



## Hidalgo County Commissioners Court

**Ramon Garcia**  
*County Judge*

**A. C. Cuellar, Jr.**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 1*

**Eduardo "Eddie" Cantu**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 2*

**Joe M. Flores**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 3*

**Joseph Palacios**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 4*

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Tuesday, April 26, 2016

### **Commissioners Court approves Hidalgo County Uniform Truancy Policy**

**EDINBURG** – The Hidalgo County Uniform Truancy Policy, required to be put in place by changes in the law that decriminalized truancy, has been approved by the Commissioners Court. The 1-inch thick document was presented by Yolanda Chapa, County Judge Ramon Garcia's chief of staff and chair of the 34-member committee.

The county was required to adopt a uniform truancy policy by May 1, pursuant to changes to the Education Code as amended by HB2398, which became effective last September. Under these statutory provisions, the County Judge and Mayor of the largest municipality in the county were required to compose a committee that would be tasked with the creation and adoption of a uniform truancy policy. The committee had its last meeting on Monday morning to review and make final recommendations for revisions to the proposed policy.

"Prior to the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative session, Texas was one of two remaining states in the nation in which truancy was a crime," Chapa reported to Commissioners Court. "The intent of the law is to remove the taint of criminality associated with school-related misconduct, require schools to implement more truancy prevention measures, and to create an entirely new type of court and procedures to handle school attendance cases."

McAllen Mayor Jim Darling, who, along with Garcia were charged with forming the committee. Darling said the collaboration of the varied entities necessary to put together the Truancy Policy for consideration by the Commissioners Court exemplifies how much the truancy issue is a major concern.

"This policy will address possible solutions to the core factors that influence truant behavior and hopefully will give the courts the tools to keep our kids in school," Darling said, adding that the state should consider funding programs that can support local efforts to decrease truancy in public schools.

Criminal District Attorney Ricardo Rodriguez Jr., who led the county in bringing stake holders together to provide information on the changes to the law in September, assigned one of his top assistant district attorney's to work with the committee on the policy. Chief Assistant Criminal DA - Juvenile/Civil Division Maxine Longoria Nash, who guided the committee and wrote the policy on behalf of the District Attorney, also spoke at Commissioners Court.

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Rodriguez Jr. said the change in how truancy cases are handled was long overdue, adding that school-related criminal prosecution further alienates the young people who most need to be in school.

Our office will continue to be involved in the implementation and oversight of the new Hidalgo County Uniform Truancy Policy and will make recommendations for needed revisions to this new law in the next legislative session," said Rodriguez.

In discussing the policy at Commissioners Court, Nash said the Hidalgo County Uniform Truancy Policy is one of the most comprehensive in the state.

"House Bill 2398 is one of the most significant changes to Texas juvenile law in over 40 years. The last time such drastic changes were made was when the Juvenile Justice Code was passed in 1973," Nash said. "This legislation requires our county to adopt a uniform truancy policy to be followed by all school districts, open-enrollment charter schools and truancy courts in Hidalgo County."

Nash added that the new law places more responsibility on schools to adopt truancy prevention measures that are designed to address the underlying problems that lead to truant behavior, and to make referral to court for truancy the last resort.

"What we are proposing to the county this morning is probably one of the most comprehensive policies in the state," Nash said.

Rodriguez said the change in how truancy cases are handled was long overdue, adding that school-related criminal prosecution further alienates the young people who most need to be in school.

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**Cutline:** (L-R) Precinct 2, Place 2 JP Jaime "Jerry" Munoz, McAllen Mayor Jim Darling, Precinct 4 Commissioner Joseph Palacios, Precinct 3 Commissioner Joe Flores, County Judge Ramon Garcia, Precinct 2 Commissioner Eduardo "Eddie" Cantu, Precinct 1 Commissioner A.C. Cuellar, Chief Assistant Criminal DA, Juvenile/Civil Division Maxine Longoria Nash, County Judge Chief of Staff Yolanda Chapa, and McAllen ISD Board of Trustees Vice-President Larry Esparza.