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Lazarski Law Practice, P.C.

March 30, 2026

VIA OVERNIGHT DELIVERY

Humboldt County Clerk of the Board,
Courthouse, 825 5th Street, Room 111,
Eureka, California 95501-1153

Re: **Notice of Claims re Dianna Rios v. County of Humboldt**

This Notice of Claims is made pursuant to California Government Code Section 910, *et seq.*, by Claimant Dianna Rios ("Ms. Rios") against the County of Humboldt, California ("Humboldt County" or "the County"). Pursuant to Government Code § 910(f), the amounts sought by Ms. Rios exceed ten thousand dollars (\$10,000), in an amount according to proof at trial.

Please take notice that Ms. Rios intends to seek damages against the County and, to the extent applicable, its Supervisors or employees, pursuant to California Labor Code section 1102.5, and all other laws to the extent applicable. Ms. Rios's claims are based on the following facts, without limitation, and she reserves all rights to supplement or amend this Notice with additional facts or claims as may be discovered or become relevant.

RELEVANT FACTS

Ms. Rios was employed by the County as its Economic Development Coordinator until she was terminated on October 1, 2025. Ms. Rios was terminated in clear retaliation for her reporting of sexual harassment, invasion of privacy, and related claims by then- [REDACTED] in August 2024. [REDACTED] was a [REDACTED] to Ms. Rios during [REDACTED] employment at the County.

On or about December 2-4, 2023, Ms. Rios travelled with [REDACTED] and another County employee to attend the [REDACTED]. While there, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] which caused Ms. Rios extreme embarrassment, humiliation, loss of reputation, and emotional distress.

On or about August 23, 2024, Ms. Rios reported [REDACTED] conduct to County Human Resources Director Zachary O'Hanen. The delay in her reporting was because she was fearful of retaliation from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] friends in the County, but her supervision was being transferred from [REDACTED] and she felt unsafe working under new supervision without the reporting the [REDACTED] incident. Mr. O'Hanen issued an "Administrative Investigation and

Interview Notice" on or about August 28, 2024, which opened an investigation into the incident with [REDACTED]

Immediately after reporting the incident with [REDACTED], the working environment changed drastically. Assigned staff was removed from her projects, and she was given increased scrutiny on her every action by the County, in particular [REDACTED]

On or about April 23, 2025, while the investigation into [REDACTED] was ostensibly still ongoing, Ms. Rios was accidentally included on an email from [REDACTED] to County administration titled "Disciplinary Action", where [REDACTED] was attempting to seek any information available to issue some sort of "discipline" to Ms. Rios in order to paper her file and move her toward termination, and concerns about "building a case" against Ms. Rios were discussed. There was no objective reason to discipline Ms. Rios for anything at that time when her many projects were all progressing successfully, and the attempt at that time to "build a case" against her was a clear act of retaliation for her complaint about [REDACTED]

Ultimately, because of the egregiousness of the actions Ms. Rios brought to light, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] It was clear from the totality of the circumstances that [REDACTED] allies in power were committed to retaliate against Ms. Rios for her role in [REDACTED] with the County.

With the investigation of [REDACTED] still open, on September 15, 2025 the County issued a Notice of Intent to Terminate Ms. Rios's employment. The Notice, which included a number of vague and ambiguous allegations, generally accused Ms. Rios of "insubordination and resistance to direction," "Inefficiency/incompetence in project and budget management," "discourteous and unprofessional conduct," and "failure of good behavior." No legitimate specific examples of any of these things were provided, and it appears to be nothing more than and pretext and retaliation for the foregoing.

After a cursory *Skelly* process, the Notice was sustained and Ms. Rios was terminated on October 1, 2025. To demonstrate unmistakably the causal connection between her termination and her complaints about [REDACTED] on October 2, 2025 – the day after she was fired -- Ms. Rios was sent a memo from Mr. O'Hanen titled "Investigation Closure and Findings", which said "Your allegations that [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The term "sustained" means that the investigation established that, more likely than not, the allegation was true." (bold emphasis in original). The clear message the County intended to convey with the timing and content of these communications was that Ms. Rios should have kept her legitimate complaints to herself.

Cal. Labor Code sec. 1102.5(b) states, "An employer, or any person acting on behalf of the employer, shall not retaliate against an employee for disclosing information, or because the employer believes that the employee disclosed or may disclose information, to a government or law enforcement agency, to a person with authority over the employee or another employee who has the authority to investigate, discover, or correct the violation or noncompliance, or for

providing information to, or testifying before, any public body conducting an investigation, hearing, or inquiry, if the employee has reasonable cause to believe that the information discloses a violation of state or federal statute, or a violation of or noncompliance with a local, state, or federal rule or regulation, regardless of whether disclosing the information is part of the employee's job duties."

Cal. Labor Code sec. 1102.5(c) states, "An employer, or any person acting on behalf of the employer, shall not retaliate against an employee for refusing to participate in an activity that would result in a violation of state or federal statute, or a violation of or noncompliance with a local, state, or federal rule or regulation."

Ms. Rios intends to take legal action under these statutes and other applicable law (including but not limited to the Fair Employment and Housing Act, which claims need not be exhausted here).

Finally, it should be noted that under Labor Code sec. 1102.6, "In a civil action or administrative proceeding brought pursuant to Section 1102.5, once it has been demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence that an activity proscribed by Section 1102.5 was a contributing factor in the alleged prohibited action against the employee, the employer shall have the burden of proof to demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that the alleged action would have occurred for legitimate, independent reasons even if the employee had not engaged in activities protected by Section 1102.5." The County will have a difficult time meeting this burden of rebuttal where it cannot point to any legitimate performance-related reason for Ms. Rios's termination.

Notice and Further Action

If the County declines to act, or fails to act within forty-five (45) days of this Notice, Ms. Rios will proceed with the foregoing claims in Humboldt County Superior Court. Ms. Rios further contends that there exists no further internal or administrative remedy available to her that could provide due recourse. All notices on this matter should be directed to Counsel of Record:

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All rights are reserved and no admissions are made by Ms. Rios in connection with this Notice.

Regards,



LAZARSKI LAW PRACTICE, P.C.