Wayne County administrators charged

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and IRS Special Agent in Charge Criminal Investigation Erick Martinez.

"As this investigation continues to unfold it is imperative that anyone with knowledge of potential illegal activity within Wayne County government come forward immediately," Arena said. "In addition, anyone who knowingly acts to obstruct justice in this case will be found and prosecuted. As always, assistance and cooperation from citizens and employees of Wayne County remains a key part of the investigation."

"Following the money trail is crucial to uncovering all of the facts in this investigation," Martinez said. "The taxpayers of Wayne County deserve public officials who are honest and not lured by greed,"

A complaint is only a charge and not evidence of guilt. Trial cannot be held on felony charges in a complaint. When the investigation is completed, a determination will be made whether to seek a felony indictment.

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Ordinance to prevent secret payouts for county appointees approved

An ordinance to prevent county employees from getting secret, big-money deals was approved Thursday by the Wayne County Commission.

Introduced by Commission Chairman Gary Woronchak (D-13th District), the ordinance requires commission approval for any benefit to a county employee beyond their regular, established salary and normal benefits.

"No longer will any county employee be granted any extraordinary payout without there being full public knowledge and scrutiny," Woronchak said. "And that means they just won't happen, because I don't believe the Commission would have approved any number of special deals that were put in place without our knowledge over the past few years.

"Appointees have been enriched, lucrative severance payments promised and special policies created for individuals on the whim of the executive branch, without any public awareness," Woronchak said.

Commissioners were outraged last fall upon learning that former county economic development director Turkia Mullin had been given a $200,000 severance payment upon voluntarily leaving her county job to become chief executive officer at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport. Mullin returned the money at the request of County Executive Robert Ficano in the wake of a strong public outcry, and later was fired from the airport job.

Gary Woronchak

Scrutiny of the severance payment, which included a Special Committee on Appointee Compensation formed by Woronchak, led to revelations that several other special deals had benefitted high-level county appointees without the Commission's knowledge.

"We have found out that the severance payment to the former economic development director was, unfortunately, not an isolated event," Woronchak said. "Instead, it was just the latest in a line of big-money, behind the scenes deals for top-level appointees in an administration that apparently believed it could do whatever it wanted with taxpayer dollars.

"I'm sure the administration can offer some legal rationale for most of the deals, but the point is that taxpayers had no way of knowing or judging these deals, because they were done without anyone outside of the administration knowing about them.

"In a system of government that was created with checks and balances to prevent abuses of authority, the administration has acted independently of any such encumbrances in these matters," Woronchak added.

Among the examples of special deals made without Commission approval cited by Woronchak were:

- Former Deputy County Executive Azzam Elder had a notarized document signed by Ficano in March 2009 promising him a separation payment in the $300,000 range, along with enhanced retirement benefits.
- Former economic development director Mulu Birru was given a $200,000 severance payment upon leaving his position in early 2009.
- In December 2010, the administration created an Executive Benefit Plan that included a new, lucrative benefit for appointees. Any who left the county by April 1, 2011 would get a separation payment of up to 24 weeks of pay, and around 40 took advantage of this departure bonus. This was not done in secret, since it was in the published benefit plan. But it was done without check and balance, as the administration holds that Commission approval is not required for their appointee benefit plan.

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