

# TEXAS ETHICS COMMISSION

IN THE MATTER OF

MARIO BRACAMONTES,

RESPONDENT

§  
§  
§  
§  
§  
§  
§

BEFORE THE

TEXAS ETHICS COMMISSION

SC-31505110, SC-31505111, SC-31505112,  
SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123,  
AND SC-31505124

## ORDER and AGREED RESOLUTION

### I. Recitals

The Texas Ethics Commission (Commission) held a preliminary review hearing on September 28, 2017, to consider sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, SC-31505112, SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124. A quorum of the Commission was present. The Commission determined that there is credible evidence of violations of sections 253.033, 254.031, and 255.001 of the Election Code, laws administered and enforced by the Commission. To resolve and settle these complaints without further proceedings, the Commission proposed this resolution to the respondent.

### II. Allegations

Sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112 alleged that the respondent: 1) knowingly accepted from a contributor political contributions in cash that in the aggregate exceeded \$100; 2) did not properly disclose political contributions, political expenditures, and loans in his 30-day pre-election report prior to the May 9, 2015, election; and 3) did not include a proper disclosure statement on political advertising. Sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124 alleged that the respondent: 1) did not disclose or properly disclose political contributions, political expenditures, or loans in his 8-day pre-election report prior to the May 9, 2015, election; 2) misrepresented the true source of campaign communications; and 3) misrepresented his identity in political advertising.

### III. Facts Supported by Credible Evidence

Credible evidence available to the Commission supports the following findings of fact:

1. At all times at issue in the complaints, the respondent and three other individuals ran as a slate of candidates named "Pharr First" for mayor and for seats on the city council for the City of Pharr, in the May 9, 2015, election. The respondent and the three other candidates

appointed the same individual as their campaign treasurer. The respondent was a first-time candidate and was elected as the Pharr City Commissioner for Place 6, in the May 9, 2015, election.

### **Political Contributions Over \$100 in Cash**

2. Sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112 alleged that the respondent accepted three political contributions in cash that exceeded \$100 in his 30-day pre-election report prior to the May 9, 2015, election. The three cash contributions from three separate contributors were disclosed in a spreadsheet containing a list of political contributions accepted by the slate, Pharr First, from January 8, 2015, through April 2, 2015, and the spreadsheet was attached to the respondent's 30-day pre-election report. The spreadsheet contained a column for "Ck#," that Pharr First used to disclose the check number for each contribution. For the three contributions at issue, Pharr First listed "cash" under the column for reporting the check number. The spreadsheet disclosed that Pharr First received one cash contribution of \$1,000 on February 27, 2015, and two cash contributions of \$500 and \$5,000 on March 30, 2015.
3. In response to the sworn complaints, the respondent admitted to accepting the contributions. However, the respondent stated that he was unaware at the time the contributions were accepted that the contributions were in cash, because the campaign treasurer for him and the other members of the slate "handled the acceptance, deposit, and accounting for each of these contributions." The respondent also stated that the contributions were returned to the contributors.

### **Disclosure of Political Contributions, Loans, and Political Expenditures**

#### Political Contributions

4. Sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112 alleged that the respondent's 30-day pre-election report before the May 9, 2015, election was missing required information and was incomplete because the respondent did not disclose the complete addresses of the contributors. The respondent attached a spreadsheet to his 30-day pre-election report that disclosed the contributions the slate, Pharr First, received during the reporting period. The spreadsheet contained six headings: "DATE," "Ck#," "Contributor," "ADDRESS," "Amount," and "Comments." Of the 63 contributors that the respondent disclosed in his 30-day pre-election report, only one had a complete address. Fifty-four of the remaining 62 contributors did not have a zip code in their address, two contributors had only the city and state for an address, two contributors had only the house number and street name for an address, one contributor had no state or zip code in their address, two contributors had no address disclosed, and one contributor's address appeared to be an

incomplete address in Mexico. Three of the political contributions disclosed did not exceed \$50, and therefore were not required to be itemized. The total amount of political contributions at issue in the 30-day pre-election report is approximately \$98,950.

5. Sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124 alleged that the respondent's 8-day pre-election report before the May 9, 2015, election was missing required information regarding his contributors. The respondent attached a spreadsheet to his 8-day pre-election report that disclosed the contributions the slate, Pharr First, received during the reporting period. The spreadsheet contained five headings: "DATE," "Ck#," "Contributor," "ADDRESS," and "Amount." Of the 27 contributors that the respondent disclosed, 25 contributors did not have a zip code in their addresses and two contributors had only the house number and street name for an address. One of the political contributions disclosed was in the amount of \$50 or less, and was therefore not required to be itemized. The total amount of political contributions at issue in the 8-day pre-election report is approximately \$37,500.
6. The seven sworn complaints also alleged that the respondent did not report an in-kind contribution of political yard signs from his campaign treasurer. The respondent's political yard sign contained the following political advertising disclosure statement: "Political Advertising Paid for by [campaign treasurer], Treasurer. 221 S. Cage Pharr, TX 78577." The respondent did not disclose an in-kind political contribution from his campaign treasurer on Schedule A (used to disclose monetary and in-kind political contributions prior to July 2015) or on the spreadsheets listing Pharr First's political contributions that was attached to his 30-day and 8-day pre-election reports.
7. In response to the seven sworn complaints, the respondent swore he "made best efforts to obtain the correct address of all contributors, and to the extent any required information was omitted," his original reports were filed in "good faith" and "without intent to mislead or to misrepresent the information contained" in the reports. The respondent corrected his 30-day and 8-day pre-election reports to add the omitted address information for the contributors at issue whose contributions exceeded \$50. The respondent also disclosed, through his corrected report, that he received a quarter of each political contribution that was made to the slate.
8. In response to the specific allegation regarding the in-kind political contribution from his campaign treasurer, the respondent stated that the campaign treasurer did not make an in-kind political contribution of political yard signs. The respondent further stated that the complainants mistook the:

...political advertising disclaimer required by Section 255.001, Election Code listing the treasurer and the address of [the] campaign for a

contribution of the signage by the treasurer of [the] campaign as an individual. The names of the candidates who authorized the communication were displayed on the signage, as well as the disclaimer.

### Loans

9. Sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112 alleged that the respondent reported a loan without disclosing the required information about the loan on Schedule E (used to disclose loans) or on the spreadsheet attached to his 30-day pre-election report before the May 9, 2015, election. The respondent's attached spreadsheet that disclosed political contributions also disclosed one loan made on December 29, 2015, in the amount of \$15,000, from "NAFT FCU" located at 1311 S. Dogwood, Pharr, TX. The respondent did not disclose this loan on Schedule E and did not include the loan in the principal amount of all outstanding loans on the cover sheet page of the respondent's 30-day pre-election report.
10. In response to sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112, the respondent stated that the loan at issue was made to another slate member, as opposed to the slate as a whole, and was inadvertently included in his report. The slate member who took out the loan stated that the loan was improperly reported because he received the loan "outside the reporting period covered by the 30-day report." The slate member later stated to Commission staff that the loan was made on December 29, 2014. The respondent corrected his 30-day pre-election report and removed the loan previously disclosed on the spreadsheet.
11. Sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124 alleged that the respondent disclosed a loan with missing information when he attached a spreadsheet to his 8-day pre-election report that disclosed one loan made on April 30, 2015, in the amount of \$20,000, with a check number of "3548" and from an undisclosed lender located at "1800 ANGELINA MARIE PHARR, TX."
12. In response to sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124, the respondent did not address the \$20,000 loan disclosed on the spreadsheet attached to his 8-day pre-election report. However, the evidence indicates that the loan at issue was a \$20,000 personal loan another member of the slate made to the campaign on April 30, 2015. The loan was given to the campaign outside of the reporting period for the 8-day pre-election report. The respondent removed the \$20,000 loan at issue when he filed corrections to his 8-day pre-election report.

### Political Expenditures

13. Sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112 alleged that the respondent did not disclose payee addresses for any of his political expenditures and did not

disclose the payee name for some of his political expenditures in his 30-day pre-election report before the May 9, 2015, election. The respondent attached a spreadsheet to his 30-day pre-election report that disclosed 136 political expenditures made by the slate, Pharr First, for the reporting period. The spreadsheet contained five headings: "Num," "Date," "Name," "Account," and "Paid Amount." The spreadsheet did not contain the addresses for the payees of the political expenditures. Also, the spreadsheet did not contain the name of the payee for five of the political expenditures. Fifty-three of the political expenditures disclosed were in the amount of \$100 or less, and were therefore not required to be itemized. The total amount of the political expenditures at issue in the 30-day pre-election report is approximately \$76,460.

14. Sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124 alleged that the respondent reported political expenditures without disclosing payee addresses, payee names, and the purpose of the political expenditures in his 8-day pre-election report before the May 9, 2015, election. The respondent attached a spreadsheet to his 8-day pre-election report that disclosed 136 political expenditures made by the slate, Pharr First, for the reporting period. The spreadsheet contained six headings: "Num," "Date," "Name," "Adress [sic]," "Account," and "Amount." Seventy-two of the 136 political expenditures reported did not disclose a payee's address. The respondent did not disclose a payee's name for six of the political expenditures, all of which were \$100 or less. The respondent also did not disclose a category and description for the purpose of all 136 political expenditures. Forty-five of the political expenditures disclosed were in the amount of \$100 or less, and were therefore not required to be itemized. The total amount of the political expenditures at issue in the 8-day pre-election report is approximately \$82,930.
15. In response to all seven sworn complaints, the respondent stated that as to the extent that the campaign finance reports contained omitted information, he filed the original reports in "good faith and without an intent to mislead or to misrepresent the information contained" in the reports. The respondent corrected his 30-day and 8-day pre-election reports to include the omitted information regarding the political expenditures that were in excess of \$100 in the aggregate. The respondent also disclosed, through his corrected reports, that he was responsible for a quarter of the amount of each political expenditure made by the slate, Pharr First.

**Disclosure Statement on Political Advertising, True Source of Communication, and Misrepresentation of Identity on Political Advertising**

16. Sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112 alleged that the respondent did not use the proper required political advertising disclosure statement on three mailers and a political yard sign. The three mailers, referred to as Mailer 1, Mailer 2, and Mailer 3, included the following political advertising disclosure statement: "POLITICAL

ADVERTISING APPROVED AND PAID FOR BY THE CANDIDATES, 221 S, [sic] CAGE – PHARR, TX 78577." Additionally, the political yard sign contained the following political advertising disclosure statement: "Political Advertising Paid for by [campaign treasurer], Treasurer. 221 S. Cage Pharr, TX 78577." The address listed in the political advertising disclosure statement of all of the communications is that of the campaign treasurer for the respondent and the other candidates in the slate.

17. In response to sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112, the respondent denied knowingly causing to be published or distributed the three mailers because he said the campaign manager for the slate developed the mailers in question and a campaign volunteer entered into the contract with a printer to print the mailers on behalf of the campaign. The respondent also stated that he and the other members of the slate directed the campaign manager and volunteer "to ensure that any materials published by [our] campaign comply with any legal requirements in the law, including publishing of the required disclaimer." Additionally, the respondent acknowledged that the political advertising disclosure statement did not comply with section 255.001 of the Election Code, because it did not include the full names of him and the other members of the slate; however, they were unaware of the requirement that their names be listed in the political advertising disclosure statement and they did not see the final copy of the mailer with the political advertising disclosure statement until after the mailers were printed and distributed. The respondent did not address this allegation as it pertains to the political yard sign.
18. Sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124 alleged that the respondent, with intent to injure a candidate or influence the result of an election, knowingly represented in a campaign communication that the communication emanated from a source other than its true source and misrepresented a person's identity in political advertising or a campaign communication. The communications at issue are the same communications at issue in sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112. Regarding the three mailers, the complaints specifically allege that the respondent knowingly placed the name of the slate's opponents above the disclaimer that was absent the name of the person who paid for the mailer, so that voters assumed that the person or persons distributing the mailers were the candidates depicted in the mailers.
19. Mailer 1 is an eight-page mailer. One side of each page is in English while the other side is in Spanish. The first page contains two pictures of an opponent of one of the other members of the slate with the words "THEN" and "NOW" next to them and it reads:

LET'S NOT  
REPEAT  
HISTORY

[opponent] IS NOT THE SOLUTION...HE WAS THE PROBLEM

The last sentence above was printed directly above the mailer's political advertising disclosure statement: "POLITICAL ADVERTISING APPROVED AND PAID FOR BY THE CANDIDATES, 221 S, [sic] CAGE – PHARR, TX 78577." The remaining three pages of the mailer contain various quotes from newspapers speaking negatively of the opponent pictured in the mailer and of his fellow slate members and other uncited statements that oppose the pictured opponent's election to the office.

20. Mailer 2 is also an eight-page mailer. One side of each page is in English while the other side is in Spanish. The first page contains what appears to be a picture of an opponent of one of the other members of the slate. The page reads: "PHARR IS NOT FOR SALE," "VOTE NO TO SPECIAL INTERESTS," and "VOTE NO TO HIGHER TAXES." The opponent's name is printed directly above the mailer's political advertising disclosure statement: "POLITICAL ADVERTISING APPROVED AND PAID FOR BY THE CANDIDATES, 221 S, [sic] CAGE – PHARR, TX 78577." The second and third pages of the mailer discuss the opponent's tax plan which includes possible increases in property taxes and the opponent's involvement in a particular local political committee. The final page of the mailer includes several negative comments concerning the opponent's medical practice posted to an Internet website by some of the opponent's patients.
21. Mailer 3 is a two-page mailer. The front page contains what appears to be a picture of an opponent of one of the other members of the slate. The opponent's name appears on the picture along with the title "PHARR FORWARD MAYORAL CANDIDATE." The page also reads:

[Opponent's] TAX PRESCRIPTION  
TODAY [opponent] PROMISES TO LOWER TAXES BUT SIX MONTHS AGO HE  
WAS FINANCIALLY COMMITTED TO RAISING TAXES THROUGH A HOSPITAL  
TAXING DISTRICT (BILL 3793) IN PHARR AND HIDALGO COUNTY. HE HAS  
NO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTAL EXPERIENCE AND HAS NEVER BEEN  
INVOLVED IN THE PHARR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.

YOU PAY MORE. HE MAKES MORE.

The last two sentences in the above sections of text was printed directly above the mailer's political advertising disclosure statement: "POLITICAL ADVERTISING APPROVED AND PAID FOR BY THE CANDIDATES, 221 S, [sic] CAGE – PHARR, TX 78577." In between the above sections of text is a graphic that represents the opponent's tax plan. The second page of Mailer 3 contains the same negative comments posted by the opponent's patients from Mailer 2. The page is titled "WHAT DO PATIENTS SAY ABOUT [opponent]?" The page also reads:

SIX MONTHS AGO HE WANTED TO RAISE YOUR TAXES, AND  
NOW HE IS PROMISING TO LOWER YOUR TAXES...CAN YOU  
TRUST [opponent] WHEN NOT EVEN HIS PATIENTS DO?

IF PATIENTS CAN'T TRUST [opponent] WITH THEIR CHILDREN,  
DON'T TRUST HIM WITH YOUR VOTE!

221 South Cage, Pharr TX 78577

The page also includes a graphic that appears to be the campaign logo for the slate, Pharr First, that reads "VOTE PHARR 2015 FIRST: PHARR HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER."

22. In response to sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124, the respondent argued that the allegations regarding sections 255.004 and 255.005 of the Election Code are identical and the Commission "has taken the position that a misrepresentation of identity for purposes of section 255.005 of the Election Code is a misrepresentation other than the kind of misrepresentation covered by section 255.004 of the Election Code." The respondent stated that the allegation that voters would mistakenly conclude that candidates depicted in the mailers distributed the mailer and not the respondent and the other members of the slate is not a misrepresentation of identity under section 255.005 of the Election Code, but rather an allegation that the true source of the campaign communication was misrepresented under section 255.004 of the Election Code. Therefore, the respondent requested that the allegation of a violation of section 255.005 of the Election Code be dismissed.
23. In response to the allegation regarding the respondent misrepresenting the true source of campaign communications, the respondent stated that one of the mailers contained the Pharr First campaign logo and "given the presence of the campaign logo and the fact that the flyers were attacking [...], our opposing candidates, a reasonable person would not believe that they [opposing candidates] and not the Pharr First candidates were the source of the flyers."

#### **IV. Findings and Conclusions of Law**

The facts described in Section III support the following findings and conclusions of law:

##### **Political Contributions Over \$100 in Cash**

1. A candidate, officeholder, or specific-purpose committee may not knowingly accept from a contributor in a reporting period political contributions in cash that in the aggregate exceed \$100. ELEC. CODE § 253.033.



2. The respondent disclosed receiving political contributions from three contributors of \$500, \$1,000, and \$5,000 in cash in his 30-day pre-election report prior to the May 9, 2015, election. The three political contributions each exceeded \$100. Therefore, regarding SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112, there is credible evidence of violations of section 253.033 of the Election Code.

### **Disclosure of Political Contributions, Loans, and Political Expenditures**

#### Political Contributions

3. Each report filed under this chapter must include the amount of political contributions from each person that in the aggregate exceed \$50 and that are accepted during the reporting period by the person or committee required to file a report under this chapter, the full name and address of the person making the contributions, and the dates of the contributions. ELEC. CODE § 254.031(a)(1).
4. As to sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112, out of the 60 contributions that exceeded \$50, only one contribution that was disclosed on the respondent's 30-day pre-election report contained all of the required information. The respondent corrected his 30-day pre-election report to add all of the missing information for the remaining 59 contributions. Therefore, there is credible evidence of violations of section 254.031(a)(1) of the Election Code.
5. Regarding sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124, out of the 26 contributions that exceeded \$50, all of the contributions disclosed in the respondent's 8-day pre-election report were missing the zip code of the address and two of the contributions disclosed were also missing the city and state of the address. The respondent corrected his 8-day pre-election report to disclose the complete addresses for the 26 political contributions. Thus, there is credible evidence of violations of section 254.031(a)(1) of the Election Code.
6. Concerning the allegation regarding the respondent not disclosing an in-kind political contribution from his campaign treasurer, the respondent and the other members of the slate appeared to have paid for the political yard signs. Although the disclosure statement on the political yard signs stated that the campaign treasurer of the respondent and the other members of the slate paid for the signs, the respondent and the other members of the slate authorized their campaign treasurer to pay for the signs from the political contributions received by the slate. Thus, there is credible evidence that the campaign treasurer did not make an in-kind contribution of political signs to the respondent. Therefore, there is credible evidence of no violations of section 254.031(a)(1) of the Election Code.

Loans

7. Each report filed under this chapter must include the amount of loans that are made during the reporting period for campaign or officeholder purposes to the person or committee required to file the report and that in the aggregate exceed \$50, the dates the loans are made, the interest rate, the maturity date, the type of collateral for the loans, if any, the full name and address of the person or financial institution making the loans, the full name and address, principal occupation, and name of the employer of each guarantor of the loans, the amount of the loans guaranteed by each guarantor, and the aggregate principal amount of all outstanding loans as of the last day of the reporting period. ELEC. CODE § 254.031(a)(2).
8. The first report must be received by the authority with whom the report is required to be filed not later than the 30th day before election day. The report covers the period beginning the day the candidate's campaign treasurer appointment is filed or the first day after the period covered by the last report required to be filed under this chapter, as applicable, and continuing through the 40th day before election day. *Id.* § 254.064(b). The second report must be received by the authority with whom the report is required to be filed not later than the eighth day before election day. The report covers the period beginning the 39th day before election day and continuing through the 10th day before election day. *Id.* § 254.064(c).
9. Concerning sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112, the respondent included a loan made on December 29, 2014, in the amount of \$15,000 in his 30-day pre-election report before the May 9, 2015, election. The reporting period for the 30-day pre-election report was January 1, 2015, through March 30, 2015. The evidence shows that the loan was made prior to the 30-day pre-election report's reporting period and was not required to be disclosed in the report. Thus, the respondent erroneously disclosed the loan on his 30-day pre-election report. Therefore, there is credible evidence of a violation of section 254.031(a)(2) of the Election Code.
10. Regarding sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124, the \$20,000 loan that was disclosed on the spreadsheet attached to the respondent's 8-day pre-election report before the May 9, 2015, election was a personal loan made to the campaign by one of the other members of the slate and not a loan made by the respondent. The personal loan was given to the campaign on April 30, 2015. The reporting period for the 8-day pre-election report was March 31, 2015, through April 29, 2015. Since the loan was made outside of the reporting period for the 8-day pre-election report, the \$20,000 loan at issue was erroneously disclosed in the respondent's 8-day pre-election report. Therefore, there is credible evidence of violations of section 254.031(a)(2) of the Election Code.

Political Expenditures

11. Each report filed under this chapter must include the amount of political expenditures that in the aggregate exceed \$100 and that are made during the reporting period, the full name and address of the persons to whom the expenditures are made, and the dates and purposes of the expenditures. ELEC. CODE § 254.031(a)(3).
12. The purpose of an expenditure means a description of the category of goods, services, or other thing of value for which an expenditure is made and a brief statement or description of the candidate, officeholder, or political committee activity that is conducted by making the expenditure. Ethics Commission Rules § 20.61. The brief statement or description must include the item or service purchased and must be sufficiently specific, when considered within the context of the description of the category, to make the reason for the expenditure clear. *Id.* Merely disclosing the category of goods, services, or other thing of value for which the expenditure is made does not adequately describe the purpose of an expenditure. *Id.*
13. Regarding sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112, the respondent was required to provide the full name and address of the persons to whom political expenditures were made, and the dates and purposes of those expenditures in his 30-day pre-election report prior to the May 9, 2015, election. Of the 83 political expenditures that were in excess of \$100, the respondent did not disclose the full address of the payee or the purpose of any of the political expenditures. The respondent corrected his 30-day pre-election report to add the required address of each payee and the purpose of those 83 political expenditures. Therefore, there is credible evidence of violations of section 254.031(a)(3) of the Election Code.
14. In regards to sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124, the respondent was required to provide the full name and address of the persons to whom political expenditures were made, and the dates and purposes of those expenditures in his 8-day pre-election report prior to the May 9, 2015, election. Of the 91 political expenditures that were in excess of \$100, the respondent did not provide the full address of the payees for 47 political expenditures and did not provide the purpose for any of the political expenditures. The respondent corrected his 8-day pre-election report to include the omitted information. Thus, there is credible evidence of violations of section 254.031(a)(3) of the Election Code.

**Disclosure Statement on Political Advertising, True Source of Communication, and Misrepresentation Identity on Political Advertising**

15. A person may not knowingly cause to be published, distributed, or broadcast political advertising containing express advocacy that does not indicate in the advertising that it is political advertising; and the full name of the person who paid for the political advertising; the political committee authorizing the political advertising; or the candidate or specific-purpose committee supporting the candidate, if the political advertising is authorized by the candidate. ELEC. CODE § 255.001(a).
16. Political advertising that is authorized by a candidate, an agent of a candidate, or a political committee filing reports under this title shall be deemed to contain express advocacy. *Id.* § 255.001(b).
17. A person commits an offense if, with intent to injure a candidate or influence the result of an election, the person enters into a contract or other agreement to print, publish, or broadcast political advertising that purports to emanate from a source other than its true source. *Id.* § 255.004(a).
18. A person commits an offense if, with intent to injure a candidate or influence the result of an election, the person knowingly represents in a campaign communication that the communication emanates from a source other than its true source. *Id.* § 255.004(b).
19. A person commits an offense if, with intent to injure a candidate or influence the result of an election, the person misrepresents the person's identity or, if acting or purporting to act as an agent, misrepresents the identity of the agent's principal, in political advertising or a campaign communication. *Id.* § 255.005(a).
20. "Political advertising" means a communication supporting or opposing a candidate for nomination or election to a public office or office of a political party, a political party, a public officer, or a measure that in return for consideration, is published in a newspaper, magazine, or other periodical or is broadcast by radio or television; or appears in a pamphlet, circular, flier, billboard or other sign, bumper sticker, or similar form of written communication; or on an Internet website. *Id.* § 251.001(16).
21. "Campaign communication" means a written or oral communication relating to a campaign for nomination or election to public office or office of a political party or to a campaign on a measure. *Id.* § 251.001(17).

Disclosure Statement on Political Advertising

22. The respondent and the other members of the slate authorized their campaign manager to create the mailers at issue and the respondent and the other members of the slate authorized their campaign treasurer to print and use their political contributions to pay for the political yard signs. Since the four communications at issue were ultimately authorized by agents of the respondent and the other members of the slate, the communications are deemed to contain express advocacy. *See* ELEC. CODE § 255.001(b). Thus, the three mailers and the political yard signs at issue are political advertising. The mailers included a political advertising disclosure statement that stated "THE CANDIDATES" as the name of the persons who authorized and paid for the mailers. The respondent and the other members of the slate authorized their campaign manager and a volunteer to design and enter into a contract to print the mailers. Therefore, the name of each candidate in the slate should have been printed in the political advertising disclosure statement on the mailers. Regarding the political yard signs, the signs disclosed that they were paid for by the campaign treasurer of the respondent and the other members of the slate. However, the respondent and the other members of the slate authorized the campaign treasurer to pay for the political yard signs with their political contributions and thus, the name of each candidate of the slate should have been listed in the political advertising disclosure statement on the political yard signs. Therefore, there is credible evidence of violations of section 255.001(a) of the Election Code regarding the four political advertising communications at issue in sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, and SC-31505112.

True Source of Communication

23. As previously indicated, the three mailers and the political yard signs are political advertising. These communications are also campaign communications because they are all written communications relating to a campaign for election to public office. Although the respondent stated that he and the other members of the slate did not enter into a contract to print the mailers or the yard signs, he admitted that he and the other members of the slate were the source of the four communications. So the issue is whether the respondent knowingly represented that the campaign communications emanated from a source other than himself and the other members of the slate. The mailers listed "THE CANDIDATES" as the person who paid for the mailers and the yard signs listed the campaign treasurer of the respondent and the other members of the slate as the person who paid for it. Although the respondents' names were not disclosed in the four communications' political advertising disclosure statement, all four communications disclosed the address of the campaign treasurer of the respondent and the other members of the slate, and thus the source of the communications at issue was reasonably ascertainable. There is no evidence that the respondent used "THE CANDIDATES" and the campaign treasurer's name and title in the political advertising disclosure statement to knowingly represent that the campaign

communications emanated from another source. Therefore, there is credible evidence of no violations of section 255.004 of the Election Code concerning sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124.

#### Misrepresentation of Identity on Political Advertising

24. Again, as previously indicated, the three mailers and the political yard signs are political advertising and campaign communications. The political advertising disclosure statements on the three mailers and the political yard signs were in violation of section 255.001 of the Election Code; however, there is no evidence that the improper political advertising disclosure statements were used with the intent to injure their opponents or influence the results of the election. The complaint alleged that voters would mistakenly conclude that the opponents depicted in the mailers were responsible for printing and distributing the three mailers because the opponents' names were printed directly above the mailers' political advertising disclosure statement. However, the political advertising disclosure statements on the mailers, although improper, contain the address of the campaign treasurer of the respondent and the other members of the slate, and Mailer 3 contains the campaign logo of the respondent's slate, Pharr First. That evidence along with the fact that the mailers' content is in opposition of the candidates depicted in the mailers would not lead a reasonable person to conclude that the mailers were printed or distributed by the opponents of the respondent and the other members of the slate. Therefore, there is credible evidence of no violations of section 255.005 of the Election Code as to sworn complaints SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124.

### **V. Representations and Agreement by Respondent**

By signing this order and agreed resolution and returning it to the Commission:

1. The respondent neither admits nor denies the facts described under Section III or the Commission's findings and conclusions of law described under Section IV, and consents to the entry of this order and agreed resolution solely for the purpose of resolving these sworn complaints.
2. The respondent consents to this order and agreed resolution and waives any right to further proceedings in this matter.
3. The respondent acknowledges that: 1) he may not knowingly accept from a contributor in a reporting period political contributions in cash that in the aggregate exceed \$100; 2) each report filed must include the amount of political contributions from each person that in the aggregate exceed \$50 and that are accepted during the reporting period by the person or committee required to file a report under this chapter, the full name and address of the person

making the contributions, and the dates of the contributions; 3) each report filed must include the amount of loans that are made during the reporting period for campaign or officeholder purposes to the person or committee required to file the report and that in the aggregate exceed \$50, the dates the loans are made, the interest rate, the maturity date, the type of collateral for the loans, if any, the full name and address of the person or financial institution making the loans, the full name and address, principal occupation, and name of the employer of each guarantor of the loans, the amount of the loans guaranteed by each guarantor, and the aggregate principal amount of all outstanding loans as of the last day of the reporting period; 4) each report filed must include the amount of political expenditures that in the aggregate exceed \$100 and that are made during the reporting period, the full name and address of the persons to whom the expenditures are made, and the dates and purposes of the expenditures; and 5) a person may not knowingly cause to be published, distributed, or broadcast political advertising containing express advocacy that does not indicate in the advertising that it is political advertising; and the full name of the person who paid for the political advertising; the political committee authorizing the political advertising; or the candidate or specific-purpose committee supporting the candidate, if the political advertising is authorized by the candidate.

The respondent agrees to comply with these requirements of the law.

## **VI. Confidentiality**

This order and agreed resolution describes violations that the Commission has determined are neither technical nor *de minimis*. Accordingly, this order and agreed resolution is not confidential under section 571.140 of the Government Code and may be disclosed by members and staff of the Commission.

## **VII. Sanction**

After considering the nature, circumstances, and consequences of the violations described under Sections III and IV, and after considering the sanction necessary to deter future violations, the Commission imposes a \$1,000 civil penalty.

## **VIII. Order**

The Commission hereby orders that if the respondent consents to the proposed resolution, this order and agreed resolution is a final and complete resolution of sworn complaints SC-31505110, SC-31505111, SC-31505112, SC-31505121, SC-31505122, SC-31505123, and SC-31505124.

AGREED to by the respondent on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mario Bracamontes, Respondent

EXECUTED ORIGINAL received by the Commission on: \_\_\_\_\_.

Texas Ethics Commission

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Seana Willing, Executive Director