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State Holds Laguna Irrigation District to Account Over Claims of Severe Workplace Harassment and Discrimination

Settlement requires irrigation district to pay \$160,000 and overhaul workplace complaint process

SACRAMENTO – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today announced a settlement with the Laguna Irrigation District in Fresno County over claims that supervisors at the district created a hostile work environment and retaliated against employees who reported alleged misconduct. The settlement, which involves multiple former workers, requires the irrigation district to pay \$160,000 and overhaul its workplace complaint process.

“When workers have the courage to come forward, employers are required by law to take their complaints seriously,” said **CRD Director Kevin Kish**. “There is no place for bullying and harassment by your supervisors. This settlement will bring change workers at the Laguna Irrigation District deserve.”

Alleged Racist Comments and Sexual Harassment

In 2022, CRD began investigating the Laguna Irrigation District after receiving a complaint from a former worker who said he was fired for reporting racist comments and sexual harassment. According to the complaint, the worker and his colleagues regularly experienced verbal and physical harassment multiple times per week, including the use of derogatory terms by supervisors attacking people of Mexican descent and unwanted touching. Instead of addressing the concerns when raised, the supervisors were allegedly dismissive and ultimately fired the complainant. After determining that the individual complainant's claims potentially affected other employees, CRD converted the matter into a group or class investigation as part of an effort to fully address the alleged misconduct.

State Settlement Holds District Accountable

After investigating, CRD was able to secure a settlement to resolve the complaint and require a range of corrective actions at the district. As a result, the district will:

- Revise its employee complaint process to ensure robust investigation of workplace discrimination and harassment.
- Hire a third-party investigator for complaints against supervisors or where otherwise necessary to ensure timely resolution.

- Annually train supervisors and human resources personnel on their responsibilities under California’s civil rights laws, with an emphasis on complaint procedures.
- Launch an employee assistance program as a resource for workplace conflict or short-term counseling.
- Post information on rights against discrimination and harassment in the workplace.
- Pay \$160,000 to be address the alleged harms to the complainant and other impacted employees.

If you or someone you know has been the victim of employment discrimination, CRD may be able to assist you through its [complaint process](#). The department also [provides general information and factsheets online](#) about civil rights protections for members of the public.

The settlement announced today was secured by Staff Counsel Eliana Mata and Assistant Chief Counsel Nelson Chan. It was mediated by Attorney Mediator IV Angela E. Oh.

A copy of the settlement is available [here](#).

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The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) is the state agency charged with enforcing California’s civil rights laws. CRD’s mission is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state-funded programs and activities, and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit calcivilrights.ca.gov.

