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1 ADDRESS, 5 FREE RIDES TO COLLEGE;

State Sen. Sandoval, who signed all the applications, wants to know how it happened

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SPRINGFIELD - A tan-bricked bungalow in the 4500 block of South Avers Avenue must be a popular hangout for college kids.

Five students certified that same home - owned by a paid campaign staffer to state Sen. Martin Sandoval (D-Cicero) - as their permanent residence in order to qualify for highly sought tuition waivers handed out by Sandoval.

The senator told the Chicago **Sun-Times** he has no explanation for that peculiar coincidence and blamed the State Board of Education for not discovering it, even though Sandoval put his signature on each scholarship application before submitting them to the agency.

After being questioned about the oddity last week by the **Sun-Times**, a State Board of Education spokesman said his agency has turned the matter over to the FBI and to the legislative inspector general's office for further investigation.

"It seemed strange five individuals who did not have the same last name would list the same address, and so we wanted someone to look into that," board spokesman Matt Vanover told the **Sun-Times**.

State law requires that students receiving **legislative** **scholarships** live within the awarding lawmaker's district, and providing any "false or misleading" information on applications can result in the waivers being revoked and the students having to repay the colleges for the tuition freebies.

Motor vehicle and voter registrations for the students cast doubts on whether the recipients lived at the Archer Heights home owned by 14th Ward precinct captain Rudolph Acosta Sr. The combined value of the students' tuition waivers exceeded an estimated $65,000.

"I largely depended on my staff to make sure these forms were filled out accurately," Sandoval said. "I'm quite angry at the fact the Illinois State Board of Education would even process them."

He said he has fired at least two staffers in his office who were involved in processing the applications, though he refused to identify them. "I've since cleaned up shop, and the individuals are no longer with my office, and the Illinois State Board of Education needs to do the same to implement clear and more thorough processing and approval of these nomination forms," Sandoval said.

Vanover said the agency relies on legislators submitting accurate information on the scholarship nomination forms, which must be signed by the lawmakers and students and notarized.

One of the students who listed Acosta's South Avers property as his home address was Michael Giorango, son of three-time felon and reputed mobster Michael C. "Jaws" Giorango.

The **Sun-Times** reported last month about Sandoval's highly unusual move to revoke Giorango's July 2009 scholarship to Illinois State University because of an "administrative error" in his office. Giorango lives in Orland Park, well outside Sandoval's district, according to vehicle and voter registration records.

Told about the circumstances of Sandoval's case, a leading legislative backer of abolishing the scholarship program said there is no plausible explanation for Sandoval awarding scholarships to five people with the same address.

"I don't think a case can be made that there's not something drastically wrong there," said Senate Minority Leader Christine Radogno (R-Lemont). ". . . It doesn't pass the smell test."

Besides Giorango, who renounced his scholarship, other students who listed the South Avers residence as their "permanent address" included: Luisa Burgos, Adriana Cortez, Lissette Velazquez and Allison Madel.

Cortez, who received Sandoval scholarships to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana in 2007 and 2008, described the South Avers address as a "temporary residence," where she lived for "a summer."

When Cortez received her 2007 award from Sandoval, Madel received a tuition waiver the same year from the senator to study art education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Even though the two women listed the same address as their home, Cortez said she did not know Madel or any of the other students. "I actually don't know those people," Cortez said.

Vehicle registration records show that Cortez lives in the 7300 block of West Touhy Avenue, outside Sandoval's district.

City voter registration records show that she moved her voting address to South Avers on July 10, 2006, six months before getting her first Sandoval scholarship. Records show she moved her voting address back to Touhy Avenue in May 2009.