

INVESTIGATIONS

Sidney Torres' payments to Kenner mayor's deputy, ties to competitor's consultant raise questions

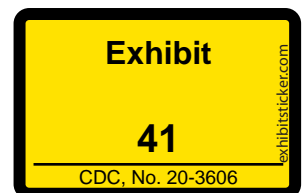
Torres confirmed on Monday that he paid former Kenner Chief Administrative Officer Chad Pitfield more than \$4,000 for delivering new IV Waste trash cans to customers



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New details emerged Monday about the financial relationship between trash magnate Sidney Torres IV and two key figures who steered the city of Kenner's controversial 2020 decision to switch its garbage collection contract to Torres' firm IV Waste.

Torres confirmed on Monday that he paid former Kenner Chief Administrative Officer Chad Pitfield more than \$4,000 for delivering new IV Waste trash cans to customers in July 2020. Pitfield also used an IV Waste email address in correspondence with Torres around that time, though Torres said he never employed Pitfield.

Meanwhile, former Kenner official Joseph "Nicky" Nicolosi, who had been a consultant to former Kenner trash contractor Robert Ramelli, started working for one of Torres' subcontractors right before the city agreed to grant Torres the contract.

Those payments could be a factor in an apparent FBI probe of the contract award and in a lawsuit by Ramelli, whose company hauled trash in the city from 2007 until the 2020 switch. Ramelli has claimed the new IV Waste deal is illegal.

The rift between Kenner and Ramelli burst into public view in early 2020, when Kenner Mayor Ben Zahn claimed Ramelli had overbilled the city for emptying dumpsters at parks, one of several reasons Zahn gave for switching vendors. Pitfield was Zahn's recreation director at the time, and he performed an audit in December 2019 that determined Ramelli was charging the city for dumpsters that either didn't exist or were handled by other vendors.

Former Ramelli employees also signed sworn affidavits alleging Ramelli had been mixing residents' recycling with garbage and dumping it at the landfill, which Zahn called a "fraud" against city taxpayers who were footing a half-million-dollar annual fee for recycling service.

In May 2020 Zahn switched from Ramelli to IV Waste, less than four years into Ramelli's second 10-year contract with the city. The mayor has said the city's contract with Ramelli was non-exclusive and it had the right to hire Torres' firm at any time.

Zahn also fired Pitfield earlier this month after news reports revealed he had collected \$86,000 in extra disaster pay in the four months after Hurricane Ida. The FBI subpoenaed Pitfield's employment records, emails and other documents as part of an apparent, separate probe into his work for the city. Among other things, investigators are attempting to determine whether Pitfield was paid by the city for hours when he was also claiming to serve as a reserve Jefferson Parish sheriff's deputy.

In June 2020, Pitfield used an IV Waste email account in his name to request that Torres reimburse him for more than \$4,000 in expenses he incurred in helping get IV Waste established in the city. About \$500 of the sum was for printing doorhangers; the remaining \$3,500 was so Pitfield could pay workers to help deliver about 1,000 IV Waste cans to Kenner residents, according to the email.

Torres said Pitfield used the IV Waste email only briefly. Pressed for an explanation for why a city employee would have had a vendor's email account at all, Torres said: "Chad wasn't working for (the Public Works) department when he was helping with the cans. He stopped using (the IV Waste email) before he switched to Deputy CAO. I don't know how else to explain it."

Such an arrangement is very unusual: It's not clear why Pitfield would have dipped into his own pocket to pay for the bin and flier distribution. And it's also possible that the direct payment from Torres – a major city contractor – to a top city aide would violate ethics laws.

Pitfield declined this week to respond to any questions about the payments.

Questions have also surfaced about Pitfield's role in overseeing IV Waste after Zahn promoted Pitfield to deputy CAO. Last week, WVUE-TV reported that, on a number of occasions, the city of Kenner had signed off on what appeared to be inflated invoices for trash taken to the transfer station. City officials said Pitfield was responsible for approving those payments.

In an interview Monday, Torres acknowledged "clerical errors" in some of the paperwork, but said he believes any overpayments were minimal. He said he has hired a team of accountants to review all of the billings and said he will report their findings to the city of Kenner by the end of the week.

New information about Nicolosi also has come to light. Ramelli has said Nicolosi helped engineer the switch to IV Waste even as he collected \$10,000 a month working as a consultant for Ramelli. A former city CAO, Nicolosi quit Ramelli in late January 2020. Torres got the contract in April 2020, but he denied persistent talk that he planned to hire Nicolosi.

Now, Torres acknowledges Nicolosi has been involved in IV Waste's dealings in Kenner, almost from the beginning.

By June 2020, Torres had spent \$425,000 to build a new transfer station where residents could drop off bulky waste for free. He hired Carimi Construction to build the site, and Carimi turned around and hired Nicolosi to help it get the necessary permits, Torres confirmed. Carimi paid Nicolosi about \$5,000 per month, Torres said.

"David Carimi was a subcontractor to IV Waste for that project. David hired Nick Nicolosi to help him as a consultant to bid on service contracts," Torres said. "He did help David with getting the permits for the transfer station."

Carimi is also a business partner of Torres's in Trep's, a Mid-City bar they recently opened. Torres says he didn't have anything to do with Carimi's decision to hire Nicolosi and reiterated he's never paid Nicolosi directly.

Late Monday, Carimi issued a statement confirming he hired Nicolosi's consulting firm, NBN Services, to help him get municipal construction work in April 2020, before Torres took over the garbage pickup on May 1.

"We hired NBN Services LLC starting in April of 2020 as a consultant. Carimi Construction & Development LLC hired NBN solely to help us identify municipal work that would be a good fit for our company," the statement said.

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