KENDALL L.D. BONEBRAKE
Chief of Enforcement
JONATHAN E. RIVERA
Commission Counsel
FAIR POLITICAL PRACTICES COMMISSION
1102 Q Street, Suite 3050
Sacramento, CA 95811
Telephone: (279) 237-5913
Email: JRivera@fppc.ca.gov

Attorneys for Complainant
Enforcement Division of the Fair Political Practices Commission

BEFORE THE FAIR POLITICAL PRACTICES COMMISSION

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of: CAROLINE MENJIVAR, Respondent.	FPPC Case No. 2026-00863 **STIPULATION, DECISION AND ORDER** Date Submitted to Commission: December 2026

INTRODUCTION

Respondent, Caroline Menjivar ("Menjivar"), has served as a State Senator from Los Angeles County since 2022. This case arose from a commission-initiated investigation. In 2025, the Political Reform Act (the "Act")[1] prohibited public officials from accepting a reportable gift over-the-limit of $630 from a single source. Menjivar, a public official, violated the Act by accepting a reportable gift over-the-limit.

///

[1] The Political Reform Act – sometimes simply referred to as the Act – is contained in Government Code sections 81000 through 91014. All statutory references are to this code. The regulations of the Fair Political Practices Commission are contained in Sections 18104 through 18998 of Title 2 of the California Code of Regulations. All regulatory references are to this source.

SUMMARY OF THE LAW

The Act and its regulations are amended from time to time. The violations in this case occurred in 2025. For this reason, all legal references and discussions of law pertain to the Act's provisions as they existed at that time.

Need for Liberal Construction and Vigorous Enforcement of the Political Reform Act

When enacting the Act, the people of California found and declared that previous laws regulating political practices suffered from inadequate enforcement by state and local authorities.[2] Thus, it was decreed the Act "should be liberally construed to accomplish its purposes.[3]

A central purpose of the Act is to promote transparency by ensuring that receipts and expenditures in election campaigns are fully and truthfully disclosed so that voters are fully informed and improper practices are inhibited.[4] Another purpose of the Act is to provide adequate enforcement mechanisms so that the Act will be "vigorously enforced."[5]

Public Official Defined

The Act defines "public official" as every member, officer, employee, or consultant of a state or local government agency.[6]

Gift Defined

The Act defines "gift" to include any payment that confers a personal benefit on the recipient, to the extent that consideration of equal or greater value is not received.[7]

Gift Limit

In 2025, public officials were prohibited from accepting gifts from any single source in any calendar year with a total value of more than $630 if the official would be required to report the receipt of the gift from the source on their Statement of Economic Interests ("SEI").[8]

---

[2] Section 81001, subd. (h).
[3] Section 81003.
[4] Section 81002, subd. (a).
[5] Section 81002, subd. (f).
[6] Section 82048, subd. (a).
[7] Section 82028, subd. (a).
[8] Section 89503; Regulations 18940.1, subd. (b), and 18940.2.

Under the Act, a gift is neither accepted nor received if, within 30 days, the official reimburses the donor in full, or for a portion thereof. If the donor is not reimbursed for the full value of the payment, the value of the gift the official has received is reduced by the amount of the reimbursement.[9]

Liability for Violations

Any person who violates any provision of the Act is liable for administrative penalties up to $5,000 per violation.[10]

SUMMARY OF THE FACTS

Menjivar is a State Senator, representing the 20th Senate District, which encompasses Burbank and the San Fernando Valley. On their 2025 Annual SEI, Menjivar stated they received a gift of two tickets from the Television Academy on or around September 14, 2025, valued at $3,700. In the comments for the 2025 Annual SEI, Menjivar stated, "The total gift amount was $3,700, which exceeded the gift limit. Reimbursement above the allowable limit was paid after the 30 days, but as soon as it was brought to our attention." On February 27, 2026, Menjivar sent a check to the Television Academy in the amount of $3,070. This reimbursement occurred approximately 167 days after receipt of the gift, before Enforcement contact, but well after the 30-day cure period.

VIOLATIONS

Count 1: Acceptance of Over-the-Limit Gifts

On or around September 14, 2025, Menjivar accepted a gift totaling $3,700 from the Television Academy, which exceeded the annual gift limit of $630, in violation of Section 89503.

PROPOSED PENALTY

This matter consists of one proposed count. The maximum penalty that may be imposed is $5,000 per count. Thus, the maximum penalty that may be imposed for the counts charged here is $5,000.[11]

This case does not qualify for the streamline program because the fair market value of the gifts is more than $1,000 over the applicable gift limit.[12]

[9] Regulation 18941, subd. (c)(3).
[10] Sections 83116 and 83116.5.
[11] Section 83116, subd. (c).
[12] Regulation 18360.2, subd. (b).

In determining the appropriate penalty for a particular violation of the Act, the Enforcement Division considers the typical treatment of a violation in the overall statutory scheme of the Act, with an emphasis on serving the purposes and intent of the Act. Additionally, the Enforcement Division considers the facts and circumstances of the violation in the context of the following factors set forth in Regulation 18361.5 subdivision (e)(1) through (8): (1) The extent and gravity of the public harm caused by the specific violation; (2) The level of experience of the violator with the requirements of the Political Reform Act; (3) Penalties previously imposed by the Commission in comparable cases; (4) The presence or absence of any intention to conceal, deceive or mislead; (5) Whether the violation was deliberate, negligent or inadvertent; (6) Whether the violator demonstrated good faith by consulting the Commission staff or any other governmental agency in a manner not constituting a complete defense under Government Code Section 83114(b); (7) Whether the violation was isolated or part of a pattern and whether the violator has a prior record of violations of the Political Reform Act or similar laws; and (8) Whether the violator, upon learning of a reporting violation, voluntarily filed amendments to provide full disclosure.[13]

An express purpose of the Act is to ensure the assets and income of public officials which may be materially affected by their official actions be disclosed, so that conflicts of interest may be avoided. The acceptance of gifts over-the-limit is a serious violation of the Act because it can potentially lead to a conflict of interest. In this case, the Enforcement Division found no evidence that Menjivar intended to conceal, deceive, or mislead the public, nor did the violations appear to be deliberate; in fact, Menjivar "paid down" the gift and disclosed the gift on their Annual SEI prior to receiving contact from the Enforcement Division. Menjivar states that following the discovery of the violation, she and her staff have implemented a system to ensure that gifts received are within the limit or are "paid down" within the 30-day window allowed under Regulation 18941. This system requires real time data inputs and regular review by an experienced team member to ensure no future issues with gift limits.

The Commission considers penalties in prior cases with the same or similar violations and comparable facts.

[13] Regulation 18361.5, subd. (e).

In the Matter of Jeffrey Bryant; FPPC No. 2020-00201. Respondent, the General Manager of the Firebaugh Canal Water District, exceeded the 2015 gift limit of $460 by accepting two gifts of artificial grass totaling $7,664.43, in violation of Government Code Section 89503. In mitigation, Bryant reimbursed the source of the gift for the full value of the gifts received before Enforcement contact. In January 2023, the Commission approved a penalty of $4,000 for this count.

In the Matter of Ronald Davis; FPPC No. 2016-19819. Respondent, a Warden for the San Quentin State Prison, accepted gifts totaling approximately $3,300 exceeding the 2015 gift limit of $460 by approximately $2,840, in violation of Government Code Section 89503. In mitigation, Davis "paid down" the gifts by reimbursing the source for the full value of the gifts. In October 2017, the Commission approved a penalty of $3,000.

A penalty comparable to that found in *Davis* is recommended. Here, the gift limit was exceeded by $3,070 which is similar to the overage of $2,840 in *Davis*. By contrast, gifts in *Bryant* were $7,204.43 over the limit, which is more than double the overage in this case. In addition, all of the cases involve "paying down" of the gift by reimbursing the source the difference with the gift limit or the full amount of the gift which occurred before Enforcement contact.

Furthermore, in aggravation of Count 1, the Respondent committed additional violations of the Act that are not being charged herein in the interest of settlement. In particular, the Respondent reported accepting an over-the-limit gift on their 2024 Annual SEI. The Respondent reported receiving multiple gifts valued totaling approximately $657.89 from the California Democratic Party on or around August 27, 2024. The gift limit in 2024 was $590. On January 7, 2025, or 153 days after receipt of the gift, Menjivar reimbursed the California Democratic Party for the amount of $67.89.

Under these circumstances, it is respectfully submitted that imposition of an agreed-upon penalty in the amount of $3,000 is justified.

CONCLUSION

Complainant, the Enforcement Division of the Fair Political Practices Commission, and Respondent, Caroline Menjivar, hereby agree as follows:

1. Respondent violated the Act as described in the foregoing pages, which are a true and accurate summary of the facts in this matter.

2. This stipulation will be submitted for consideration by the Fair Political Practices Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting – or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard.

3. This stipulation resolves all factual and legal issues raised in this matter – for the purpose of reaching a final disposition without the necessity of holding an administrative hearing to determine the liability of Respondent pursuant to Section 83116.

4. Respondent has consulted with their attorney, Lacey Keys, and understands, and hereby knowingly and voluntarily waive, any and all procedural rights set forth in Sections 83115.5, 11503, 11523, and Regulations 18361.1 through 18361.9. This includes, but is not limited to, the right to appear personally at any administrative hearing held in this matter, to be represented by an attorney at Respondent's own expense, to confront and cross-examine all witnesses testifying at the hearing, to subpoena witnesses to testify at the hearing, to have an impartial administrative law judge preside over the hearing as a hearing officer, and to have the matter judicially reviewed.

5. Respondent agrees to the issuance of the decision and orders set forth below. Also, Respondent agrees to the Commission imposing against them an administrative penalty in the amount of $3,000. One or more cashier's checks or money orders totaling said amount – to be paid to the General Fund of the State of California – is/are submitted with this stipulation as full payment of the administrative penalty described above, and same shall be held by the State of California until the Commission issues its decision and order regarding this matter.

6. If the Commission refuses to approve this stipulation – then this stipulation shall become null and void, and within fifteen business days after the Commission meeting at which the stipulation is rejected, all payments tendered by Respondent in connection with this stipulation shall be reimbursed to Respondent. If this stipulation is not approved by the Commission, and if a full evidentiary hearing before the Commission becomes necessary, neither any member of the Commission, nor the Executive Director, shall be disqualified because of prior consideration of this stipulation.

7. The parties to this agreement may execute their respective signature pages separately. A copy of any party's executed signature page, including a hardcopy of a signature page transmitted via fax or as a PDF email attachment, is as effective and binding as the original.

Dated: _____

_____
Kendall L.D. Bonebrake, Chief of Enforcement
Fair Political Practices Commission

Dated: _____

_____
Caroline Menjivar, Respondent

The foregoing stipulation of the parties "Caroline Menjivar," FPPC Case No. 2026-00863, is hereby accepted as the final decision and order of the Fair Political Practices Commission, effective upon execution by the Chair.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: _____

_____
Adam E. Silver, Chair
Fair Political Practices Commission