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PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lawsuit Accuses California State University, President Tomás Morales, and Dean Jake Zhu of Equal Pay Act Violations, Gender Discrimination, And Other Illegal Behavior

Courtney Abrams, PC & Helmer Friedman LLP Represent Current California State University Employees Accusing CSU Of Illegal Employment Practices

March 14, 2023 (Los Angeles, California) – On this 2023 Equal Pay Day, Courtney Abrams of Courtney Abrams, PC & Andrew H. Friedman of Helmer Friedman LLP, announced today the filing of a lawsuit against the Board of Trustees of the California State University (“CSU”), the President of CSU’s San Bernardino campus, Tomás Morales, and the Dean of the Palm Desert Campus of CSU, San Bernardino, Jake Zhu.

The lawsuit, *Clare Weber & Anissa Rogers v. Board of Trustees of the California State University (the State of California acting in its higher education capacity); Tomás Morales, an individual; and Jake Zhu, an individual* (Los Angeles Superior Court Case No. 23STCV05549), alleges that CSU has a well-known pattern and practice of violating California’s Equal Pay Act and otherwise engaging in gender discrimination against and harassing its female employees.

The lawsuit further alleges that CSU resorts to an entrenched practice of silencing its victims if they complain, including forcing them to resign by threatening their careers with ruin (like Plaintiff Anissa Rogers), or, if they refuse, simply firing them (like Plaintiff Clare Weber).

According to the lawsuit, Dr. Weber, who was the then-Vice Provost at CSU’s San Bernardino campus, complained to Defendant CSU and President Tomás Morales that female Vice Provosts, including herself, were being paid less than their male counterparts. The lawsuit alleges that Dr. Weber specifically protested gender discrimination, including complaining that (1) she had learned that she was not making the same amount of money as her male counterparts in the CSU system; and (2) she was one of the lowest paid despite her large portfolio of assignments. According to the lawsuit, Dr. Weber requested a raise to address the disparity in pay between her and her male colleagues. Indeed, as the EEOC recognized today, allegations like Dr. Weber’s are all too common:

“Unfortunately, women’s individual stories have often included the reality that their contributions have been undervalued, underpaid, and overlooked. Pay discrimination is a stark example of that reality . . . When a woman is paid less than a man for doing the same work . . . it not only affects her weekly paycheck, but also her long-term economic security.”

See “A Message from EEOC Chair Charlotte A. Burrows for 2023 Equal Pay Day and Women’s History Month,” accessible at: <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/message-eeoc-chair-charlotte-burrows-2023-equal-pay-day-and-womens-history-month>

The lawsuit likewise alleges that Dr. Rogers, who was the then-Associate Dean at the Palm Desert Campus at CSU, San Bernardino, complained to Dean Jake Zhu that male employees were permitted to harass female employees and that Defendant CSU “needed to do better to disrupt sexism.” According to the lawsuit, Defendant Zhu, who had subjected Dr. Rogers and other female employees to a barrage of sex harassment, instructed Dr. Rogers to just “train the men.”

The lawsuit alleges that, thereafter, in *identical* conversations with both Dr. Weber and Dr. Rogers, current Provost of CSU, San Bernardino, Rafik Mohamed, directed both Dr. Weber and Dr. Rogers to lie to their colleagues and students and say they were “resigning.” According to the lawsuit, Dr. Mohamed was abundantly clear with both Dr. Weber and Dr. Rogers: If you do not resign, you will be fired.

The lawsuit also alleges that multiple current and former employees have corroborated the conduct alleged to be illegal including one current executive as attesting:

“President Morales is so deeply hostile to and regularly discriminates against female employees who work for him, there is a culture of fear at California State University. And, unfortunately, President Morales has a well-known practice of forcing female employees to “resign” or “retire” if they disagree with him or complain. He quickly turns on female employees who report workplace concerns to him and engages in what I can only called a “campaign” to discredit them and remove the female employees.”

(Emphasis added). According to the lawsuit, CSU Chancellor, Jolene Koester has been known to have “coached” female employees about how best to *endure* well-documented sex harassment, discrimination and retaliation by high-ranking male employees (while doing nothing to stop it).

The lawsuit alleges that after Dr. Weber was fired, Defendant CSU offered multiple

conflicting explanations for her firing – none of which were true.

The lawsuit filed by Dr. Weber and Dr. Rogers follows in the heels of a May 2022 study released by the California State University Employees Union finding that the current pay structure within CSU has resulted in white women being paid roughly five percent less than white men, men of color making about three percent less, and women of color having a nearly seven percent disparity in pay when compared to white men. *See* <https://www.csueu.org/Portals/0/Documents/2022/Salary%20Study/CSUEU%20Gender%20and%20Racial%20Pay%20Gaps%20Full%20With%20Appendix.pdf?ver=bCWKga-pX4TwiK6pmsUtiQ%3d%3d>.

Dr. Weber and Dr. Rogers are represented by Courtney Abrams, PC and Helmer Friedman, LLP, California law firms that represent employees and other individuals seeking to vindicate their rights.

Speaking about the lawsuit, Courtney Abrams stated, “California law is clear: it is illegal for employers to subject female employees to inferior and hostile working conditions and pay them less than their male counterparts.”

Andrew H. Friedman likewise stated: “California law is abundantly clear that an employer – not even the State of California – may retaliate against an employee because she complains about gender discrimination and harassment.”

Current and former employees of California State University who wish to report their work experiences or learn more about the lawsuit should visit <https://www.helmerfriedman.com/calstate-university-sued-for-gender-discrimination/> and/or <https://www.courtneyabramslaw.com/csu-sued-for-gender-discrimination-and-sex-harassment>.

For more information about this lawsuit, please contact Courtney Abrams (at 310-490-1547 or courtney@courtneyabramslaw.com) or Andrew H. Friedman (at 310-396-7714 x. 106 or afriedman@helmerfriedman.com).

Similarly, if you are a witness or have information that would be relevant to the claims of Dr. Weber or Dr. Rogers please contact Mr. Friedman and/or Ms. Abrams.