

PRESS RELEASE

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CUSD Leadership Under Investigation **Orange County District Attorney Reviewing Evidence of Alleged Illegal Acts**

An investigation into allegations of illegal activities at the Capistrano Unified School District has been commenced. The Orange County District Attorney's office is leading the investigation.

This past summer, residents throughout South Orange County sought to recall the entire school board based upon allegations of corruption and gross fiscal mismanagement. More than 177,000 petition signatures seeking to remove the Trustees from office were delivered to the Orange County Registrar of Voters.

Susan Schroeder, spokesperson for the District Attorney's Office confirmed the District Attorney has assigned a Deputy District Attorney to the case. Schroeder also stated, "We are reviewing the evidence and witness statements."

CUSD is led by Superintendent James A. Fleming, as well as seven elected Trustees (John Casabianca, Marlene Draper, Crystal Kochendorfer, Sheila Benecke, Sheila Henness, Duane Stiff and Mike Darnold).

On December 22, 2005, the Registrar announced it would not certify the recall claiming that not enough valid signatures from registered voters had been turned in. Recall leaders are now questioning that decision.

Thomas Russell, spokesperson for the CUSD Recall Committee, the organization that led the unprecedented recall campaign, was gratified and hopeful, "We hope that commencement of the District Attorney's investigation brings us one step closer to restoring honesty, integrity and accountability into our public school system."

Russell continued, "The recall campaign uncovered compelling evidence of corruption at CUSD. As a result, many citizens called upon law enforcement authorities to commence a full and complete investigation. We believe those CUSD officials that have misled our community and violated the law must be removed from office, held accountable and brought to justice."

Local elected officials had strong reactions to the commencement of the District Attorney's investigation.

Tony Beall, Rancho Santa Margarita Mayor Pro Tem, declared, “I believe a culture of corruption exists within the ranks of the CUSD leadership. I urge the District Attorney to aggressively investigate all evidence of illegal activities and to vigorously enforce all the laws that may have been violated.”

Mission Viejo Mayor Pro Tem Frank Ury also reacted to the news. “The arrogant treatment of parents and children by the leadership of CUSD has deeply troubled me over the past few years. It is unacceptable for the CUSD Trustees to cut millions of dollars from school programs at the same time they are building themselves a \$52 Million administration building.” Ury continued, “I look forward to the D.A.’s investigation to finally get some real answers for the residents of Mission Viejo.”

James V. Lacy, Dana Point City Councilmember stated, "This is really a sad day for education in South Orange County. The Trustees are due a presumption of innocence, but if the District Attorney's corruption investigation reveals any avarice at all in their Boardroom, big changes are going to be necessary to win back the confidence of parents, teachers, and the kids."

Rancho Santa Margarita City Councilman Gary Thompson stated that, “Based on my first hand experience and dealings with this district since we became a city, I can’t say I am surprised. It is unfortunate that the people who have suffered the most from their mismanagement of public funds have been the children.”

Mission Viejo City Councilmember John Paul Ledesma said, “I am very concerned about the CUSD Trustees use of taxpayer dollars – from the 1999 bond measure to the \$52 million dollar administration building! If there is an investigation of other issues I trust that the District Attorney’s office will do a thorough job.”

CUSD is one of the largest school districts in the State of California. Founded in 1965, the district serves seven cities and several unincorporated areas in South Orange County, including, Rancho Santa Margarita, Mission Viejo, Coto de Caza, Wagon Wheel, Las Flores and Ladera Ranch. Approximately 50,000 children are enrolled in CUSD public schools.

To learn more about these important issues, please visit our website at

www.cusdreCALL.com

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