



## Civil Rights Department

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### **Tulare County Public Defender's Office to Pay \$200K in Settlement Over Allegations of Unchecked Workplace Sexual Harassment**

*Public defender's office agrees to take proactive steps to prevent future harassment, including training and monitoring by the state*

**SACRAMENTO** – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today announced a settlement involving the Tulare County Public Defender's Office to resolve an employment complaint alleging sexual harassment and an openly tolerated culture of inappropriate workplace conduct. As part of the settlement, the public defender's office will pay \$200,000 to an individual complainant and take a range of proactive steps to prevent future harassment, including training and monitoring by the state.

"Leaders have an obligation to prevent and remedy sexual harassment in the workplace," **said CRD Director Kevin Kish**. "It is unacceptable to allow inappropriate behavior to go unchecked. Through this settlement, the Tulare County Public Defender's Office is taking important steps to ensure staff are able to do their critical work free from harassment."

#### **Alleged Culture of Inappropriate Conduct**

In 2024, CRD received a complaint against the Tulare County Public Defender's Office from an employee who alleged that they experienced years of unchecked sexual harassment by a direct supervisor. According to the complaint, the harassment was physical, verbal, and severe, ranging from intrusive and intimate questions to unwanted sexual contact. The complainant also alleged that there was an openly tolerated culture of workplace misconduct, including an instance of a senior official engaging in inappropriate conduct in front of dozens of staff at an office holiday party. Ultimately, in the complaint to CRD, the employee alleged that they were subjected to a hostile work environment and that the public defender's office failed to take reasonable steps to prevent harassment from occurring.

#### **State Complaint Brings Change**

After conducting an initial investigation, CRD provided the employee and the public defender's office an opportunity to voluntarily resolve the allegations through mediation with the department's [Dispute Resolution Division](#). As a result of the settlement, the office, without admitting liability, will:

- Issue a bulletin to all staff to remind them of protections against sexual harassment in the workplace and options for reporting misconduct.
- Ensure and certify to the state that supervisors and staff have taken mandatory training on the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Conduct a survey of all employees to gauge understanding of the office's sexual harassment prevention policy and submit the results to CRD.
- Report to CRD on how new workplace sexual harassment complaints have been handled for a period of one year.
- Pay \$200,000 to the individual complainant for lost wages and other harms.

If you or someone you know has experienced 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, including on [protections against sexual harassment](#). The department also offers [free training on sexual harassment prevention](#) that can be taken online at any time.

The settlement announced today was secured by Associate Chief Counsel Logan Talbot and Assistant Chief Counsel James Zahradka. The complaint was investigated by Christopher Billington with CRD's Enforcement Division.

You can learn more by [reading a copy of the settlement](#).

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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 [civildrights.ca.gov](http://civildrights.ca.gov).*

