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Civil Rights Department, Labor Commissioner's Office Secure Settlement with Children's Book Organization Over Alleged Workplace Retaliation

SCBWI agrees to training, policy change, and compensation for former employee

SACRAMENTO – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) and California Labor Commissioner's Office (LCO) today announced reaching a settlement with the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) over alleged retaliation against a former employee for making legally protected complaints of race discrimination and unfair pay practices. As part of the settlement, SCBWI has agreed to provide training to staff, create policies for handling discrimination complaints, and compensate the former staff member.

"California law protects everyone who speaks out about concerning behavior on the job," **said CRD Director Kevin Kish**. "If an employee believes the law is being broken, they are allowed to complain — and employers cannot punish them for doing so. We're proud to work with our partners in the Labor Commissioner's Office to help safeguard the rights of workers in our state. Nobody should ever be silenced for making a legally protected complaint."

"California workers have the right to raise concerns about workplace conditions, including pay, workload, as well as health and safety, without fear of retaliation," **said California Labor Commissioner Lilia García-Brower**. "Employers are responsible for providing a safe and compliant workplace free of retaliation. This settlement, in partnership with CRD, reflects the state's commitment to protecting workers and ensuring accountability when retaliation occurs."

Kicked Out for Speaking Out

In late 2023, CRD received a complaint against SCBWI alleging that the organization unlawfully fired an employee in retaliation for speaking out internally over issues in the workplace. According to the complaint, the worker raised concerns regarding their treatment as a Black employee and how the organization's rhetoric around Palestinians related to their own experiences of dehumanization and discrimination at SCBWI. The former employee also alleged in the complaint to CRD that SCBWI never fully addressed a disability accommodation request and that they were underpaid for work they were doing in violation of the Equal Pay Act.

In response to the internal complaint, SCBWI allegedly put the employee on administrative leave in retaliation for making the complaint and ultimately fired the employee for insubordination. Under California law, it is illegal to punish someone for complaining about discrimination or unpaid wages. Regardless of whether the underlying conduct by an employer is proven to be unlawful, Californians have the right to speak out against harassment, discrimination, or any other practice that they reasonably believe is illegal. The worker filed complaints with both CRD and LCO.

Joint Enforcement Effort Leads to Resolution

After conducting separate investigations, both CRD and LCO determined that SCBWI violated California laws aimed at protecting the rights of workers and provided the organization an opportunity to resolve the allegations through mediation. As a result of the settlement, SCBWI, without admitting wrongdoing, will:

- Ensure executive staff attend training every two years for six years on retaliation and discrimination, protections for workers with disabilities, and effective workplace investigations.
- Adopt and share with all employees an updated policy against discrimination and retaliation in the workplace.
- Inform all staff and their governing board of the findings by CRD and LCO.
- Report on compliance with the terms of the agreement to both CRD and LCO.
- Pay \$180,000 in compensation to the complainant.

If you or someone you know has experienced employment discrimination or retaliation, 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 retaliation](#).

If you or someone you know has experienced wage theft, retaliation related to wage claims, or other labor law violations, you can [file a complaint online with LCO](#). Workers can also find more information including how to [file a wage claim](#), updates on new [labor laws](#), and how to report a [labor law violation](#). Additionally, LCO provides educational resources, including [webinars](#) and [FAQs on labor rights](#), to help workers and employers better understand their rights and responsibilities under California labor laws.

The settlement announced today was secured by Staff Counsel Dylan Crary, Associate Chief Counsel Christa Conry, and Senior Associate Chief Counsel Mamta Ahluwalia with CRD and Attorney III Alyssa Huff, Attorney Supervisor Nicholas Seitz, and Deputy Labor Commissioner Regional Manager Alberto Argueta with LCO. It was mediated by Attorney IV Mediator Angela E. Oh with CRD's Dispute Resolution 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 calcivilrights.ca.gov.

The Division of Labor Standards Enforcement ([California Labor Commissioner's Office](#)) combats wage theft and unfair competition by investigating allegations of illegal and unfair business practices. Workers who have questions about labor laws enforced by the LCO can call 1-833-LCO-INFO (833-526-4636) between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Californians can follow the Labor Commissioner on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

