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Dec. 30, 2013

Prominent Miami criminal defense attorney Larry Handfield, the former chairman of the Public Health Trust, Jackson Health System's governing board, has quietly pleaded guilty to filing false tax returns.

The criminal conviction is a surprising chapter in the career of Handfield, 57, one of South Florida's most prominent African-American lawyers and civic leaders.

Handfield will serve 12 months of probation after he pleaded guilty late last month in Miami federal court to two misdemeanor tax-evasion charges. He must repay \$78,842 in restitution to the government.

He is now facing an inquiry from the Florida Bar, which regulates the state's lawyers.

"This was a seven-year-old matter, and when it was brought to my attention, I fully cooperated with the government and the matter was resolved with a misdemeanor," Handfield said Monday.

Handfield said he has already paid the government the money and he expects his probation to be terminated by the end of the month.

Handfield, a Miami native, is well known in South Florida legal circles. Over the years, governors have appointed Handfield to several statewide commissions — including Florida's Commission on Ethics.

Handfield was the first chairman of Miami's Civilian Investigative Panel, approved by voters in 2001 to oversee police department conduct.

Up until September 2012, he was chairman of the board of trustees at Daytona

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board, which oversaw a \$1.5 billion budget and more than 13,000 employees.

Over the years, Handfield has represented many high-profile clients. In May, he represented two brothers who scuffled with Miami cops at a murder scene, a confrontation that drew widespread headlines because it was captured on video. The charges were dropped.

In 2011, Handfield represented a Miami-Dade club promoter accused of DUI in an accident that killed Coral Gables jogger Carlos Cardenas. On Handfield's advice, the defendant pleaded guilty with no plea deal — and a judge sentenced the man to 12 years in prison.

The judge later overturned the sentence after Handfield admitted he had failed to convey a plea offer of six months in jail to the driver. Cardenas' father, at the time, said Handfield was “making a total mockery out of the justice system.”

Handfield also represents Dennis Stackhouse, the Miami developer who is accused of stealing nearly \$1 million from the failed Poinciana Park project that was supposed to revitalize the blighted Liberty City community.

According to the federal court documents in the tax case, Handfield — who runs his namesake private law firm — underreported his income to the Internal Revenue Service in 2006 and 2007.

In 2006, Handfield reported a business income of \$439,940, and total gross receipts of \$670,843. But according to the feds, he underreported the figures by \$196,587.

He underreported his gross income by \$84,992 the following year, the feds say. The false returns were “to prevent the IRS from properly determining [Handfield's] true tax liability,” according to court documents.

Handfield originally faced up to one year prison on each count. But U.S. Judge Cecilia

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stealing from his client, an affiliate of the Urban League of Greater Miami, and is giving up his law license.

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