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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**AG RULES EL PASO COUNTY ATTORNEY IS REQUIRED TO  
GIVE LEGAL REPRESENTATION TO THE ETHICS COMMISSION**

El Paso County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal today announced that Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott has issued a legal opinion that confirms the El Paso County Ethics Commission must obtain legal advice from the El Paso County Attorney.

AG Opinion No. GA-0817, issued in response to a request submitted by the El Paso Ethics Commission on December 11, 2009, states that “the County Attorney of El Paso County is required to represent the El Paso County Ethics Commission in all legal matters.”

The opinion goes further to affirm that “it could be an improper usurpation of the county attorney’s authority...if outside legal counsel were hired solely to...represent the Commission over the objection of the county attorney.”

Regarding the issue of whether the County Attorney has a conflict of interest in providing both legal advice and representation to the Commission, Attorney General Abbott deferred the answer to that question to the Texas Committee of Professional Ethics. The opinion also suggest that the El Paso County Ethics Commission may address any such concerns while drafting the ethics code, as long as the code does not contradict both Texas law and the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct.

El Paso County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal said the AG Opinion will put to rest the divisive issue.

“It has always been my professional opinion that the Ethics Commission should receive legal advice from the County Attorney’s Office, which is responsible for advising all county officials,” Bernal said.

“This opinion brings good news to El Paso taxpayers, because it confirms that the County of El Paso will not have to pay thousands of dollars in outside counsel fees for a job that our office can perform efficiently and effectively,” Bernal concluded.

Members of the El Paso Ethics Commission have received copies of the AG Opinion, and will officially discuss accepting it during their next regular meeting scheduled for Thursday December 2, 2010 at 3:00 p.m. in the County Judge’s Conference Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the County Courthouse.

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