



March 11, 2024

Mike Morath
Commissioner
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas, 78701

Re: Concerns Over Employee Political Actions While on District Time

Dear Commissioner Morath:

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.

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 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 District 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 District'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

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

Upon finally receiving the requested documents, it became apparent Ms. Vera-Rios was in fact on District 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 District during that hearing.

It is concerning that she was allowed to abuse Rio Grande City ISD 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 over one month 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 TEA undertake an investigation to determine the depth of these issues in the Rio Grande City Grulla ISD, as well as determine any remedial actions that may be necessary.

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

Sincerely,

Wayne Hamilton

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ProjectRedTX

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