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ELECTIONEERING CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST WATER DEPT. SUPERVISOR

City Inspector General puts City workers "on notice" about campaigning on City time

CHICAGO – City of Chicago Inspector General David Hoffman today announced criminal charges against Lester Cioch, a supervisor in the City's Water Department, for violating the election laws.

Mr. Cioch was arrested yesterday at his worksite by police officers with the Inspector General's Office and was charged in a criminal complaint with violating state and municipal ethics laws relating to political activity. According to the complaint, Mr. Cioch solicited signatures—some from people he supervised—on nominating petitions for Mayor Daley's campaign while on City time at his City worksite at 3901 South Ashland.

The Inspector General's Office ("IGO") was alerted to this violation by Water Department management, who received a complaint about Mr. Cioch doing political work on City time. They promptly forwarded the complaint to the IGO. The IGO also received the same complaint from a caller to its tipline – 866-IG-TIPLINE (866-448-4754).

In advance of the February 27, 2007 municipal elections, Hoffman today warned that the IGO and the Election Fraud Section of the State's Attorneys' Office will jointly be acting as watchdogs to ensure that the integrity of the process is not compromised by City employees violating the election laws.

Hoffman spoke of two key rules relating to the election:

1. *It is illegal to coerce or pressure a City employee to perform political work.*

Addressing City employees, Hoffman said, "You have the absolute right to be uninvolved. You have the right to be apolitical. If you don't want to do political work, you don't have to. If you feel pressure to do political work, we want you to call us. We stand ready to investigate."

"Your job as a City worker obligates you to do your job for the taxpayers. Period. It does not obligate you to do political work for any elected official or candidate," said Hoffman. "And if anyone makes you believe that your job or wages depend on doing political work, that is simply wrong. If you believe your right to be apolitical is being violated, we want you to give us a call so that we can look into the matter. That is one of the reasons our office is here – to protect the rights of City workers who do not want to do political work."

Hoffman warned supervisors and other managers: "Asking someone who reports to you to do political work can easily be seen as coercive. After all, you control many aspects of their employment. The bottom line is that no City worker should be doing political work unless it is a truly voluntary act on their part."

2. *City workers who choose to do political work are strictly prohibited from doing so on City time, or with City property.*

"While City workers are at work, they are being paid to work for the taxpayers, not a candidate. Doing political work on City time means that the City worker is stealing from the taxpayers. We the taxpayers pay City employees to work for us – to do their jobs. We do not pay them to do election work. They must not mix City work and election work. This is strictly prohibited. City workers also may not be pressured to do election work. Their job and its benefits do not depend on doing election work. Conditioning job security or job advancement on political work is simply illegal." Hoffman said.

Mr. Cioch was a precinct captain with the 32nd Ward Regular Democratic Organization. In early December, he was asked by the ward organization to obtain signatures on nominating petitions for Mayor Daley's campaign. According to the complaint, Mr. Cioch took the petitions to work, where he obtained signatures from more than 40 City workers.

The Inspector General's Office interviewed several employees who were directly supervised by Mr. Cioch, and who said that Mr. Cioch asked them to sign the nominating petitions at the Water Department. Some of the employees were asked to sign the petitions when they went to Mr. Cioch's desk to sign the mandatory sign-in sheet. As alleged in the complaint, one employee supervised by Mr. Cioch was asked to sign the petitions twice and refused. Mr. Cioch then asked a third time. On this last occasion, Mr. Cioch said that he really needed the favor. After all of this pushing from Mr. Cioch, the employee relented and signed the petition.

The petitions submitted by Mr. Cioch ultimately were not filed by the Daley campaign, apparently because they were rejected by the campaign for an unknown reason before the overall petitions were filed. "Petition signing might seem a more innocuous form of political activity when compared to more time-consuming acts of campaigning. "But one of the messages of today's charges is that we and the State's Attorney's Office take any mixing of City work and political work very seriously. The integrity of our City workforce and our democratic process demands that political work be strictly separated from City work, and that acts of political support not be based on pressure or coercion."

Hoffman was joined at the press conference by Ron Huberman, Chief of Staff to Mayor Daley, and Lynn McCarthy, head of the Election Fraud Section of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

"We take these crimes very seriously and we are ready to prosecute whenever they are uncovered," said McCarthy. "We will be working closely with the Inspector General's Office to ensure fairness and integrity in this year's election."

"We take any mixing of City work and political work very seriously. The integrity of our City workforce and our democratic process demands that political work be strictly separated from City work, and that acts of political support not be based on pressure or coercion," said Hoffman.

Hoffman urged City employees and other citizens with knowledge of electioneering violations, to call the IGO's confidential tipline: "One of the benefits of this office is that we are independent of the rest of City government and our investigations are confidential by law. All complaints to our office are confidential. To those who believe in the importance of integrity in elections, we ask you to give us a call if you believe the rules are being violated."

Langdon D. Neal, Chairman of the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago said, "The Board discourages any type of political or election work being performed on government time. The Board cooperates and works closely with the Inspector General's office to provide information regarding city workers who engage in such political activity as circulating nominating petitions; inspection of the Board's voter registration records; and, nominating petition objection hearings. The Chicago Election Board requires persons engaged in inspecting its records to register with this office. There should be no question in any city's employee's mind that political work on government time is illegal. To ensure impartiality of its staff, the Board of Election Commissioners prohibits any type of political activity, no matter when it occurs."

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