

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

--MEMORANDUM--



TO: Members of the City Commission

FROM: Commissioner Melissa Castro

DATE: February 19, 2025

SUBJECT: Request for Reconsideration of the Appointment of Ben Alvarez to the Code Enforcement Board

Dear Colleagues,

As public servants, we have the responsibility to make decisions that protect the integrity of our city and uphold the trust placed in us by our residents. It is with this duty in mind that I respectfully raise my concerns regarding Resolution No. D.-1. 25-8660, which seeks to appoint Mr. Ben Alvarez to the Code Enforcement Board for the remainder of a three-year term.

This is not a position I take lightly, nor is it one I raise with any sense of personal malintent toward Mr. Alvarez. I have no relationship with him and, to my knowledge, have never met or spoken with him. My sole responsibility is to advocate for the well-being of our residents and ensure that those serving in positions of public trust meet the highest ethical and professional standards.

The Importance of This Role

The Code Enforcement Board plays a critical role in upholding our city's quality of life. Its members must be fair, impartial, and above all, committed to enforcing our city's laws with integrity and transparency. Given the significance of this responsibility, we must ensure that appointees to this board not only meet the technical qualifications but also embody the values and ethical standards that Coral Gables represents.

This is a Matter of Fact, Not Allegation

The concerns I am raising are not based on speculation, hearsay, or political motives. Rather, they stem from public records, legal rulings, and formal Florida Bar and Miami Dade Commission on Ethics disciplinary actions that call into question Mr. Alvarez's suitability for this role. These include:

- **Florida Bar Disciplinary Actions:** Mr. Alvarez has been disciplined at least 3 times by the Florida Bar, including being admonished in 2017 for threatening his spouse and physically confronting her and grabbing her phone in divorce proceedings (SC15-872), suspended 30 days for disparaging opposing counsel (SC22-1530), and publicly reprimanded for misrepresenting under oath, obstruction of evidence, and financial mismanagement of a matter involving his client Manny Chamizo (SC09-217). [09-217 ROR ada.pdf](#).
- **Judicial Findings of Misconduct:** His actions have led to case dismissals and court-ordered financial penalties. [09-217 ROR ada.pdf](#).
- **Ethics Investigations:** A Miami-Dade Ethics Commission investigation found a serious appearance of impropriety after his firm received city work under questionable circumstances. [Ethics Investigation.pdf](#)
- **Legal and Financial Issues:** In 2012, a judge ruled against his firm in a fraud case involving forged documents, requiring more than \$82,000 in restitution. [Restitution.pdf](#)

These are not mere accusations; they are established facts with documented consequences.

My Commitment to a Respectful and Fair Process

As I raise these concerns, I want to be clear: I take no pleasure in bringing forward information that could cause embarrassment to Mr. Alvarez. He is a resident of Coral Gables, and like all members of our community, he deserves to be treated with respect. That is why I am addressing this privately among my colleagues first, rather than allowing it to become a public matter unnecessarily.

However, I cannot, in good conscience, remain silent when I believe an appointment poses a risk to the integrity of our governance. I believe in due process and fairness, and I strongly believe that every individual is innocent until proven guilty. Unfortunately, in Mr. Alvarez's case, the legal system has already determined guilt on multiple occasions.

Additionally, City Clerk, Billy Urquia, will send you an email containing all police reports related to Mr. Alvarez. Please treat this information with utmost confidentiality, as it pertains to sensitive details of private individuals. I kindly request that you refrain from leaking or sharing this information, as my intention is to handle this matter discreetly and protect all parties involved.

A Respectful Request for Reconsideration

With these concerns in mind, I respectfully ask the sponsor of this resolution to reconsider this appointment before it reaches a public discussion before the full Commission.

I would much prefer to resolve this matter privately and professionally rather than having to present the full scope of these issues in a public forum, where Mr. Alvarez may feel unfairly scrutinized. I genuinely wish to spare him any undue stress or embarrassment. However, as a representative of our residents, I cannot ignore the factual evidence that raises legitimate concerns about his ability to serve in this role.

I hope we can come to a resolution that is fair, professional, and in the best interest of our city. I deeply appreciate your time and consideration.

Due to Sunshine Law requirements, please note that this memo should be considered one-way communication and does not invite discussion or response. I am not available for further discussion on this matter outside of a public meeting.

Sincerely,
Melissa Castro
Commissioner, City of Coral Gables