



## Civil Rights Department

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### Sacramento Museum Agrees to Reform After Civil Rights Investigation into Keffiyeh Ban

*Former employee to receive \$255,000 in compensation over harassment and retaliation*

**SACRAMENTO** – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today announced a \$255,000 settlement with the SMUD Museum of Science and Curiosity (MOSAC) to resolve an individual complaint of employment discrimination, harassment, and retaliation against a former employee on the basis of their Arab ancestry. As part of the settlement, MOSAC has agreed to not implement any ban on attire related to an employee's national origin or ancestry, provide training to staff on state civil rights protections, and compensate the former employee.

“Navigating the impact of global conflicts or political rhetoric in the workplace is a challenge for any employer,” **said CRD Director Kevin Kish**. “But harassing staff because of where they come from is never acceptable. This settlement represents an important step forward for the SMUD Museum of Science and Curiosity to live up to its commitment to inclusion for all staff, regardless of their background.”

#### **Selective Enforcement**

In 2024, CRD received a complaint against MOSAC alleging that the museum targeted an employee based on their Arab ancestry by creating and selectively enforcing a ban on perceived political symbols. According to the complaint, the former employee wore a keffiyeh — a traditional Arab scarf — to work and was told by management to stop because it made a senior museum executive uncomfortable. Following the encounter, museum management repeatedly pressured the employee to stop wearing the keffiyeh and made derogatory comments about what they perceived it to represent. Shortly after, the museum implemented a new policy prohibiting political symbols at work and only identified the keffiyeh as a banned item under the policy.

After the employee submitted an internal discrimination complaint, the museum subjected the employee to a campaign of harassment and retaliation, including an instance of sending the employee home early for perceived insubordination for wearing a different type of scarf. Ultimately, the museum placed the employee on indefinite unpaid administrative leave solely because of their alleged violations of the new policy. Under California law, employers are prohibited from disciplining workers for speaking out against discrimination or treating employees differently because of protected categories, such as their national origin or ancestry.

### **Banned No More**

After conducting an investigation, CRD determined that MOSAC engaged in discrimination, harassment, and retaliation against the employee and provided the museum an opportunity to resolve the allegations through mediation. As a result of the settlement, the museum, without admitting wrongdoing, will:

- Rescind its initial policy banning political symbols and not prevent employees from wearing clothes, accessories, tattoos, or hairstyles associated with their culture.
- Provide annual training for a period of three years to museum leadership on state civil rights protections, including a training on anti-Arab racism.
- Update its policies for handling internal civil rights complaints and submit it to CRD for review.
- Notify museum staff and board members of CRD’s findings.
- Issue a formal apology to the complainant.
- Pay \$255,000 in compensation to the former employee for lost wages and other damages.

If you or someone you know has experienced 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 with respect to [retaliation in the workplace](#).

The settlement announced today was secured by Staff Counsel Nassim Moallem, Associate Chief Counsel Christa Conry, and Senior Associate Chief Counsel Mamta Ahluwalia. It was mediated by Attorney IV Mediator Angela E. Oh.

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](http://calcivilrights.ca.gov).*

