

Orange property appraiser settles legal dispute linked to predecessor, Rick Singh

By [STEPHEN HUDAK](#) | shudak@orlandosentinel.com | Orlando Sentinel
PUBLISHED: July 22, 2022 at 1:29 p.m. | UPDATED: July 25, 2022 at 3:24 p.m.

Three top advisors to former Orange County Property Appraiser Rick Singh, who he promised exit packages totaling over \$300,000, settled a dispute over the deals for about \$116,000, according to a mediated agreement obtained this week by the Orlando Sentinel.

The payments, which include \$36,645 for the advisors' lawyer fees, end a legal saga which began 17 months ago.

The exit packages, signed by Singh after he lost the 2020 Democratic primary election to his eventual successor, Amy Mercado, surfaced in the fifth week of her tenure as she reorganized the constitutional office and decided not to retain Singh's inner-circle trio.

Rather than pay demands outlined in the separation agreements, Mercado opted to file a lawsuit in 2021 that asked a judge to review the exit packages, which she alleged had been kept secret until she let go Tatsiana Sokalava, who formerly served Singh as a campaign consultant then his chief operational officer; Barbara Jubran, human resources manager; and legal advisor Robert Grimaldi.

Her lawsuit described the separation agreements as "shockingly exorbitant," arguing they violated state law.

The court papers also alleged the deals were intended to punish her if she made key personnel changes.

The agreements called for each of the executives to get 20 weeks severance; extra compensation equal to 500 hours or 12 1/2 weeks of pay; the cash equivalent of 18 months of health care; and an extra \$5,000 for "outplacement support and career development."

The promises added up to about \$318,000 with health care compensation totaling about \$107,000, court filings showed.

State law allows severance up to 20 weeks to government employees, but it's not an entitlement, Mercado's lawyers said.

A Property Appraiser's employee handbook noted the office did not routinely offer severance pay to laid-off employees.

According to the separation agreement, Mercado agreed to pay Sokalava \$24,280 in severance and \$8,046 for compensatory damages; Grimaldi \$18,360 in severance and \$6,193 for compensatory damages; and Jubran \$17,524 in severance and about \$5,000 for compensatory damages.

The severance roughly equaled 10 weeks pay for each.

The 11-page settlement document did not specify the reason for compensatory damages, but after their jobs were eliminated the three advisors filed discrimination complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, all of which were resolved by the agreement.

None of the parties admitted "any wrongdoing or liability of any kind to each other."

The two sides and their lawyers reached the resolution July 12, mediator Gary Salzman reported to Circuit Judge Jeff Ashton.

The three former advisors to Singh were represented by attorneys David R. Bear and Adam C. Herman.

Mercado's chief deputy and general counsel Ana Torres referred inquiries about the settlement to Sarah Reiner, an attorney with GrayRobinson, who participated in the mediation.

"Everybody reached a mutually agreeable compromise and agreed to move forward and past their disputes," Reiner said.

shudak@orlandosentinel.com

[Orange property appraiser settles legal dispute linked to predecessor, Rick Singh – Orlando Sentinel](#)