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NEWS RELEASE

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Aug. 15, 2017

**Three Former Executives for L.A. Nonprofit
Plead Guilty to Embezzlement, Other Charges**

Three former executives for the nonprofit Chicana Service Action Center pleaded guilty today to embezzling and misappropriating millions of dollars in public funds and agreed to pay collectively more than \$10 million in restitution, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced.

Sophia Esparza, the organization's one-time chief executive officer, pleaded guilty to five counts of misappropriation of public funds, four counts of embezzlement, two counts of preparing false documentary evidence and one count of filing a false tax return.

Former chief financial officer Silvia Gutierrez also pleaded guilty to 12 counts: six counts of embezzlement, four counts of misappropriation of public funds and two counts of preparing false documentary evidence.

Thomas Baiz, who served as the organization's vice president of corporate and government affairs, pleaded guilty to three counts of embezzlement, two counts of misappropriation of public funds and one count of conspiracy to misappropriate public funds.

A fourth defendant, Michael Lorenzo Tompkins, pleaded no contest to one count of embezzlement. Tompkins, a former CSAC employee, was charged earlier this year.

As part of the plea agreement, all four defendants will pay \$9 million to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services and Community Senior Services and \$1.4 million to the City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department. Esparza also will have to pay an additional \$103,000 to the California State Franchise Tax Board.

Deputy District Attorney Marian Thompson of the Public Integrity Division prosecuted the case.

Esparza, Gutierrez and Baiz misappropriated and stole from the nonprofit, which provided services for domestic violence victims, the homeless and the unemployed, as far back as 2003.

Esparza, 65, took control over the now-defunct, nonprofit organization with the help of Gutierrez and Baiz and operated it with a sham board of directors, prosecutors said. She also created fictitious lists of board of directors to conceal her control over the nonprofit.

Together, the defendants fraudulently billed for services that were never performed and pilfered some of the county and city funding for their own personal gain.

Esparza used the money to rent luxury apartments in downtown Los Angeles and a home in San Marino. She also purchased sports cars and season tickets to the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Los Angeles Clippers, chartered a \$35,000 yacht cruise and funded multiple retirement accounts to support her lavish lifestyle.

Gutierrez, 71, used public money for bonuses, life insurance and other personal expenditures. Baiz, 62, used public money for bonuses, loans, vehicles and to buy expensive meals.

All three former executives were charged in June 2015. Further investigation resulted in additional charges and the discovery of additional losses.

Sentencing is scheduled for Esparza and Gutierrez on Oct. 25, while sentencing is set for Baiz and Tompkins on Oct. 26.

Esparza is expected to be sentenced to six years in state prison. Gutierrez will receive a four-year suspended prison sentence and placed under house arrest for a year and probation for five years.

Baiz is expected to be sentenced to a three-year suspended prison sentence, one year in county jail and be placed on probation for five years. He also must perform 500 hours of community service.

Tompkins will be sentenced to three years in state prison, according to the plea agreement.

Case BA437059 was investigated by the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation with the assistance of the Office of County Investigations, a division of the Department of the Auditor-Controller's Office, the Inspector General's Office for the U.S. Department of Labor and the state Franchise Tax Board.

[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.