

## Freer women plead not guilty in mail-in case

By Mauricio Julian Cuellar Jr. / Alice Echo-News Journal

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Three Duval County women waved their arraignment on charges connected to the 2008 Primary, and pleaded not guilty to charges of unlawful possession of a mail-in ballot and unlawful assistance.

Alicia Pena Perez, 66, and Andrea Campos Bierstedt, 54, were represented by attorney Jaime Carrillo, while Cristina Lichtenberger, 53, was represented by attorney Charles Barrera, Live Oak County clerk officials said.

The Texas Attorney General's office filed complaints against all three women in Live Oak County, as the law allows election cases to be filed in neighboring jurisdictions to where the alleged crimes were committed.

Both charges the women face are misdemeanors, Class A for the unlawful assistance and Class B for the unlawful possession charge. Class B misdemeanors can carry up to six months in jail and a \$2,000 fine, while Class A misdemeanors carry up to one year in jail and a \$4,000 fine.

An Attorney General's Office investigator filed the complaints in the Live Oak County Clerk's Office in George West on Feb. 25. All three women are from Freer. Perez is the former municipal judge for Freer. Bierstedt serves on the Freer City Council. Lichtenberger is on the Freer school board.

According to the complaint information filed against Lichtenberger, she faces one count of unlawful possession of a ballot by another for knowingly possessing an official carrier envelope or an official ballot belonging to Jose Saavedra. She also faces one count of unlawful assistance for allegedly preparing Saavedra's ballot in a way other than the voter directed or without the voter's direction, according to the complaint.

Bierstedt and Perez are each charged with one count of unlawful possession of a ballot by another for allegedly possessing an official carrier envelope or an official ballot belonging to Tanya Rigdon Carrillo.

They also face an additional charge of unlawful assistance for allegedly preparing Carrillo's ballot in a way other than the voter directed, or without the voter's direction, according to the complaints.

Perez faces three additional charges of unlawful possession of a ballot by another and three charges of unlawful assistance in connection to the 2008 Primary in Duval County. The voters in those complaints include David Cavazos, Maria Cavazos and Cristina Gonzalez. The three defendants have had their cases reset for a pre-trial hearing, which will take place later this spring.

This is the second time in two years Duval County has seen indictments regarding the handling of mail-in ballots. On Jan. 31, 2008, four San Diego residents, Lydia Molina, 70; Maria "Kena" Soriano, 71; Elva Lazo, 62; and Maria Trigo, 55; were indicted in Brooks County and charged with illegally handling ballot applications and mail-in ballots that belonged to other voters during the 2006 Primary.

Three Jim Wells County women, Zaida Bueno, Cynthia Lopez and Norma Lopez, were the focus of recent complaints filed by the Texas Attorney General's Office on Feb. 4 in Live Oak County. The three were charged with unlawful possession of a ballot by another, with multiple counts under each charge, for their alleged illegal activity during the 2008 Primary in Jim Wells County.

