

1 Paul Hoffman SBN 71244
2 John Washington SBN 315991
3 Karen Kartun SBN 357230
4 Schonbrun Seplow Harris Hoffman & Zeldes, LLP
5 200 Pier Ave. Ste. 226
6 Hermosa Beach, California 90254
7 Phone: 310-717-7373
8 Emails: hoffpaul@aol.com; jwashington@sshhzlaw.com;
9 kkartun@hoffmanwashington.com

10 *Attorneys for Plaintiff*

11 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
12 **FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

13 VICTORIA FLORES, an individual,

14 Plaintiff,

15 vs.

16 CHAD BIANCO, Sheriff Riverside
17 County, DON SHARP, Undersheriff,
18 HERMAN LOPEZ, Assistant Sheriff
19 Corrections, COUNTY of
20 RIVERSIDE, and DOES 1-10,
21 inclusive,

22 Defendants.
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Case No.

COMPLAINT FOR DAMAGES

Retaliation in Violation of the Federal
False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3730(h);

Retaliation in Violation of California
False Claims Act, Cal. Gov't Code §
12653;

Wrongful Termination (Whistleblower
Retaliation) in Violation of Cal. Labor
Code § 1102.5;

Wrongful Termination and Retaliation
in Violation of Public Policy;

Gender Discrimination in Violation of
the Fair Employment & Housing Act,
Cal. Gov't Code § 12940(a);

Conspiracy to Interfere with Civil
Rights, 42 U.S.C. § 1985;

Violation of Civil Rights 42 U.S.C. §
1983 (Fourteenth Amendment Due

Process)

Violation of Civil Rights 42 U.S.C. §
1983 (Monell)

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

1 **INTRODUCTION**

2 1. This action arises from the wrongful and retaliatory termination of
3 Victoria Flores, a highly respected and principled Sheriff's Captain with an
4 unblemished record of integrity and professionalism over her decades of service to
5 the Riverside County Sheriff's Office. Flores's unwavering commitment to honesty
6 and accountability made her a target in a department plagued by corruption,
7 unconstitutional conduct, and gender discrimination.

8 2. Sheriff Chad Bianco and his leadership team sought to silence and
9 discredit Captain Flores. Bianco used a minor incident at the shooting range as
10 pretext for terminating Captain Flores to shield the department from scrutiny.
11 Bianco intentionally stigmatized Captain Flores and impaired her reputation for
12 honesty and morality, causing her great emotional harm and hindering her future
13 employment opportunities. In holding Defendants accountable for their unlawful
14 actions, Plaintiff seeks full legal and equitable relief.

15 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

16 3. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to
17 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 31 U.S.C. § 3732(a) and (b), as the claims arise under the
18 Federal False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. §§ 3729 and 3730(h), Title VII of the Civil
19 Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1985.

20 4. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1367 this Court has supplemental jurisdiction
21 over the state law claims arising under the California False Claims Acts (Cal. Gov't
22 Code § 12653), Section 1102.5 of the California Labor Code, and California's Fair
23 Employment and Housing Act (Cal. Gov't § 12653), and Wrongful Termination and
24 Retaliation in Violation of Public Policy because those claims are so related to the
25 claims within this Court's original jurisdiction that they form the same case or
26 controversy under Article III of the United States Constitution

27 5. Venue is proper in this district because Defendants reside in the district,
28 maintain a principal place of business in the district, and a substantial part of the

1 events or omissions giving rise to Plaintiff's claims occurred inside the district.

2 **PARTIES**

3 6. Plaintiff FLORES ("Flores" or "Plaintiff"), at all relevant times, was an
4 employee with Riverside County Sheriff's Office ("RCSO"). She began her career
5 with the RCSO in 1996 and served the RCSO with pride and integrity for twenty-
6 eight years. Through her hard work and dedication to service, Flores overcame
7 multiple roadblocks to move up the ranks in the RCSO from her beginnings as a
8 Correctional Deputy through positions as Corporal, Sergeant, Lieutenant, and finally
9 achieving the status of Correctional Captain at the Robert Presley Detention Center
10 a position of great responsibility, which she held until the time she was
11 inappropriately terminated. Over the course of her career, Flores managed large
12 departmental projects, chaired several committees, and was widely regarded by her
13 colleagues as a consummate and tireless professional.

14 7. Defendant CHAD BIANCO ("Defendant Bianco") was at all times
15 relevant to the litigation, a policymaker and/or supervisor and acting under color of
16 law within the course and scope of his employment and office as the Sheriff of the
17 Riverside County Sheriff's Office. Defendant Bianco has served as Sheriff since
18 2019. He oversees more than 3600 employees and five correctional facilities.
19 Under his leadership, the department has experienced multiple scandals, including
20 the Riverside County correctional facilities becoming the deadliest jail system in the
21 nation, which led to an ongoing investigation by the California Department of
22 Justice. He is being sued individually and in his official capacity.

23 8. Defendant DON SHARP ("Defendant Sharp") was at all times relevant
24 to the litigation acting under color of law within the course and scope of his
25 employment and offices as a law enforcement officer of the RCSO. As Undersheriff,
26 Defendant Sharp served as the second in command within the Sheriff's Office. He
27 is being sued individually and in his official capacity.

28 9. Defendant HERMAN LOPEZ ("Defendant Lopez") was at all times

1 relevant to the litigation acting under color of law within the course and scope of his
2 employment and offices as a law enforcement officer of the RCSO. As Assistant
3 Sheriff of Corrections, Defendant Lopez oversaw the management and operations of
4 the county's jail system.

5 10. Defendant COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE ("Defendant County") is a duly
6 constituted governmental entity in the State of California and is, or was, the
7 employer of all individually named Defendants, including but not limited to those
8 who are sued in their individual and official capacities, as well as one, or all
9 Defendant DOES 1 through 10.

10 11. The identities, capacities, and/or nature of involvement of Defendant
11 DOES 1 through 10 ("Doe Defendants") are presently unknown to Plaintiff.
12 Plaintiff, therefore, sues such persons using "Does" as fictitiously-named
13 defendants. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereupon alleges that there is likely
14 to be evidentiary support to prove that each Doe Defendant was involved in some
15 manner and legally responsible for the acts, omissions, and/or breaches of duty
16 alleged below. Plaintiff will amend the Complaint to name the Doe Defendants
17 upon learning their true identities and roles in the actions complained of herein.

18 **FACTS APPLICABLE TO ALL CAUSES OF ACTION**

19 12. Plaintiff Flores began her employment with the RCSO on April 11,
20 1996. Throughout over twenty-eight years of employment with the RCSO, Plaintiff
21 rose through the department ranks, consistently received excellent reviews of her
22 work, and had a reputation for honesty and integrity. Before the episode flagged as
23 the reason for her termination, she had never been subject to any disciplinary
24 actions. Plaintiff experienced gender discrimination, which affected the rate at
25 which she was promoted, and retaliation in the form of termination for being
26 unwilling to stay silent or cover up the corruption and unconstitutional practices she
27 witnessed.

1 *Retaliation for Challenging Unconstitutional Actions*

2 13. In May 2021, while a Correctional Lieutenant, Plaintiff became aware
3 of an incident at the Robert Presley Detention Center involving excessive use of
4 force against an inmate, which resulted in the inmate suffering a head injury and
5 loss of memory. Plaintiff was shown video of the incident by one of the sergeants.
6 She appropriately reported the incident to her superior officer, and the incident was
7 subsequently investigated by the Professional Standards Bureau (“PSB”). While the
8 investigation was underway, Lieutenant Flores was promoted to the Captain of the
9 Robert Presley Detention Center in July 2021. When the investigation was
10 complete some months later Captain Flores noted the deputies received no
11 disciplinary action. Flores spoke to Captain Kenneth Paulson of the PSB to ask why
12 no discipline was issued. In response, Paulson downplayed the entire incident,
13 explaining that there was no issue because the inmate had no recollection of the
14 events. Captain Flores posed a hypothetical question to Captain Paulson on what
15 would have happened if the inmate would have died and Captain Paulson responded
16 flippantly, “Well, then we would have done a homicide investigation.”

17 14. Similar incidents continued to occur at the detention facility. It was
18 well known by her staff that she would not tolerate the use of unconstitutional
19 excessive force. Concerned about reports of inmate mistreatment and deaths, the
20 Riverside County Grand Jury evaluated conditions in the county jails and prisons
21 beginning in 2021. Plaintiff met with the Grand Jury for a question-and-answer
22 session in August 2021, shortly after achieving her new position and was transparent
23 about all practices concerning the administration of the jails. She received a letter of
24 commendation from one of the members of the Grand Jury for her forthrightness in
25 answering their questions.

26 15. When the Grand Jury reconvened in March 2022 and requested another
27 question-and-answer session regarding inmate deaths, Defendant Bianco, concerned
28 Plaintiff would testify honestly about these incidents, ordered Plaintiff to say she

1 was sick so she could not appear. Unwilling to lie but concerned about
2 repercussions from disobeying Bianco, Plaintiff said she would instead take a
3 vacation day that day.

4 16. While in her leadership position at the detention facility, Plaintiff
5 quickly reported any issues to the PSB, and her direct Chief, including another
6 severe incident that occurred in May 2023. The incident involved a deputy with a
7 history of disciplinary issues. Plaintiff reported the deputy to the PSB, and Chief
8 James Krachmer, and he was placed on administrative a month after the incident.
9 However, as soon as Plaintiff was placed on administrative leave, the deputy was
10 brought back to active service without receiving any discipline.

11 17. In August 2023, an inmate suffered a fentanyl overdose and required
12 hospitalization. Flores immediately informed her superior officer, Correctional
13 Chief Misha Graves. Captain Flores explained to Graves that the inmate in question
14 could possibly pass away. Chief Graves told Plaintiff she did not want to have
15 another death listed for corrections. Graves told Flores not to send her the
16 Notification of Incident (“NOI”), which would have been the usual protocol.
17 Instead, she stated she would have the inmate federally released from custody while
18 he was in the hospital, which would remove him from the list of incarcerated
19 individuals and distance Graves from any responsibility. The federal release process
20 is only supposed to be used when a detention facility reaches 90% capacity, which
21 was not case at the time. Recognizing the inmate’s release was atypical, Plaintiff
22 sent the NOI to herself for documentation.

23 18. Additionally, the Robert Presley Detention Center houses many
24 severely mentally ill inmates. Because their illness made them unable to either
25 understand or comply with requests, these inmates frequently responded violently
26 toward the deputies. The Use of Force investigation team (“CAPO”) began pushing
27 for criminal charges to be filed against these inmates so that they could use those
28 charges to argue against any inmates who filed civil excessive force suits against the

1 RCSI. Plaintiff pushed back against this plan because it would ultimately keep the
2 inmates in custody longer and delay or entirely prevent their getting treatment for
3 their illness. Flores spoke out against this practice in October 2023. Instead of
4 addressing the issue, three weeks later leadership once again reacted by moving all
5 the facility commanders around. Plaintiff understood that this was part of the
6 leadership's "fuck around and find out" treatment for individuals who voiced their
7 concerns about leadership's actions.

8 19. Similar occurrences continued at other Riverside County correctional
9 facilities in which inmates died or were seriously injured, and disciplinary action
10 was not taken against the perpetrators. The Sheriff's Office covered up or hid
11 information about these incidents from the relatives of the deceased inmates. The
12 severity of these incidents was such that the Department of Justice initiated a civil
13 rights investigation of the Sheriff's Office that is still ongoing. A motivating factor
14 in Plaintiff's termination was Plaintiff's opposition to Defendants' illegal actions
15 and egregious conduct and fear that she would expose them.

16 20. Plaintiff's concerns about potential retaliation from leadership were
17 heightened when, after the incident with Chief Graves, she found a representative
18 from the technical services bureau in her office altering her computer. The
19 representative's claim that it was to enable Plaintiff to make Amazon purchases for
20 her facility was nonsensical as purchases of that type were handled by someone else.
21 Suspicious about the real reason for the representative's action, Plaintiff examined
22 her computer settings and found that a second IP address was now associated with
23 her system, suggesting her computer was being mirrored and monitored elsewhere.

24 21. Plaintiff was terminated in part because Defendant Bianco knew
25 Plaintiff recognized and would expose the egregious wrongs occurring in the jails.

26 *Retaliation for Challenging Corruption-Overcharges*

27 22. Beginning in July 2021, Plaintiff noted improper charges in the budget
28 she was responsible for overseeing. These included charges for consultations she

1 was unaware of and wildly inflated charges for construction and repair work.

2 23. In September 2021, the manager of the security electronics company
3 CML contacted Plaintiff. Plaintiff had developed a relationship with the vendor
4 while working out contracts and hiring vendors before her July 2021 promotion to
5 captain. The manager informed Plaintiff that Assistant Sheriff Robert Gunzel was
6 bringing over people from Orange County and having the contractors markedly
7 inflate the contract prices.

8 24. Shortly after this interaction, a sergeant working within the Project
9 Management Office (“PMO”) approached Flores with concerns that Assistant
10 Sheriff Robert Gunzel was bringing his friends from Orange County over as part of
11 the Job Order Contracting (“JOC”) program. He explained that of the nine JOC
12 contractors hired, only two were not from Orange County and, the ones from
13 Orange County had a personal relationship with Gunzel. This sergeant also
14 expressed his concern that Remon Tadrous, the director of the PMO, told his staff
15 that he did not want any facility commanders receiving line item costs for projects
16 and to provide only the total amount to avoid raising too many questions. At the
17 time of these conversations, Plaintiff was still on probation in her new position and
18 worried about the repercussions of reporting the malfeasance. Plaintiff encouraged
19 the manager to go to the auditing company and seek an investigation and told the
20 sergeant he should let his chain of command know.

21 25. In May 2022, Lieutenant Rafael Gomez, who had some construction
22 experience, compiled a spreadsheet of department construction expenses and noticed
23 discrepancies amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Gomez contacted the
24 vendors for clarification, but the vendors refused to supply any documentation.
25 Gomez sent the information up the chain of command, but nothing was done about
26 it.

27 26. Plaintiff, along with other concerned colleagues, appropriately
28 questioned these charges. Instead of receiving an appropriate response from the

1 leadership, Plaintiff was told to stop challenging the charges. When Plaintiff
2 questioned Chief Graves about a “consultation” fee for more than 60,000 dollars,
3 Plaintiff was told “It is what it is,” and received no further information.

4 27. Commanders had previously been able to see and question all line
5 items for their projects, but RCSO leadership stopped that when Plaintiff and her
6 colleagues raised concerns about the inflated or unexplained charges. Plaintiff
7 received an email from her Chief stating that Remon Tadrous, the director of the
8 Project Management Office, would no longer be providing the information. From
9 then on, Plaintiff was only informed of the total project cost and was denied
10 information about the component costs. Additionally, Bianco had Gomez
11 transferred and specifically ordered someone without construction experience to be
12 put into the position. Gomez was told he was being transferred because he had been
13 asking too many questions.

14 28. Plaintiff was terminated in part to stop her questions and prevent her
15 from exposing these overcharges.

16 *Retaliation for Challenging Corruption Cover Ups for Leadership’s Friends*

17 29. In May 2023, there was a homicide investigation in Riverside County
18 involving the killing of a young woman by her boyfriend. The homicide
19 investigator submitted the case to the Riverside District Attorney for prosecution.
20 Without discussing it with the homicide investigator or the victim’s family and in
21 conflict with his obligations as a law enforcement officer, Assistant Chief Delgado
22 wrote to the DA and asked him to be lenient with the perpetrator, who was a family
23 friend. He also advocated for the perpetrator’s expedited release from Plaintiff’s
24 facility. Based on Delgado’s letter, and without the input or consent of the homicide
25 investigator, the DA lowered the charges from murder to involuntary manslaughter.
26 When the homicide investigator became aware of the back-channel actions and
27 change in the charges, he demanded an investigation. The PSB came to Plaintiff’s
28 facility to investigate the charges and spoke with one of Plaintiff’s lieutenants.

1 Knowing the underhanded actions would anger Plaintiff, the PSB personnel told the
2 lieutenant not to let his superior officer, Captain Flores, know what had happened.
3 Uncomfortable with the subterfuge, the lieutenant informed Plaintiff of what
4 occurred. Initially, Delgado suffered no consequences. Delgado was forced to
5 resign only after the information got out and was met with public outrage.

6 30. In November 2023, a sergeant came to Plaintiff with information that
7 one of the Perris station sergeants was participating in pornography for payment.
8 Plaintiff knew the department had previously placed another correctional lieutenant
9 on administrative leave for making a racial joke while participating in a non-
10 pornographic TikTok video. Recognizing that the Perris station sergeant's
11 pornographic video was significantly more offensive than that created by the other
12 correctional lieutenant, Plaintiff brought the information to Chief Misha Graves.
13 Graves made it clear she was displeased that Plaintiff raised a concern. Although
14 Graves asked Plaintiff to send whatever information she had, it ultimately became
15 clear to Plaintiff that the sergeant's pornographic activities were already known to
16 the department for a year. Instead of being reprimanded, like the other correctional
17 lieutenant, the involved sergeant had simply been told to keep it on the "down low."

18 31. Two weeks after bringing the information to Graves, Plaintiff was
19 placed on administrative leave. By discharging Plaintiff, the department had, in
20 effect, resolved the complaint because, without a complainant, there was no
21 requirement to investigate. The matter was dropped, and there were no
22 repercussions for the video participant.

23 *Favors for Bianco's Political Supporters*

24 32. In July 2023, a friend and political supporter of Defendant Bianco's,
25 who was the proprietor of a company called "One Day Wraps," was awarded a
26 lucrative contract to wrap several buses before any other business was even allowed
27 to bid on the contract.

28 33. After One Day Wraps had already completed the work, one of

1 Plaintiff's lieutenants, Lieutenant Rafael Gomez, was told by Chief Zach Hall to
2 justify the contract by finding three other quotes from other vendors that were
3 higher than the amount paid to One Day Wraps. The lieutenant could only do so by
4 seeking vendors outside Riverside County. Plaintiff was not informed of the
5 lieutenant's assignment until after the lieutenant had already completed the task.

6 34. Plaintiff was intentionally kept uninformed because Defendant Bianco
7 knew she would have challenged the improper conduct.

8 *Firing Range Incident*

9 35. On November 27, 2023, Plaintiff received a call from Chief Graves
10 stating she was being moved from the Robert Presley Detention Center to the Smith
11 Correctional Facility. Other correctional commanders were also to be moved
12 between facilities.

13 36. On November 28, 2023, Plaintiff, along with other correctional
14 commanders, met with Assistant Sheriff Lopez to inform him that the commanders
15 did not want to be relocated. The commanders wanted to speak with Defendant
16 Bianco, as they believed the transfers were in retaliation for their speaking up about
17 leadership's resistance to their filing charges in use of force incidents. Furthermore,
18 the commanders recognized that by relocating them to different facilities, leadership
19 aimed to prevent them from answering questions during the upcoming DOJ
20 investigation into previous jail incidents because they would lack knowledge of past
21 incidents that had occurred in facilities to which they would be assigned. No
22 meeting with Bianco was permitted.

23 37. November 29, 2023, was Plaintiff's first day back in the office after
24 having been off for several days. There was a large stack of paperwork on her desk
25 that needed to be addressed, particularly with the impending transfer. Additionally,
26 Plaintiff wanted to arrange for two of her command staff members to move to the
27 new facility with her and needed to make phone calls to accomplish this. Plaintiff
28 received a text message from Correctional Lieutenant Gomez the day before

1 reminding her and others that they were scheduled to do a qualification on
2 November 29th. The message did not state whether it was a daytime or nighttime
3 qualification. Plaintiff felt there was no time to do the qualification that day with
4 everything else she needed to accomplish, but her team convinced her to go to the
5 range for the qualification.

6 38. At the range, Plaintiff had on a new ballistic vest that she had never
7 worn before. The vest was too large for her torso, and after shooting, she had
8 difficulty figuring out how to holster her gun appropriately with the vest on.
9 Sergeant Kelly, the Rangemaster, gave her commands to assist her in this process.
10 As he was doing so, Plaintiff heard Deputy Beltran yell, "You, you, come here!"
11 something a deputy would never do to a much higher ranking officer like Plaintiff.
12 Indeed, Beltran contemptuously pointed to the ground in front of him, essentially
13 summoning Plaintiff over to him as one might call a dog. Standard procedure would
14 have required Beltran to inform Rangemaster Kelly about any concerns he had so
15 that Kelly could address those concerns with Plaintiff.

16 39. Unaware of why Beltran called her over, Plaintiff assumed that it was
17 related to her being outspoken about the many issues she had raised and that perhaps
18 she was about to be terminated, or that someone had died at her facility. She was
19 focused on these concerns and, therefore, confused and taken aback when Beltran
20 stated he called her over because she was being unsafe with her weapon when she
21 was trying to holster it. Plaintiff was confused by Beltran's aggressive attitude,
22 which was far beyond that called for based on the severity of the claimed offense.
23 Standard protocol would have been for Beltran to speak to Rangemaster Kelly about
24 his concerns and have Kelly address them with Plaintiff since Kelly was already
25 dealing with the difficulty with holstering the gun.

26 40. After Plaintiff walked back to the bay where her team stood, she
27 overheard a conversation between the rangemaster in the adjacent bay and Sergeant
28 Kelly in which Kelly stated that an email was going out the following week noting

1 that the qualifications were night qualifications. Plaintiff had not realized the
2 qualification was supposed to be a nighttime qualification until that time. Plaintiff
3 asked Sergeant Kelly, "Are we all right qualifying today?" Sergeant Kelly looked at
4 the conditions and said it was fine because it was overcast.

5 41. Embarrassed and rattled by the humiliating treatment she received in
6 front of her team, Plaintiff wanted to leave the range as quickly as possible and
7 regain her composure. As Plaintiff was leaving, she approached Kelly to say
8 goodbye. She did not ask Sergeant Kelly to speak with Beltran, but having
9 witnessed Beltran's unprofessional conduct toward Plaintiff, Kelly called Beltran
10 over of his own accord. Beltran and Kelly proceeded to get into an argument over
11 what just happened.

12 42. When Plaintiff witnessed Beltran also being disrespectful towards
13 Kelly, his superior officer, she told Beltran his behavior was inappropriate.
14 However, because Plaintiff strongly believes in leaving any interaction on a positive
15 note, she told Beltran that she had heard very good things about him, and she looked
16 forward to working with him at the Smith facility. Furthermore, as she was leaving,
17 Plaintiff asked Kelly to check on Beltran and ensure he was OK. In the
18 investigation that followed the incident, Beltran misconstrued Plaintiff's act of good
19 faith as an attempt to intimidate him.

20 43. Plaintiff, as per usual practice, did not fill out the qualification time on
21 the paperwork. Sergeant Kelly completed the paperwork. Plaintiff left the range
22 without recognizing Kelly falsified the time.

23 44. It was not unusual for RCSO officers to qualify slightly earlier for
24 nighttime qualifications than 5 p.m. because they cannot receive overtime pay to
25 come to the range after hours.

26 45. Based on the incident at the shooting range, Plaintiff was placed on
27 administrative leave in December 2023. Plaintiff was charged with falsely stating
28 that the qualification was a nighttime qualification when it was done during daylight

1 hours and for conduct unbecoming of an officer related to Plaintiff questioning the
2 manner in which Deputy Beltran reprimanded her at the shooting range.

3 46. These charges were false. However, even if true, they would not have
4 been brought against a Sheriff's Office employee with an impeccable record were it
5 not for a retaliatory purpose.

6 *Gender Discrimination*

7 47. Starting three years ago, Defendant Bianco and RCSO leadership
8 denied Plaintiff promotions that were promised to her and for which she was the
9 most qualified. Four men received promotions ahead of Plaintiff. The delay in
10 promotion impacted Plaintiff's ability to move up the ranks to chief. Subsequently,
11 even though Plaintiff was highly qualified for a chief position, she was passed over
12 by a less experienced male colleague who was one of the four men who had been
13 promoted to captain ahead of her.

14 48. In November 2022, RCSO Lieutenant Thomas Tanner attempted to
15 further degrade Plaintiff by breaking into her office and placing multiple photos
16 showing Sheriff Bianco winning the recent election throughout her office.
17 Lieutenant Tanner, who had a history of treating women disparagingly, would not
18 have acted similarly towards a male colleague. Additionally, when Captain Flores
19 reported the incident, it was not investigated. Plaintiff's willingness to protest
20 discriminatory treatment is one of the reasons she was retaliated against.

21 49. RCSO has a known history of using derogatory terms to describe
22 women. Women are generally categorized as "bitches" or "sluts" and treated
23 accordingly. Whereas a male officer would be praised as a strong leader at RCSO,
24 Plaintiff was categorized as a "bitch" for demonstrating the same leadership
25 qualities as male leaders in the Department. This classification was used by
26 witnesses to impugn Plaintiff's character during the shooting range incident
27 investigation. A man in her position would not have been terminated. Plaintiff's
28 male colleagues who were fired at the same time were the collateral damage of

1 RCSO leadership's actions against Plaintiff.

2 *Termination*

3 50. Defendant Bianco used the shooting range incident as pretextual
4 justification for Plaintiff's termination. In the termination letter dated April 26,
5 2024, Defendant Bianco noted he reviewed Flores's employment file covering the
6 previous five-year period and found not a single incidence of prior disciplinary
7 action. Nevertheless, he proceeded to terminate her employment.

8 51. Plaintiff was terminated from her position on July 11, 2024.

9 52. Had Plaintiff been male and unquestioning of Defendant Bianco's
10 misconduct, a single disciplinary action over decades of service would not have led
11 to the termination of a respected twenty-eight-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office.

12 53. At the time of her termination, Plaintiff was a Commander at the
13 Robert Presley Detention Center.

14 54. On January 8, 2025, Plaintiff timely filed a claim against the County of
15 Riverside regarding her wrongful and retaliatory termination pursuant to Gov. Code
16 § 910. The Riverside County Board of Supervisors denied the claim on January 14,
17 2025.

18 55. On February 18, 2025, Plaintiff timely filed a complaint with the
19 California Civil Rights Department and received a right-to-sue notice.

20 56. On March 11, 2025, Plaintiff timely filed a complaint with the EEOC.
21 To date, the EEOC has not issued a right-to-sue letter. Plaintiff will amend her
22 complaint when she receives a right-to-sue letter or six months have passed.

23 57. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' actions, Ms. Flores
24 continues to suffer severe emotional injuries and medical expenses. Her future
25 earning potential has been irreparably harmed by her removal from a government
26 position she held for nearly three decades.

27

28

FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Retaliation in Violation of the Federal False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3730(h)

58. Plaintiff hereby realleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of this Complaint.

59. The Federal False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. § 3730(h) Relief from Retaliatory Actions reads as follows:

(1) In general. Any employee, contractor, or agent shall be entitled to all relief necessary to make that employee, contractor, or agent whole, if that employee, contractor, or agent is discharged, demoted, suspended, threatened, harassed, or in any other manner discriminated against in the terms and conditions of employment because of lawful acts done by the employee, contractor, agent or associated others in furtherance of an action under this section or other efforts to stop 1 or more violations of this subchapter

(2) Relief. Relief under paragraph (1) shall include reinstatement with the same seniority status that employee, contractor, or agent would have had but for the discrimination, 2 times the amount of back pay, interest on the back pay, and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the discrimination, including litigation costs and reasonable attorneys' fees. An action under this subsection may be brought in the appropriate district court of the United States for the relief provided in this subsection.

60. In retaliation for Plaintiff's complaints, Defendant criticized, berated, and terminated Plaintiff.

61. As a result of Defendant's actions, Plaintiff suffered general and special damages, including lost wages and overtime compensation, earnings capacity and

1 promotional opportunities, other employment benefits, and emotional distress.

2 62. Plaintiff also seeks to recover her attorneys' fees, costs of suit, and any
3 other relief deemed appropriate by the Court.

4 **SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

5 **Retaliation in Violation of California False Claims Act, Cal. Govt. Code §**
6 **12653**

7 63. Plaintiff hereby realleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of
8 this Complaint.

9 64. At all relevant times, Plaintiff was employed by Defendant.

10 65. At all relevant times, California Government Code Section 12651 was
11 in full force and effect and was binding upon Defendant. This section states that it
12 shall be a violation of law for any person to "knowingly present or cause[] to be
13 presented a false or fraudulent claim for payment or approval." Cal. Govt. Code §
14 12651(a)(1).

15 66. At all times herein mentioned, California Government Code Section
16 12653 was in full force and effect and was binding upon Defendant. Government
17 Code Section 12653 subsection (a) provides that:

18 An employee, contractor, or agent shall be entitled to all relief
19 necessary to make that employee, contractor, or agent whole, if that
20 employee, contractor, or agent is discharged, demoted, suspended,
21 threatened, harassed, or in any other manner discriminated against in
22 the terms and conditions of his or her employment because of lawful
23 acts done by the employee, contractor, agent or associate others in
24 furtherance of an action under this section or other efforts to stop one
25 or more violations of this article.

26 67. Plaintiff personally observed and was informed that contract prices
27 were being inappropriately inflated or charges, such as consulting fees, were listed
28 in budgets without adequate explanations.

1 68. Plaintiff also reasonably believed that RCSO was giving contracts to
2 leadership's cronies without going through the required bidding process.

3 69. Accordingly, Plaintiff had a reasonable suspicion and belief that
4 employees of RCSO were defrauding the government.

5 70. Plaintiff reported these violations on multiple occasions to supervisors
6 in an effort to stop the violations.

7 71. As a result of Plaintiff's efforts to prevent these violations, Defendants
8 retaliated against Plaintiff by criticizing and berating her, performing no or only the
9 most cursory investigation of Plaintiff's claims, and terminating Plaintiff under false
10 pretenses.

11 72. Plaintiff was harmed by being wrongfully terminated.

12 73. As a result of Defendants' actions, Plaintiff suffered the loss of her
13 salary and other wages, current and future earning capacity, the financial value of
14 her employment benefits, and other pecuniary losses not presently ascertained.

15 74. Plaintiff is entitled to two times her lost wages pursuant to Government
16 Code Section 12653(c).

17 75. As a further direct and legal result of the acts and conduct of
18 Defendant, Plaintiff suffered and continues to suffer harm to reputation,
19 embarrassment, humiliation, embarrassment, severe emotional distress, and mental
20 anguish, in an amount according to proof.

21 76. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants
22 —some of whom are presently unknown to Plaintiff—committed the acts alleged
23 herein: maliciously, fraudulently, and oppressively; with the wrongful intention of
24 injuring Plaintiff; with an improper and evil motive amounting to malice or
25 oppression; and in conscious disregard of Plaintiff's rights. As such, Plaintiff is
26 entitled to recover punitive damages from Defendant in an amount according to
27 proof.

28 77. As a result of Defendant's unlawful acts as alleged, Plaintiff is entitled

1 to compensation for special damages sustained due to Defendants' unlawful
2 retaliation. Plaintiff is also entitled to litigation costs and reasonable attorneys' fees.

3
4 **THIRD CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

5 **Wrongful Termination (Whistleblower Retaliation) in Violation of Cal. Labor**
6 **Code § 1102.5**

7 78. Plaintiff hereby realleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of
8 this Complaint.

9 79. At all times relevant to this lawsuit, Plaintiff was an employee of
10 RCSO.

11 80. In doing the things herein alleged, and as otherwise will be proven at
12 trial, Defendant violated California Labor Code Section 1102.5.

13 81. California Labor Code Section 1102.5 prohibits an employer from
14 retaliating against an employee because, *inter alia*, the employee: (1) had
15 reasonable cause to believe that a violation of state or federal statute or local, state,
16 or federal rule or regulation occurred; and (2) disclosed—or may disclose—that
17 information to a person with authority either over the employee or to investigate,
18 discover, or correct the violation or noncompliance.

19 82. As alleged herein, Plaintiff had reasonable cause to believe that
20 Defendants had violated Federal and State laws and regulations.

21 83. Acting upon that reasonable belief, Plaintiff disclosed information
22 about these violations to her supervisor and others with authority to investigate
23 and/or correct RCSO's actions.

24 84. Specifically, Plaintiff disclosed information to her immediate
25 supervisor and others about:

26 (1) RCSO's unlawful up-charging in contracts

27 (2) The unconstitutional use of excessive force in the Riverside
28 County detention system

1 (3) A deputy's participation in conduct unbecoming of a law
2 enforcement officer.

3 85. Defendant retaliated against Plaintiff by unlawfully terminating
4 Plaintiff for questioning these expenditures and incidents.

5 86. By terminating Plaintiff, Defendant retaliated against Plaintiff in
6 violation of in violation of California Labor Code Sections 1102.5(a), 1102.5(b),
7 and 1102.5(c).

8 87. As a direct and proximate cause of Defendant's conduct, Plaintiff has
9 suffered damages including, but not limited to, lost overtime pay, missed
10 opportunities for promotion and other employment benefits, loss of earnings and
11 future earning capacity, and other pecuniary loss not presently ascertained.

12 88. As a further direct and legal result of the acts and conduct of
13 Defendant, Plaintiff has been caused to and did suffer and continues to suffer severe
14 emotional and mental distress, anguish, humiliation, embarrassment, fright, pain,
15 discomfort, and anxiety.

16 89. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants
17 and their agents—some of whom are presently unknown to Plaintiff—committed the
18 acts alleged herein: maliciously, fraudulently, and oppressively; with the wrongful
19 intention of injuring Plaintiff; with an improper and evil motive amounting to malice
20 or oppression; and in conscious disregard of Plaintiff's rights. As such, Plaintiff is
21 entitled to recover punitive damages from Defendant in an amount according to
22 proof.

23 90. Plaintiff is also entitled to litigation costs, reasonable attorney's fees,
24 and costs of suit.

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27
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FOURTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Wrongful Termination in Violation of Public Policy

91. Plaintiff hereby realleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of this Complaint.

92. RCSO terminated Plaintiff because she sought to stop and prevent unlawful activity and because of her gender. Defendant's termination of Plaintiff for these reasons violated important and well-established public policies, including the public policies codified in California Labor Code Section 1102.5 and California Government Code Section 12940.

93. At all times during her employment with RCSO, Plaintiff performed her duties in an exemplary fashion. By reason of the aforementioned conduct and circumstances, Defendant violated the fundamental public policies of the State of California.

94. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants' termination of her employment, as alleged herein, was based on illegal motivations set forth above and that any other reasons proffered by Defendants were and are pretextual. The aforementioned harassment, wrongful termination, and retaliation have resulted in damage and injury to Plaintiff as alleged herein.

95. As a direct, foreseeable, and legal result of Defendant's actions, Plaintiff has incurred and continues to incur substantial losses in earnings, earning capacity, and employment benefits.

96. As a direct, foreseeable, and legal result of Defendant's actions, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer damage to her reputation, humiliation, embarrassment, mental and emotional distress, and mental anguish, the precise amount of which will be proven at trial.

97. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges that Defendant and its managing agents, officers, and/or directors—some of whom are presently unknown to Plaintiff—committed the acts alleged herein maliciously, fraudulently,

1 and oppressively; with the wrongful intention of injuring Plaintiff; with an improper
 2 and evil motive amounting to malice or oppression; and in conscious disregard of
 3 Plaintiff's rights. As such, Plaintiff is entitled to recover punitive damages from
 4 Defendant in an amount according to proof.

5 98. As a result of Defendants' retaliatory acts as alleged herein, Plaintiff is
 6 entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs of suit.

8 **FIFTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

9 **Gender Discrimination in Violation of FEHA, Cal. Gov't Code § 12940(a)**

10 99. Plaintiff hereby realleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of
 11 this Complaint.

12 100. Plaintiff filed a complaint with the Civil Rights Department of
 13 California alleging that Defendant discriminated against her on the basis of gender
 14 and marital status in violation of Cal. Gov't Code § 12940(a), and Plaintiff received
 15 a right-to-sue notice. Plaintiff then timely filed this action.

16 101. In violation of Government Code section 12940(a), Defendant
 17 unlawfully and willfully discriminated against Plaintiff by terminating her in part
 18 based on her gender.

19 102. RCSO, which was Plaintiff's employer, terminated Plaintiff.

20 103. Plaintiff was harmed by Defendant's termination of Plaintiff's
 21 employment, both financially and emotionally.

22 104. Indeed, by the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendant, Plaintiff has
 23 been directly and legally caused to suffer actual damages including, but not limited
 24 to, loss of her salary, loss of current and future earning capacity, loss of the financial
 25 value of her employment benefits, and other pecuniary loss not presently
 26 ascertained.

27 105. As a further direct and legal result of the acts and conduct of
 28 Defendants, Plaintiff has been caused to suffer and continues to suffer emotional

1 and mental distress, anguish, humiliation, embarrassment, fright, shock, pain,
 2 discomfort, and anxiety. The exact nature, duration, and extent of said injuries are
 3 presently unknown to Plaintiff, but she is informed and believes and thereon alleges
 4 that some, if not all, the injuries are reasonably certain to be permanent.

5 106. Defendant's conduct in terminating Plaintiff because of her gender—
 6 was a substantial factor in causing Plaintiff's harm.

7 107. Defendant—independently and through its officers and agents—acted
 8 with oppression, fraud, or malice in terminating Plaintiff so as to support the
 9 imposition of exemplary damages. Sheriff Bianco and RCSO employees engaged in
 10 despicable conduct towards Plaintiff with a willful and conscious disregard of her
 11 rights under the FEHA.

12 108. As a result of Defendant's discriminatory conduct alleged herein,
 13 Plaintiff is entitled to reasonable attorney's fees and costs.

14 **SIXTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

15 **Conspiracy to Interfere with Civil Rights, 42 U.S.C. § 1985**

16 109. Plaintiff hereby alleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of
 17 the Complaint.

18 110. Defendant Bianco conspired with others to deprive Plaintiff of her
 19 constitutional rights, motivated by discriminatory animus towards women and
 20 retaliatory intent.

21 111. Defendant Bianco encouraged or allowed members of his staff to use
 22 derogatory language classifying women, including Plaintiff, as bitches; to vandalize
 23 Plaintiff's office; and to humiliate Plaintiff in front of others without repercussions.

24 112. Defendant Bianco's actions were part of a concerted effort to harm
 25 Plaintiff and violate her rights.

26 113. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant Bianco's actions,
 27 Plaintiff has suffered damages, including emotional distress and economic harm.
 28

SEVENTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Violation of Civil Rights 42 U.S.C. § 1983

(Fourteenth Amendment Due Process)

114. Plaintiff hereby alleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of the Complaint.

115. Defendants, acting under color of state law, deprived Plaintiff of her constitutional rights, including her right to due process under the Fourteenth Amendment.

116. Defendants deprived Plaintiff of her right to a good reputation, a protected liberty interest. Defendants intentionally stigmatized her and impaired her reputation for honesty and morality by asserting that Captain Flores was fired for dishonesty, thereby hindering future employment opportunities.

117. Defendant Bianco and his leadership staff conspired to keep Plaintiff uninformed.

118. Defendants' actions were intentional, malicious, and in reckless disregard of Plaintiff's constitutional rights

119. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' actions, Plaintiff has suffered damages, including emotional distress and economic harm.

EIGHTH CAUSE OF ACTION

Violation of Civil Rights 42 U.S.C. § 1983 (Monell)

120. Plaintiff hereby realleges and incorporates each and every paragraph of this Complaint.

121. Defendant COUNTY, through its policies, practices and customs, failed to adequately train, supervise, or discipline its employees, including those in the Riverside County Sheriff's Office.

122. Moreover, Defendant Bianco was the policy maker for the Sheriff's Department at all relevant times, and he directed or ratified the retaliation against plaintiff and other Sheriff's Department employees, including retaliation against

employees who report irregularities in the contracting process, inflated charges for services to the department, and unconstitutional treatment of inmates housed in the County's detention centers. Defendants Bianco and Riverside County also failed to discipline employees who committed these violations. Instead, the RCSO leadership team, including Defendants Bianco, Sharp and Lopez, used threats, forced resignations, and terminations to silence employees who voiced concern or opposition regarding these corrupt and illegal practices.

123. The County's failure to correct or stop these practices resulted in the violation of Plaintiff's constitutional rights, including her right to due process under the Fourteenth Amendment.

124. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant Bianco and Riverside County's actions, Plaintiff has suffered damages, including emotional distress and economic harm. Based upon the principles set forth in *Monell v New York City Department of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658 (1978), Defendant County is liable for Plaintiff's injuries as set forth herein.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff requests relief against Defendants, and each of them, as follows:

1. For general damages in a sum which will be shown according to proof;
2. Special damages;
3. For compensatory and consequential damages according to proof;
4. For interest on the amount of losses incurred;
5. For loss of earnings and other economic expenses according to proof;
6. For all damages and remedies available for violation of 31 U.S.C.S. § 3730, including but not limited to reinstatement with the same seniority status that employee would have had but for the discrimination, two times the amount of back pay, interest on the back pay, and compensation for

1 any special damages sustained as the result of the discrimination,
2 including litigation costs and reasonable attorneys' fees.

3 7. For all damages and remedies available for violation of Government Code
4 § 12653(a)-(b) *et seq.*, including but not limited to, double back pay,
5 interest, attorney's fees and litigation costs and reinstatement with full
6 seniority pursuant to Government Code § 12653(b);

7 8. For all damages and remedies available for violations of Labor Code
8 Section 1102.5, including, without limitation, attorney's fees and costs.

9 9. For costs of suit, including reasonable attorney's fees, including under 42
10 U.S.C. § 1988;

11 10. For punitive and exemplary damages as permitted by law;

12 11. For such other and further relief as the Court may deem proper.

13
14 DATED: July 7, 2025

SCHONBRUN SEPLOW HARRIS
HOFFMAN & ZELDES LLP

15
16 */s/ Paul Hoffman*

17 By: _____

Paul Hoffman
John Washington
Karen Kartun
Attorneys for Plaintiff

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff hereby demands trial by jury for all causes of action alleged.

DATED: July 7, 2025

SCHONBRUN SEPLOW HARRIS
HOFFMAN & ZELDES LLP

/s/ Paul Hoffman

By: _____

Paul Hoffman
John Washington
Karen Kartun
Attorneys for Plaintiff