



SOUTH COUNTY

Chula Vista leaders call on Andrea Cardenas to resign amid criminal charges



Chula Vista Councilmember Andrea Cardenas is facing several felony charges. (Adriana Heldiz/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

The District Attorney says council member and her brother committed fraud, conspiracy and money laundering

BY TAMMY MURGA | REPORTER

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Chula Vista city leaders are calling on their council colleague, Andrea Cardenas, to resign from office because of criminal charges she is facing. The first-term council member said Monday she wants an opportunity to defend herself first.

Last week, District Attorney Summer Stephan filed seven charges against her and her brother, Jesus Cardenas, related to more than \$170,000 in federal COVID-19 funds provided to their political consulting firm, Grassroots Resources, via the Paycheck Protection Program.

The siblings allegedly falsified their application for the money and used it to pay credit card bills, personal expenses and to pay off campaign debt, according to the criminal complaint.

If convicted on all charges, Andrea faces up to five years and eight months in state prison and Jesus could receive up to four years and four months in custody. Besides the five counts she faces with her brother, the 31-year-old council member is charged with two additional counts of failing to file tax returns.

City Council members initially declined to comment on whether Andrea should relinquish her position as the city's District 4 representative.

But on Monday, Mayor John McCann issued a statement saying that he had reviewed the allegations and that "considering the serious nature of the alleged crimes, it is clear to me that she must resign from the City Council."

"Ensuring public trust is crucial for all elected officials," he said. "Maintaining that trust under the current circumstances is simply impossible."

Deputy Mayor Jose Preciado echoed McCann's remarks.

“Andrea has the right to due process and the presumption of innocence in court, but the right thing for her to do now is to resign from the City Council,” he said in a statement.

For the first time since prosecutors filed the charges last week, Andrea issued a public statement Monday afternoon. It acknowledged the concerns and questions raised by elected officials, the San Diego County Democratic Party and the San Diego Association of Governments about the repercussions the charges may have.

“My intent has never been to harm or disappoint those who believed in me, both in life and at the ballot box,” she said. “Many conversations are taking place around me about me and what others think is the best way for me to move forward.”

“I would like to make one thing very clear - my commitment to my community continues,” Andrea added. “As we move forward in this process, I hope to be given an opportunity by the media, folks in political circles, and, most importantly, my constituents to defend myself.”

The council member said the District Attorney’s Office notified her and her brother on Nov. 1 that multiple charges were filed against them. But they learned of the details of the allegations through local media outlets.

Jesus Cardenas did not respond to a request for comment.

Councilmembers Carolina Chavez and Alonso Gonzalez also have not responded to requests for comment or issued statements.

An arraignment is scheduled for Thursday at 1:30 p.m. in Superior Court.



Tammy Murga

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