

Cesar Ruiz dissolves Latino political action committee due to campaign finance violations

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Local entrepreneur Cesar Ruiz, head of the USA International Sports Complex Group, speaks during a press conference at the International Volleyball Hall of Fame in Holyoke where officials announced a project to build a new home for the Hall and a new sports and recreation complex in Holyoke. (Don Treeger / The Republican) 2/6/2024The Republican

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SPRINGFIELD – Businessman [Cesar Ruiz](#) dissolved his political action committee this week and has agreed to donate \$190,000 to charity as punishment for breaking state campaign finance laws.

Ruiz, CEO of Golden Years Home Care Services, Golden Years Behavioral Health Group and Golden Years Staffing, said Friday he takes responsibility for the violations. Ruiz and his supporters hope to form a new PAC with more flexibility and a fundraising goal from other donors – not just Ruiz – of \$1 million.

The dissolved PAC – Hispanic Latinos Leaders Now Independent Expenditure Committee – began in 2023 and supported Latino in candidates statewide – including state Rep. Orlando Ramos’ run for Springfield mayor.

But **the committee made direct contributions last year totaling \$5,500 to 13 candidates for municipal offices in Holyoke**, Chelsea, Waltham, Worcester and Leominster in violation of state law, according to [disciplinary documents](#) posted Aug. 7 by the state Office of Campaign & Political Finance.

Under state law, PACs set up as this one was can accept unlimited contributions from individuals or entities. They can use the money to advocate for causes or candidates.

But they cannot coordinate directly or indirectly with campaigns and cannot contribute to them.

The state Office of Campaign & Political Finance said it provided written guidance to the Ruiz PAC in July and August 2023. Staff of OCPF also spoke by phone or answered email questions at least seven times between May and September 2023. On at least two of these occasions, OCPF staff told the PAC representatives that it could not make contributions to candidates.

Nonetheless, on Nov. 6, the committee contacted OCPF to inquire about contributions made directly to candidates — and how to disclose such contributions on its finance reports.

The state office said its staff reiterated that the committee was barred from coordinating with campaigns and cannot make contributions to candidates.

All \$5,500 in contributions were made between Oct. 16 and Nov. 2, 2023. **The list provided by OCPF includes Holyoke candidates Kocayne S. Givner \$250; Tessa Murphy Romboletti, \$250; Jose**

Moldonado Velez, \$250; Israel Rivera, \$500; Jenny Rivera, \$500; Janelle Mojica, \$500 and Axel Fontanez, \$500.

Givner, Murphy-Romboletti and Israel Rivera all won City Council seats in Holyoke.

Ruiz has a major project he's backing in Holyoke. He plans to create a sports complex and a new home for the International Volleyball Hall of Fame at the Wyckoff Country Club.

In another violation, OCPF said the Ruiz committee's financial reporting was off, understating receipts by \$5,151 — by not accounting for refunds paid back by vendors — and underreporting expenditures by \$30,474.

There were duplicate entries in the forms, appearing to be data-entry errors.

OCPF also took the committee to task because Ruiz – the sole donor supplying the committee with \$190,000 – made three contributions totaling \$140,000 with treasurer's checks prepared by a bank teller, not checks drawn on his personal account.

Ruiz said he's taking responsibility for all the errors. He said the violations of campaign finance law were inadvertent and stemmed from not knowing the rules.

"I liken this situation to the time-worn phrase, 'We were flying the plane as we were building it,'" he said. "We wanted to be engaged in last year's election process."

He said he provided banking records showing that the treasurer's checks represented funds from his savings account.

"I understand why the teller's checks are a problem. They want to follow the money," he said.

He said he didn't appeal the punishment from the campaign office and is taking responsibility.

"It was a good learning process," he said. "The buck stops with me. The errors were unintentional."

Penalty terms

So far, as part of the penalty, Ruiz has made the following donations:

- Irish Cultural Center: \$25,000
- Springfield Puerto Rican Parade: \$10,000
- New North Citizen Council/Josiah's House: \$15,000
- Voto Latino Foundation in Washington, D.C.: \$25,000
- Massachusetts Association for Gifted Education in Boston: \$7,500

Remaining to be given is \$107,500. Ruiz said he and his advisors are reviewing possible recipients.

Ruiz said he's working with advisors on a new PAC to replace the old one, with donations from more people and a goal of raising \$1 million.

"It will be the same goal," he said. "The purpose of the PAC was to be able to raise funds to help our Latino candidates, new leadership and youth who are coming into politics. And also encourage women to engage in this space."

Ruiz, 69, said his experience becoming the first Latino elected official in the state, as a Springfield School Committee member back in 1980, inspired him to help today's candidates.

"I know how lonely a path that can be for candidates engaging in the political process for the first time," he said.