

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CREATES A PUBLIC CORRUPTION UNIT

In August 2008, such a department was created. There has not been any articles of it doing anything.

New public-corruption unit in Montco

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If residents suspect malfeasance, there will be a place to report it, the district attorney said.

By Angela Couloumbis
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The Montgomery County District Attorney's Office is launching a public-corruption unit to crack down on the abuse of power in public positions in both the county and the local governments within it.

District Attorney Risa Ferman said she created the office because she wanted to send a message to residents that if they suspected corrup-

tion, there was a place to report it and know that their information would be vetted and investigated.

Ferman also said yesterday that the Bonusgate scandal now unfolding in Harrisburg — as well as Philadelphia's past pay-to-play corruption case — made her realize that she needed to get out front in battling public corruption.

"Watching what's been happening in other places, I've become increasingly aware of the public's frustration with elected officials who abuse authority," Ferman said. "People in Montgomery County should know that there is a place

they can go if they believe someone is abusing public authority."

Ferman said she had given the new unit the full power of the District Attorney's Office, including empaneling investigating grand juries, granting immunity, and using informants and wiretaps.

The public-corruption unit will have at least one prosecutor and several investigators, she said.

It is not expected to cost extra to run the unit, Ferman added.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Tom Corbett yesterday applauded Ferman's decision to form the unit.

Corbett created a public-corruption unit within his office in February 2006. Since then, it has brought charges

against dozens of public officials and employees and has won convictions against about 20.

"Creating a special unit and putting specialized prosecutors and agents on it raises the level in the public's mind and in the criminal-justice system of these types of crimes," said Kevin Harley, Corbett's press secretary.

"It goes to the heart of democracy. People have to have faith in their elected officials, that they abide by the law," Harley added.

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