



April 17, 2024

Alamdar Hamdani
United States Attorney
Southern District of Texas
1000 Louisiana, Ste. 2300
Houston, TX 77002

Re: Concerns Over Federal Crimes Occurring in Starr County, Texas

Dear Mr. Hamdani:

I write to bring to your attention a concerning matter regarding employees engaging in political activities on school district time, that has been and may still be occurring in the Rio Grande City Grulla ISD, located in Starr County, Texas.

I was in the courtroom in Starr County on August 29, 2022, for a hearing to determine the residency of a candidate for Starr County Judge. At that time, a school district employee, Jessica Vera-Rios was present in the courtroom. Ms. Vera-Rios' father is the incumbent Starr County Judge. Judge Vera had filed the complaint that had brought us to that courtroom on August 29th.

Ms. Vera-Rios, who is also the chairwoman for the Starr County Democratic Party, was present in the courtroom for the hearing and even approached and spoke to me. This hearing occurred during business hours. Ms. Vera-Rios was not a party to the proceeding in the court that day.

At that time, I became concerned that she was abusing taxpayer dollars by neglecting her duties to the ISD to attend a court hearing regarding her father's campaign opponent's residency. Because of my concern, I commissioned public information requests regarding Ms. Vera-Rios' employment status and requests for time off, which went unanswered and ultimately were met with hollow objections by the ISD's lawyer.

In an attempt to find the truth of this matter, those public information requests were refiled in the summer of 2023. Those requests, despite multiple submissions from both the requestor and the Texas Attorney General's office, were not fulfilled until the requestor was

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forced to file a mandamus action against the ISD. Shortly after the mandamus action was filed, the ISD finally provided the requested documents.

Upon finally receiving the requested documents, it became apparent Ms. Vera-Rios was in fact on ISD time while she was in court that day. Her personnel records show no request for time off to attend that hearing and give no other indication that she was not being paid by the ISD during that hearing.

I bring this situation to the attention of federal authorities because I am certain that the ISD receives federal grant dollars. It is my understanding that the ISD receives federal grant dollars specifically to support its school counseling program. Ms. Vera-Rios is a counselor for the ISD, although questions have been raised as to her qualifications as it pertains to the ISD's federal grant.

It is concerning that she was allowed to abuse taxpayers in such a blatant manner. Public money should never be used for personal or political gain.

I have called on the Rio Grande City Grulla ISD Board of Trustees to open an investigation into not only this specific instance, but of all instances in which employees have conducted political affairs while on District time. That plea was made several months ago, but I have not received any communication from the District indicating that it has taken any action.

In light of the District's inaction, I want to bring this concerning situation to your attention and make the same request: that your office undertake an investigation to determine the depth of these issues in the Rio Grande City Grulla ISD, as well as determine any criminal actions that may be necessary.

I look forward to the findings of your investigation. I know that making sure that taxpayers' dollars are being appropriately managed is your priority.

Sincerely,

Wayne Hamilton

Wayne Hamilton
Director,
ProjectRedTX

Cc: Ted Imperato
Assistant United States Attorney
Chief – Criminal Division
Southern District of Texas
1000 Louisiana, Ste. 2300
Houston, TX 77002

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Federal Bureau of Investigation – McAllen Office
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McAllen, Texas, 78501

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