

Jackie Lacey
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NEWS RELEASE

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**LAUSD President Charged With Conspiracy,
Improperly Identifying Campaign Donors**

The president of the Los Angeles Unified School District and his cousin were charged today for allegedly reimbursing nearly \$25,000 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) and Elizabeth Tinajero Melendrez (dob 9/2/72) were each charged in case BA460879 with one felony count of conspiracy to commit assumed name contribution and 25 misdemeanor counts of assumed name contribution. Rodriguez also faces one felony count each of perjury and procuring and offering a false or forged instrument.

The defendants are scheduled to be arraigned after 1:30 p.m. today in Department 30 of the Foltz Criminal Justice Center.

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

Rodriguez, who earlier this summer became LAUSD's president, 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.

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

Commission staff found that over a 22-day period in December 2014, nearly half of the campaign contributions were allegedly fraudulent because Rodriguez and Melendrez reimbursed them. The findings were referred to the District Attorney's Office.

Prosecutors commended the investigation launched by the commission, which after additional investigation by the District Attorney's Office, led to the filing of criminal charges against both defendants.

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

If convicted on the felony counts, Rodriguez faces a possible maximum sentence of four years and four months in local custody, while Melendrez faces up to three years in local custody.

The case remains under investigation 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.