

# Flowers

SouthtownStar

Here's Hoping Flower's Arrest Brings Reform

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CHICAGO - Charles Flowers no longer will be able to use his public office as if it were an ATM. On Thursday, the superintendent of the Suburban Cook County Regional Office of Education was arrested and charged with theft by the Cook County state's attorney's office.

In a series of stories by staff writer Duaa Eldeib over the past nine months, the SouthtownStar has exposed a long list of corrupt and questionable practices by Flowers.

Although he inherited an office already \$425,000 in debt, Flowers put his two sisters and a nephew on the payroll.

As the debt mounted to \$1 million, the office defaulted on a \$190,000 loan from Cook County, was evicted from its headquarters for failing to pay the rent and failed to make payroll.

SouthtownStar requests for his credit card records under the Freedom of Information Act revealed that airline tickets were bought for a personal trip to Mississippi for Flowers' family and that he took out cash advances on the regional office's credit card, although his salary is \$103,000 a year.

When auditors returned, with two months' advance notice, they still couldn't find receipts for credit card expenses or documentation for other office spending.

The Cook County Board, not known for its moral compass, gave Flowers' office a vote of no confidence, and state lawmakers drafted legislation to dissolve the office.

When asked for public records by this newspaper, Flowers at first stonewalled and later said that the documents had been confiscated by the state's attorney, who had opened a grand jury investigation into the allegations of wrongdoing. More recent requests for information were simply ignored completely.

Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez has earned the gratitude of taxpayers for using the powers of her office to crack down on public corruption.

Flowers' office is responsible for services to 143 suburban school districts serving 400,000 students. One of its roles is to oversee teacher certifications and licensing.

But it has been so inept that many school districts have found alternative means of obtaining teacher certifications.

Originally called the Cook County Regional Office of Education, it was abolished by the state Legislature in the early 1990s because of allegations of corruption and patronage.

But it was reinstated a short time later as the Suburban Cook County Regional Office of Education, with no authority in Chicago and no funding from Cook County, in order to create a new patronage haven for Republicans in the suburbs.

We hope this latest embarrassment puts a stake through the heart of this sham of a public office.

Unfortunately, in Illinois, public humiliation and national disgrace never seem to justify true reform.