

ETHICS COMMISSION IMPOSES FINE OF \$100,000 IN LAUSD MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

At a special meeting today, the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission unanimously approved a stipulated order imposing a penalty of \$100,000 on Refugio Rodriguez (Rodriguez) and Elizabeth Melendrez (Melendrez).

Rodriguez and Melendrez admitted to engaging in political money laundering during Rodriguez's 2015 campaign for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Board of Education office. Melendrez aided Rodriguez by using his personal funds to reimburse family and friends for contributions they made to Rodriguez's LAUSD campaign committee. From December 23 to December 31, 2014, Rodriguez and Melendrez illegally reimbursed 25 contributions ranging from \$775 to \$1,100 and totaling \$24,350. The contributions were falsely identified on public disclosure statements as having been made by the family and friends who were reimbursed.

[City law](#) prohibits contributions that are made in the name of anyone other than the true source of the funds, because such contributions deprive the public of information about who financially supports candidates and can circumvent the contribution limits.

Based on the Ethics Commission's investigation in this case, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office also initiated an investigation and filed criminal charges against Rodriguez and Melendrez. The stipulated order is part of a global settlement agreement that includes the District Attorney's office. In addition to admitting guilt in the Ethics Commission case, Rodriguez and Melendrez entered [guilty pleas](#) in criminal court today. Rodriguez pled guilty to one felony count of conspiracy and four misdemeanor counts of assumed name contribution, and Melendrez pled guilty to four misdemeanor counts of assumed name contribution. Both were sentenced to three years of probation and 60 days of community service. Rodriguez also resigned from the LAUSD board today.

"The Ethics Commission is committed to protecting public integrity and ensuring transparency, accountability, and trust," said Serena Oberstein, Vice President of the Ethics Commission. "Be it LAUSD or City elections, our decision today is a reminder that anyone who conceals the true source of campaign contributions will be held accountable."

All fines levied by the Ethics Commission are paid to the City's general fund. Enforcement orders can be viewed and searched through the Ethics Commission's [Public Data Portal](#).

The [Ethics Commission](#) was created by Los Angeles voters in 1990 to impartially administer and enforce the City's governmental ethics, campaign financing, and lobbying laws.