

**BEFORE THE FLORIDA
JUDICIAL QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION**

INQUIRY CONCERNING A JUDGE,
THE HONORABLE MARIA ORTIZ
JQC NO. 2018-63

SC18- _____

STIPULATION

In this disciplinary proceeding, the Investigative Panel of the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission and Judge Maria Ortiz of the 11th Judicial Circuit, present the following stipulation to this Court pursuant to Article V, Section 12 of the Florida Constitution, and Rule 6(j) of the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission's Rules ("FJQC Rules").

Under FJQC Rule 6(j), the Investigative Panel "may reach agreement with a judge on discipline or disability," and the Supreme Court has the discretion to accept or reject the terms of the Stipulation.

In this case, after reviewing the available evidence, and questioning the Respondent Judge under oath, the Investigative Panel has determined that probable cause exists to support the allegations brought forth in the Notice of Formal Charges filed concurrently with this Stipulation and incorporated herewith by reference.

Judge Ortiz, through her counsel, agrees that by failing to report and disclose the receipt of free accommodations at an all-inclusive resort she violated the Code

of Judicial Conduct, and hereby submits this Stipulation together with the Commission, for the Court's review.

1. At all times relevant to this inquiry, Judge Ortiz and her husband maintained a joint bank account into which both of their paychecks were deposited. Judge Ortiz and her husband also maintained separate, individually held, credit cards.
2. On three occasions, between August 2015 and September 2016, Judge Ortiz benefitted from free hotel accommodations provided to her husband by the RIU Hotel Group.
 - a. Between August 7, 2015 and August 9, 2015, Judge Ortiz and her husband stayed free-of-charge in an Ocean Front double room at the Riu Miami Beach Hotel. During this stay, the Hotel provided Judge Ortiz and her husband with a complimentary food basket and bottle of wine. Judge Ortiz acknowledges that she did not make any inquiry into whether, or how, this trip was paid for.
 - b. Between September 3, 2015, and September 7, 2015, Judge Ortiz and her husband stayed free-of-charge, in a standard jacuzzi suite at the RIU Palace Bavaro All-Inclusive Resort, in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. The Hotel also arranged for a special excursion, a trip to

the VIP area of the famous Coco-Bongo Show and Disco. This excursion was provided free-of-charge.

- c. Between September 1, 2016, and September 5, 2016, Judge Ortiz and her husband stayed free-of-charge, in an Ocean Jacuzzi Suite at the RIU Palace All-Inclusive Resort in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. Several acquaintances and family friends of Judge Ortiz and her husband, as well as numerous other members of their travel group, consisting of city employees and their relatives and friends, received large discounts on their room and board. The Hotel, again, arranged for a special VIP excursion, another VIP trip to the Coco-Bongo Show and Disco.
3. Judge Ortiz now admits and acknowledges that she failed to report the free trips and accommodations as required on her Form 6A, in violation of the Canons. The Respondent states that she relied on her husband to maintain the finances of the household, and that he filled out her disclosure forms, which she signed without checking to see if the information was accurate. Judge Ortiz acknowledges that she failed to take any steps to verify that the information on the forms was “true, accurate, and complete” as the oath on the disclosure requires.

4. The Commission and Judge Ortiz further acknowledge and agree that while the Respondent's conduct may not have been intentional, her indifference to, or ignorance of, her personal finances, nonetheless, created the appearance of impropriety which could have been avoided if she had taken reasonable steps to inquire into the financing of the trips, and had maintained a closer accounting of her finances.
5. With the exception of the present matter, Judge Ortiz has maintained an exemplary record while serving on the Miami-Dade County bench since 2004, and as a Judge of Compensation Claims from 1997 until 2004.
6. Judge Ortiz expressed sincere remorse and took responsibility for her failures. She assured the Investigative Panel of the Commission that she will amend her previously filed reports related to the benefits she received and failed to report, and henceforth prepare by herself, or with the assistance of a CPA, all future required disclosure forms.
7. The parties acknowledge and understand that this Stipulation, and Findings and Recommendations of Discipline may be rejected by the Court, and in that event this matter may be returned to the Hearing Panel for a final plenary hearing. In such event, the parties agree that none of the statements in the Stipulation (or the attached Findings and Recommendations of Discipline) are admissible in that hearing for any purpose. The parties

further agree that none of the negotiations related to this Stipulation are admissible for any purpose.

8. The parties believe that oral argument before this Court is not necessary in light of the record, the nature of the charges, the contents of this Stipulation, and the attached Findings and Recommendation of Discipline. Judge Ortiz waives her right to further hearings if they are accepted.

Dated this 4th day of May, 2018

**INVESTIGATIVE PANEL OF THE FLORIDA JUDICIAL
QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION**

By: _____

Alexander John Williams
ASSISTANT GENERAL COUNSEL
TO THE FJQC
Florida Bar No. 99225
PO Box 14106
Tallahassee, FL 32317
(850) 488-1581
awilliams@floridajqc.com

Hon. Maria Ortiz
COUNTY JUDGE, MIAMI-DADE
COUNTY

David Rothman, Esquire
COUNSEL FOR JUDGE ORTIZ