BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT
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August 8, 2023

Eraina Ortega
California Department of Human Resources
1810 16th St.
Sacramento, CA 95811

Letter of Concern Regarding
Recruitment Practice Modifications Enacted on or since January 1st, 2023 by the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR)

Dear Director Ortega,

The County of Humboldt Board of Supervisors is writing to express our growing concern with the modifications made to the recruitment and selection process administered by CalHR on or since January 1st, 2023. These changes continue to drastically hinder our county's ability to recruit for MSS positions in our Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) - Social Services Programs and the North Coast Regional Department of Child Support Services (NCRDCSS). The County of Humboldt is currently an Interagency Merit System (IMS) County and relies on CalHR to administer recruitment and classification processes for our MSS positions. While MSS positions provide essential services to our community, the recent CalHR recruitment changes have hindered our county's ability to recruit qualified applicants for these positions in a timely manner. To address these concerns, we strongly urge CalHR to revert the following January 1st, 2023 changes to CalHR's recruitment and selection process.

The January 1st, 2023 changes have extended the recruitment process in a number of ways, resulting in months long delays to hire candidates and provide essential services to our community. CalHR's recent interpretation that their Merit System rules supersede the County's Merit System Rules (Personnel Rules) has required additional testing measures for candidates. Many of these new testing measures have not been developed by CalHR prior to implementing this new practice, however CalHR has indicated this process must be followed despite not being developed. The legal requirement to include these testing measures is also being applied above and beyond the requirements of the California Code of Regulations, Title 2 § 17033 by CalHR, and the county has not been provided a justification for this change as of the date of this letter. The County of Humboldt feels your interpretation of California Code of Regulations, Title 2 § 17033 is outside of the letter and intent of these regulations. The screening process for applicants also changed in the new year, requiring the review of transcripts in the Minimum Qualifications (MQ) step that has further impacted the timeline from the point a candidate applies to notification that they eligible for hire. This practice so far has shown to be inefficient and is resulting in a loss of interest in prospective applicants. These changes have prevented the County of Humboldt from attaining appropriate staffing levels to serve our community.

Some changes to CalHR's recruitment and selection process that have been especially impactful to the County of Humboldt include the screening of MQs for the Social Worker IV A/B/C/D Classification. Social Workers are critical to providing essential services to some of our community's most vulnerable families. Due to educational requirements for this position, the county has a narrow window to recruit CalSWEC Title IV-E graduates from CalPoly Humboldt's Social Worker program before they seek opportunities outside of the county. Historically, CalHR has allowed candidates to progress to next stages in the recruitment process for the Social Worker IV classification if they would be an upcoming graduate from an approved program. As of January 1st, 2023, CalHR changed this long standing past practice and hasn't allowed candidates to pass the MQ screening if they have not yet graduated. Our county has since received direction from CalHR that the job specification must be modified before this practice can resume. These unexpected changes have severely impacted the county's ability to recruit for Social Workers.

As an IMS county, we have no other avenue to fill these positions. A May 1, 2023, Grand Jury Report indicated that the county must streamline hiring practices to recruit for this classification within a reasonable amount of time. This report was shared with CalHR for review and consideration. However, CalHR has not provided solutions to the recruitment findings listed in the report. At this stage, compliance with these finding falls completely in the hands of CalHR. Finally, since the new Merit System Services management team has indicated that their recruitment and selections rules now supersede the County of Humboldt's own Merit System Rules, county employees are effectively being held to different standards when they're recruited either through Merit System Services or through the County of Humboldt's recruitment process. This is unacceptable, as all County of Humboldt employees deserve an equal application of the county's personnel rules.

We urge that CalHR implement the following changes to allow the County of Humboldt to maintain essential services to our community:

- Revert the requirement for one competitive examination per recruitment. This includes that the competitive examination to be one of the four recognized examination types used by CalHR;
- Reinstate the option for examinations to be waived at the request of the hiring authority;
- allow the county to uses its current competitive examinations;
- Revert the requirement for examinations to be developed before the recruitment bulletin is posted;
- Transfer the authority to verify official transcripts to the hiring authority upon successful completion of the recruitment process;
- Reinstate the county's process for Masters in Social Work (MSW) students to apply up to 6 months prior to graduation for Social Worker IV A-D recruitments and be provisionally placed on the eligible list;
- Implement a forum for CalHR to seek input from counties prior to implementing new changes to MSS processes.

The recruitment changes that CalHR has implemented since January 1, 2023, have significantly impacted the ability of our county to provide appropriate service levels to our community. DHHS and NCRDCSS provide services to vulnerable populations within our community and this

has resulted in barriers to meeting mandated service requirements. As a result, continued staff vacancies have negatively impacted the lives of families served by our agency.

Sincerely,

Steve Madrone, Chair

cc: Senator Mike McGuire