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Statement from Dallas County District Attorney's Office

On December 13, 2007, the Dallas County District Attorney's (DA) Office held a two-hour holiday awards and recognition program for its employees at the Frank Crowley Courts Building. The purpose of the event was merely to celebrate the holiday season and increase morale by recognizing employees for their tireless efforts to seek justice and keep the citizens of Dallas County safe. During the event, awards were presented to employees including Felony Prosecutor of the Year, "Rookie of the Year" Misdemeanor Division, Juvenile Prosecutor of the Year, Civil Prosecutor of the Year, Investigator of the Year and Support Staff Member of the Year. Additionally, service pins were presented to employees who had achieved five, 10-, 15- 20- and 25-years of service milestones.

Although a media advisory about the event was distributed to all local media including FOX 4 News on December 12, 2007, only a representative from the *Dallas Morning News* attended the event. However, three months later in March of 2008, FOX 4 News filed an Open Records request on information related to the planning of the DA's holiday event, specifically about the awards presented at the event and the in-kind raffle prizes donated by area businesses.

Mr. Watkins personally spent approximately \$4,500 on the holiday event for catering, along with gift cards, raffle prizes, and individual gifts for every employee at the DA's Office. The employees who planned the event used their personal contacts at area businesses to secure additional raffle prizes, which is completely within the law (see below). Therefore, the DA's Office did absolutely nothing wrong.

Section 36.10 (a) specifically states that 36.08 (Gift to Public Servant) and 36.09 (Offering Gift to Public Servant) do NOT apply to:

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(2) a gift or other benefit conferred on account of kinship or a personal, professional, or business relationship independent of the official status of the recipient.

A few of these personal contacts requested something in writing for their records, however, the letter that was sent to the companies violated an internal policy at the DA's Office because it was not approved by Mr. Watkins or any of the leadership team before it was distributed to the intended recipients.

The awards presented at the event were purchased from the fund at the DA's Office that has always been used to purchase awards for employees under previous administrations.

Questions that have been raised about potential violations of any kind are groundless. It is unfortunate, that of all the real news being generated out of the DA's Office like this week's capital murder trial against a man for fatally shooting a Dallas police officer or for freeing wrongfully-convicted men who have spent decades in prison, that the media would waste time reporting on our office's holiday event that occurred five and half months ago. Obviously someone with a personal vendetta against this office and Mr. Watkins is playing politics and trying to distract citizens from all the positive media coverage we have garnered. It was just a holiday party.

As it relates to questions about travel by Mr. Watkins, Ms. Bradfield and Ms. James to the Congressional Black Caucus' Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., last September, first, the Congressional Black Caucus' annual conference is attended by several elected officials (local and national levels), as well as business and community leaders from across the country, not just members of Congress.

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Secondly, Mr. Watkins' travel expenses were not paid for by County funds. Both Ms. Bradfield's and Ms. James' travel expenses were paid by the County because they were valid business trips. Ms. Bradfield, who is the Public Information Officer at the DA's Office, accompanied the DA to coordinate on-site media requests including interviews with national media outlets. Ms. James, who is Mr. Watkins' assistant, played an expanded role on this trip in serving as the liaison with the Office of Congressman Danny K. Davis (D-IL), who is the author of the Second Chance Act for ex-offenders — a re-entry initiative that Mr. Watkins has followed closely since taking office as it supports his "smart on crime philosophy."

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