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NEWS RELEASE

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Ex-LAUDS Board President, Cousin Plead Guilty to Improperly Identifying Campaign Donors

The former president of the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education and his cousin pleaded guilty today to charges that they reimbursed thousands of dollars to donors that he claimed in a campaign filing form, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced.

Refugio Rodriguez (dob 7/12/71) entered his guilty plea to one felony count of conspiracy to commit assumed name contribution and four misdemeanor counts of assumed name contribution. Elizabeth Tinajero Melendrez (dob 9/2/72) pleaded guilty to four misdemeanor counts of assumed name contribution.

Rodriguez was immediately sentenced to three years of formal probation and ordered to complete 60 days of community service. Melendrez was placed on summary probation for three years and was ordered to complete 60 days of community service.

Deputy District Attorney Susan Ser of the Public Integrity Division prosecuted the case.

Rodriguez announced in November 2014 that he was running for the school board. Despite his late start in the filing period, he raised more than \$50,000 during his first campaign reporting that ended Dec. 31, 2014.

The Los Angeles City Ethics Commission received a whistleblower complaint in March 2015 about Rodriguez's fundraising activities.

In total, 25 donors, most of whom were family and friends, were allegedly paid back \$24,250, prosecutors said. The donors' names were listed on a campaign finance report that was signed by Rodriguez and submitted to the commission.

Prosecutors commended the investigation launched by the commission which found that over a 22-day period in December 2014, nearly half of the campaign contributions were fraudulent because

Rodriguez and Melendrez reimbursed them. The findings were referred to the District Attorney's Office.

Case BA460879 was investigated by the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation.

[About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#)

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.