

Only have a minute? Listen instead

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here is nothing more important to our communities, our families and the future of our children than a strong public school system. Our dedicated La Joya ISD teachers and staff work tirelessly and do an excellent job preparing our students for success.

Recently, a crucial policy change took place with La Joya ISD that signals a significant step toward preventing corruption and minimizing conflicts of interest. The Board of Managers made a bold move to prohibit district administrators from holding an elected position. This policy is tailored to positions that oversee employees or manage the financial affairs of the district. This policy shift, led by Superintendent Dr. Marcey Sorenson and Board of Managers President Julian Alvarez, is a praiseworthy initiative that deserves our support.

This action is key in dismantling the persistent culture of corruption that has tainted the integrity of our institutions. The recent string of federal indictments involving public officials from La Joya ISD, Agua Special Utility District ("Agua SUD") and the city of Peñitas emphasizes the urgency of addressing this issue at its core.

Some board members at La Joya ISD, the largest employer in western Hidalgo County, took advantage of this influence to enrich themselves and their allies with promotions, stipends and government positions and contracts. In 2017, I passed a law that attempted to address the trading of hires between board members of La Joya ISD and Agua SUD. At the time, the president and vice president of the La Joya ISD board were employed by Agua SUD, while four Agua SUD directors were employed by La Joya ISD as administrators of different departments. This trading of hires of elected officials by these overlapping taxing entities created a huge conflict of interest.



Agua Special Utility District's office seen Friday, June 30, 2023, in Palmview. (Joel Martinez | jmartinez@themonitor.com)

Senate Bill 814 (85R) prohibited Agua SUD from hiring elected officials or family members of another taxing entity within the district, such as La Joya ISD. To protect their cushy and dubious jobs, Agua SUD spent public money to pay for consultants to kill SB 814. When it became clear they would fail, both boards took actions to loot additional taxpayer money. On May 1, 2017, the Agua SUD board rushed to approve new five-year employment contracts with the two La Joya ISD trustees with a severance clause that guaranteed a huge payout to both trustees shortly after SB 814 became law in June 2017. Eight days after Agua SUD approved the new contracts, the board members employed by La Joya ISD all conveniently received promotions, new positions and dramatic increases in their stipends and salaries that





Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa