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PRESS RELEASE

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**COUNTY OFFICIALS TESTIFY BEFORE THE
TEXAS LEGISLATURE IN SUPPORT OF CREATING A
COUNTY ETHICS COMMISSION**

El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez and Precinct 1 County Commissioner Anna Pérez will testify today in Austin before the Texas Legislature in support of a bill that would give the County of El Paso the authority to create an “Ethics Commission” with the power to investigate complaints and assess civil penalties.

On February 23, 2009, El Paso County Commissioners approved the language for a proposed legislation that would create an Ethics Commission with the authority to receive confidential complaints, investigate those complaints, with subpoena power, and with the authority to assess civil fines and refer cases to the appropriate prosecuting attorney in case of criminal violation of the ethics code.

The proposal was filed by Representative Marisa Marquez as House Bill 2301 on March 3rd, and by Senator Eliot Shapleigh as Senate Bill 1368 on March 4th.

Today El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez and Precinct 1 Commissioner Anna Pérez will testify before the *House Committee on County Affairs* and the *Senate Committee on International Relations & Trade* in support of the corresponding bills.

Under the proposal, the Ethics Commission will regulate the conduct of County officials, County employees, vendors, lobbyist and others who do business with the County. The Commission will consist of 9-members: one appointed by each member of Commissioners Court, and 4 representatives “at large” from the public chosen by the appointed members.

El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez explained creating a County Ethics Commission “with teeth” became necessary after the FBI revealed that it had been conducting a public corruption investigation involving county elected officials, judges and employees.

“Tainted deals have cost our County millions, and it is costing us still more money, time and resources to try and recover some of that lost property,” said County Attorney Rodríguez.

“The idea of an ethics code makes some people nervous, but most people realize that it is simply good policy to identify questionable behavior and put it out of bounds,” Rodríguez concluded.

El Paso County Commissioner Anna Pérez said creating a County Ethics Commission “is an opportunity to be state leaders in sharing accountable government.

“We need to work on improving the public’s trust in county government,” Perez concluded.

The hearing of the *Senate Committee on International Relations & Trade* is scheduled to begin at 12:30 p.m. (El Paso time) in room E1.016. To watch the live streaming of the hearing follow this link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/ram/helix/ch6.ram>

The hearing of the *House Committee on County Affairs* is scheduled to begin at 1:00 p.m. (El Paso time) in room E2.016. To watch the live streaming of the hearing follow this link: <http://www.house.state.tx.us/fx/av/live/extlivecmte36.ram>

WHO: County Attorney José R. Rodríguez and County Commissioner Anna Pérez

WHAT: Testimony before the Texas Legislature in favor of the creation of the El Paso County Ethics Commission

WHEN: Monday March 23, 2009 at 12:30 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. El Paso time.

WHERE: State Capitol, Austin Texas.

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