid process. I made inquiries into the process and according to received records, it appears that the RFP was initiated through the proper channels.

Over 700 vendors reviewed the request for bids and six downloaded and reviewed the RFP and responding to same.

Respectfully,

Christopher Weber, Chief Investigator

State Attorney 16th Judicial Circuit
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