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For Immediate Release

Western International High School Principal and Esperanza Detroit Non-Profit Chief Operating Officer Arraigned in Embezzlement Scheme

Prosecutor Kym L. Worthy has charged Esperanza Detroit Chief Operating Officer Cecelia Zavala*, 35, of Wyandotte, and Western High School principal Rodolfo Benavides-Diaz*, 35, of Lincoln Park, with embezzling money from Esperanza Detroit, a non-profit agency located in the 2400 block of Michigan Avenue.

Esperanza Detroit was a non-profit organization that provided services and in house counselors to at risk students at Western International High School and other Detroit Public Schools. In April of 2014, the Detroit Public School's Office of the Inspector General noticed irregularities with some checks issued by the organization. A member of Esperanza Detroit conducted an internal audit and took the results to the Detroit Police Department. As a result, the matter was turned over to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

It is alleged that from November 2011 until May 2014, Zavala embezzled over $100,000 from the Esperanza Detroit non-profit for her personal use. She is alleged to have used the organization's credit and debit cards without authorization to pay for restaurants, personal vacations at expensive hotels, jewelry and a car. It is further alleged that she and Diaz engaged in a conspiracy to embezzle from Esperanza.

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From October of 2013 through May of 2014, Benavides-Diaz is alleged to have received checks totaling $10,400 written on the Esperanza account and misappropriated the money for his personal use. The checks were for consulting services that he never performed. Benavides-Diaz is alleged to have conspired, and, aided and abetted Zavala in embezzling money from Esperanza.

Zavala is charged with: 1. Embezzlement over $100,000; 2. Embezzlement over $1000 – Non-profit; 3. Embezzlement over $1000; 4. Conspiracy to Embezzle; 5. Embezzlement over $1000 - Non-profit; 6. Conspiracy Embezzlement – Non-profit; 7. Using a computer to commit Embezzlement over $100,000 and 8. Using a computer to commit Embezzlement from a non-profit over $1,000.

Benavides-Diaz is charged with: 1. Embezzlement over $1000; 2. Conspiracy Embezzlement; 3. Embezzlement over $1000 - Non-profit and 4. Conspiracy to Embezzle – Non-profit.

Detroit Public Schools Emergency Manager Darnell Earley said: "Detroit Public Schools has and will continue to cooperate with the Wayne County Prosecutor and her office on this matter."

“The evidence in this case will show that these defendants, both in positions of trust, felt that it was acceptable behavior to eat, travel, shop, and otherwise live large, and children they were supposed to serve be damned,” said Prosecutor Worthy.

Zavala and Benavides-Diaz were arraigned on Wednesday, July 1, 2015 at 10:30 in 36th District Court. The Probable Cause Conferences are scheduled for July 8, 2015 at 8:30 a.m. before Judge Kenneth King. The Preliminary Examinations are scheduled for July 15, 2015 at 9:00 a.m., before Judge King, as well.

*These are the correct spellings of the defendants’ names.

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