



# TSTA NEWS

TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

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## **TSTA WARNS ROBSTOWN ISD NOT TO DELAY EMPLOYEE PAYCHECKS**

The oldest education organization in Texas warned the administration and school board of Robstown Independent School District that they “will be venturing into uncharted territory that could be rife with legal liability” if the district fails to pay its employees on Sept. 15, as scheduled.

“The district is obligated to pay its employees for services rendered,” a letter from the legal staff of the 65,000-member Texas State Teachers Association warned Superintendent Roberto Garcia and Rosendo Espinoza, the president of the Robstown school board.

“Not paying employees on time will make it even more difficult for the Robstown district to retain experienced, qualified teachers. Once the district gets a reputation for not being financially reliable, many teachers will not return here. They will go to districts with more trustworthy leadership,” said Madaline Caraway, the president of TSTA’s local affiliate, the Robstown Faculty Association.

An impasse between the superintendent and the school board resulted in failure to adopt the district’s annual budget by the end of August.

Garcia responded to the district’s increased costs for fuel, food and electricity by proposing laying off 48 education support professionals, cutting incentives for employees and consolidating schools. If he and the school board cannot agree on the budget by Sept. 15, district employees will not be paid before the end of the month.

“Your employees will not be able to pay their mortgages, putting their homes in jeopardy. In addition, your employees will not be able to make their car payments – ensuring difficulties with their lending institutions and putting their transportation in jeopardy,” TSTA lawyer John Grey warned the district.

Caraway said one employee faces eviction if she isn’t paid on time in mid-September. The husband of another employee suffered a heart attack related to stress caused by the district’s financial uncertainty; in that family, the wife is the sole breadwinner.

“That’s bad enough. But our students will pay an even higher cost if the district’s financial instability drives away the experienced teachers we need,” Caraway emphasized.

The Robstown Faculty Association president also questioned the superintendent’s plan to fire 48 education support professionals.

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“Without these people, the district will not be able to staff its services and facilities adequately. That will undermine our ability to serve our students. So, once again, our students are the ones who will pay a very high price,” Caraway warned.

“We really appreciate the members of our school board who back our teachers and support professionals. Roberto Tapia is instrumental in getting things done for teachers, and Richard Gonzales and Adolfo Lopez are great, too. We need more school board members like them. That’s what we’re going to work for in future school board elections,” the Robstown Faculty Association president added.

“We’re disappointed but not surprised by the situation in Robstown. Thanks to House Bill 1, which the Texas Legislature passed in 2006, the state froze its school funding at an outdated level, with no new money for higher fuel, food and electricity costs,” TSTA President Rita C. Haecker said.

“This forces districts to raise local taxes or to cut staff, programs and services – or both. The Robstown administration and school board could have handled their situation better, but the ultimate responsibility rests at the steps of the Texas Capitol. House Bill 1 was an irresponsible political gimmick that’s costing our Texas students, schools and school employees dearly,” Haecker added.

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