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16	Attorneys for Plaintiff					
17	UNITED STATES	DISTRICT COURT				
18	DISTRICT	OF HAWAII				
19						
20	HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENSE CENTER,	Case No.				
21	Plaintiff,	COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY				
22	v. TOMMY JOHNSON, individually and in his	AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF AND DAMAGES UNDER THE FEDERAL				
23	official capacity as Director of the Hawaii Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation;	CIVIL RIGHTS ACT, 42 U.S.C. § 1983				
24	PAMELA STURZ, individually and in her official capacity as Deputy Director of	JURY TRIAL DEMANDED				
25	Correctional Institutions at the Hawaii Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation;					
26	and JOHN AND JANE DOES 1-20, individually and in their official capacities,					
27	Defendants.					
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INTRODUCTION

1. Plaintiff Human Rights Defense Center ("HRDC" or "Plaintiff") brings this action to enjoin Defendants from censoring publications and correspondence that it mails to people incarcerated with the Hawaii Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation ("DCR" or the "Department"). Defendants have adopted and implemented mail policies, practices, and customs that unconstitutionally prohibit delivery of publications and correspondence mailed by Plaintiff to persons incarcerated at the Department, and that deny due process of law to senders, like Plaintiff, whose mail is censored, by failing to provide adequate notice and an opportunity to challenge each instance of censorship. Defendants' actions violate Plaintiff's rights under the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Plaintiff seeks injunctive and declaratory relief, and damages in an amount to be proven at trial pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 2. This action is brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1331 (federal question), as this action arises under the Constitution and laws of the United States, and pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1343 (civil rights), as this action seeks redress for civil rights violations under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
- 3. Venue is proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b). At least one Defendant resides within this judicial district and the events giving rise to the claims asserted herein all occurred within this judicial district.
- 4. Plaintiff's claims for relief are brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which authorizes actions to redress the deprivation, under color of state law, of rights, privileges and immunities secured by the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and laws of the United States.
- 5. This Court has jurisdiction over claims seeking declaratory and injunctive relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202, and Rules 57 and 65 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, as well as nominal and compensatory damages,

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against all Defendants, and punitive damages against the individual defendants in their personal capacities.

- 6. Plaintiff's claim for attorneys' fees and costs for its federal claims is predicated upon 42 U.S.C. § 1988, which authorizes the award of attorneys' fees and costs to prevailing plaintiffs in actions brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
- Plaintiff is informed, believes, and based thereon alleges that the 7. individual Defendants as described herein acted with reckless disregard for Plaintiff's rights and/or with the intent to injure, vex, annoy and harass Plaintiff, and subjected Plaintiff to cruel and unjust hardship in conscious disregard of Plaintiff's rights with the intention of causing Plaintiff injury and depriving it of its constitutional rights. As a result of the foregoing, Plaintiff seeks compensatory and punitive damages against the individual Defendants.

PARTIES

Plaintiff HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENSE CENTER ("HRDC") is a not-8. for-profit charitable organization recognized under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, incorporated in the state of Washington and with principal offices in Boynton Beach, Florida. For over thirty-five years, HRDC has focused its mission on public education, advocacy and outreach to incarcerated persons and the public about the economic and social costs of prisons to society, and to help incarcerated persons educate themselves about their constitutional and human rights and to learn about accessing education while incarcerated. HRDC accomplishes its mission through advocacy, litigation, and publication and/or distribution of books, magazines and other information concerning prisons and the rights of incarcerated persons. Prison Legal News is a wholly-owned project and publishing arm of HRDC. Through its publishing project, HRDC engages in core protected speech and expressive conduct on matters of public concern, such as the operation of correctional facilities, prison and jail conditions, and the health, safety and constitutional and human rights of incarcerated persons. HRDC publishes and

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- distributes two monthly magazines covering corrections and criminal legal news and analysis, and publishes and distributes books about the criminal legal system and legal issues affecting incarcerated persons, which HRDC distributes by mail to incarcerated persons, lawyers, courts, libraries, and the public throughout the United States.
- 9. Nonparty the Hawaii Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation ("DCR" or the "Department") is an agency of the State of Hawaii organized and existing under the laws of the State of Hawaii. DCR is a unified system of jails and prisons. Specifically, DCR operates four jails: Hawaii Community Correctional Center ("HCCC"), Kauai Community Correctional Center ("KCCC"), Maui Community Correctional Center ("MCCC"), and Oahu Community Correctional Center ("OCCC"). DCR also operates four prisons: Halawa Correctional Facility ("HCF"), Waiawa Correctional Facility ("WCF"), Kulani Correctional Facility ("KCF') and the Women's Community Correctional Center ("WCCC").
- 10. Defendant TOMMY JOHNSON is the Director of DCR and has held that position since 2023. Defendant JOHNSON is employed by and is an agent of the State of Hawaii and DCR. He is responsible for overseeing the management and operations of DCR, and for the hiring, screening, training, supervision, discipline, counseling, and control of the personnel at DCR who interpret and apply its incoming mail policies. As Director, Defendant JOHNSON is a final policymaker for DCR with respect to the operation of its facilities, including for policies, practices, and customs governing incoming mail for incarcerated persons. He is sued in his individual and official capacities.
- 11. Defendant PAMELA STURZ is the Deputy Director of DCR's Correctional Institutions Division and has held that position since 2024. Defendant STURZ is employed by and is an agent of the State of Hawaii and DCR. As Deputy Director, Defendant STURZ is and was a policymaker for the State of Hawaii and DCR with respect to the operation of the jail and prison facilities, including for

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policies, practices, and customs governing incoming mail for incarcerated persons. She is sued in her individual and official capacities.

- 12. The true names and identities of Defendants DOES 1 through 20 are presently unknown to HRDC. Each of Defendants DOES 1 through 20 are or were employed by and are or were agents of the State of Hawaii and/or DCR, were personally involved in the adoption and/or implementation of the policies, practices, and customs governing incoming mail for incarcerated persons at DCR, and/or are or were responsible for the hiring, screening, training, retention, supervision, discipline, counseling, and/or control of the personnel who interpret and implement these incoming mail policies, practices, and customs. They are sued in their individual and official capacities. Plaintiff will seek to amend this Complaint when the true names and identities of Defendants DOES 1 through 20 have been ascertained.
- 13. At all times material to this action, all Defendants were acting within the course and scope of their employment as agents and/or employees of the State of Hawaii and DCR.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

- 14. For over thirty-five years, the focus of HRDC's mission has been public education, advocacy and outreach on behalf of, and for the purpose of assisting, incarcerated persons who seek legal redress for infringements of their constitutionally guaranteed and other basic human rights. HRDC's mission, if realized, has a salutary effect on public safety.
- 15. To accomplish its mission, HRDC publishes and distributes books, magazines, and other materials containing news and analysis about prisons, jails and other detention facilities, the rights of incarcerated persons, court rulings, management of prison facilities, prison and jail conditions, and other matters pertaining to the rights and/or interests of incarcerated persons. HRDC's publications contain political speech and social commentary, which are core First Amendment rights and

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essential to accomplishing the mission of HRDC. The primary aim of HRDC is to communicate with incarcerated persons about developments in the law and protection of one's health and personal safety while in prison or jail. Reading materials enable incarcerated persons to engage in productive activity rather than sitting idle, thus helping to avoid conflicts and incidents of violence in correctional facilities and encouraging lawful methods of dispute resolution. In addition, reading allows incarcerated persons to keep their minds sharp, helping them prepare to become productive citizens when released back into society.

17. HRDC publishes and distributes an award-winning monthly magazine

Sending publications through the mail to incarcerated persons is

- titled *Prison Legal News: Dedicated to Protecting Human Rights* ("*Prison Legal News*"), which contains news and analysis about correctional facilities, the rights of incarcerated persons, court opinions, prison and jail conditions, excessive force, and religious freedom. *Prison Legal News* is published on newsprint bound by two small staples, and is 72 pages long.
- 18. HRDC also publishes and distributes a second monthly magazine titled *Criminal Legal News*: *Dedicated to Protecting Human Rights* ("*Criminal Legal News*"), which contains news and analysis about individual rights, court rulings, and other criminal legal-related issues. *Criminal Legal News* is also published on newsprint bound by two small staples, and was 48 pages long, but has more recently expanded to 56 pages long.
- 19. HRDC also publishes and/or distributes several different soft-cover books on criminal justice, health, and legal issues that are of interest to incarcerated persons and others. HRDC publishes and distributes the *Prisoners' Guerilla Handbook: A Guide to Correspondence Programs in the United States and Canada* ("*Prisoners' Handbook*"), which provides information on enrolling at accredited higher educational, vocational and training schools. HRDC does not publish, but is

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the sole national distributor of Protecting Your Health and Safety ("PYHS"), which describes the rights, protections and legal remedies available to persons concerning their health and safety while they are incarcerated.

- 20. In addition to its publications, HRDC also communicates with incarcerated persons through the United States Postal Service by mailing them: (a) informational brochure packets, which contain a brochure and subscription order form, a book list, and a published books brochure (each of which is a single page); (b) copies of judicial opinions of import to incarcerated persons, which are marked "Court Ruling;" and (c) subscription renewal letters and follow-up letters to ascertain whether HRDC's mailings have been delivered as addressed. HRDC encloses a self-addressed, stamped envelope with its informational brochure packets and subscription renewal letters, but does not enclose extra envelopes or stamps with the informational brochure packets, judicial opinions, or other letters that it mails to incarcerated persons.
- 21. Since 1990, HRDC has sent its publications and books by mail to incarcerated persons and law librarians in more than 3,000 correctional facilities in all fifty states, including at death row housing units and "supermax" prisons, including the federal Administrative Maximum Facility at Florence, Colorado, which is known as the most secure prison in the United States. Prior to 2024, HRDC also sent its publications to incarcerated persons at DCR facilities for more than three decades without incident.
- DCR's Correctional Institutions Division's policies are available on DCR's public website at https://dcr.hawaii.gov/policies-and-procedures/pp-cor/ (last visited July 15, 2025). Under Chapter 15 of these policies, there is a hyperlink to the policy # COR.15.05, which governs publications mailed to prisoners (the "Publication Policy") at https://dcr.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ COR.15.05-Inmate-Access-to-Publications.pdf (last visited July 15, 2025). According to the Publication Policy, it went into effect on January 1, 2024, and

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supersedes the prior February 1, 2016 version.

23. Defendants' Publication Policy provides, in pertinent part:

5.0 PROCEDURES TO RECEIVE PUBLICATIONS

Facility Wardens shall designate staff to censor and approve all incoming publications for inmates in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

- .1 An inmate may receive publications only from a publisher, a book club or a bookstore.
- .2 Inmate requests for subscriptions or individual publications shall be submitted to the Case Manager/Counselor who will ascertain whether the publication is likely to be approved. Cash on delivery orders shall not be accepted; the inmate, their family or friends must pre-pay for all orders.
- .3 Facility Wardens may set limits on the number of volume of publications an inmate may receive or retain in his/her quarters (for life, sanitation, or housekeeping reasons).

PROHIBITED PUBLICATIONS

- .1 Publications which may be prohibited by the Warden/designee include but are not limited to publications that contain pictures, depictions, illustrations, or information that would threaten, undermine, or degrade personal safety of staff, volunteers, inmates, or others, such as:
 - a. Depicting or describing procedures for the construction or use of weapons, ammunition, bombs or incendiary devices;
 - Depicting, encouraging, or describing methods of escape from correctional facilities (or contains blue prints, drawings or similar descriptions of correctional facilities) including the functionality of locks and/or security devices (i.e. cameras, alarms) or how to bypass or defeat the security functions of these devices;
 - Depicting or describing procedures for the brewing of alcoholic beverages or the making or manufacture of drugs or poisons or extoling the virtues of drug use;
 - d. Writings in code;
 - Depicting patterns for tattoos and/or skin modification equipment which would provide, at a minimum, visual aids for inmates wishing to reproduce this type of body ornamentation and/or equipment;
 - f. Depicting, describing or encouraging activities which may lead to the use of physical violence or group disruption;
 - g. Depicting the use of hands, feet, or head as weapons, fighting weapons and techniques, self-defense and martial arts;
 - h. Encouraging or instructing in the commission of criminal activity;

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1			i.	Containing sexually explicit material;		
2			j.	Violating federal or Hawaii obscenity laws or encouraging criminal activity;		
3 4			k.	Containing any material that would have an adverse impact on the rehabilitation goals of the inmates (i.e. sex offender		
5				treatment) or on the management and security of the institution;		
6			I.	Creating a hostile work environment for staff or for other inmates;		
7			m.	Containing racism and/or religious oppression and the		
8				superiority of one race/religion/political group over another, and/or the degradation of one race/religion/political group by another;		
9			n.	Containing any material that advocates the overthrow of the		
10				Government of the United States of America or the State of Hawaii;		
11			0.	Containing STG or gang-related activities and plans to include terrorism; or		
12			n	Threatening or undermine safety, security, order, discipline,		
13			p.	control, or other legitimate penological interests.		
14		.2		ty Wardens may not establish an excluded list of publications. idual publications shall be reviewed prior to rejection.		
15			Publi	ications must be evaluated using content-neutral criterial [sic]; ting such publications cannot be arbitrary or irrational or based		
16				he biases, personal beliefs or personal preferences of the den/designee.		
17		.3		y part of a publication is determined to violate content-neutral		
18				regulations, the publication may be rejected in its entirety. The Supreme Court has ruled that if a publication contains portions		
19			which should be rejected, the entire publication should be refused rather than simply tearing out the offending material.			
20	PROCEDURES TO REJECT PUBLICATIONS					
21	.1 When a publication for an inmate is rejected or denied, the publisher					
22			and the inmate to whom the publication was addressed shall both be notified in writing of the following:			
23			a.	Notification of rejection or denial;		
24			b.	Reason for rejection or denial; and		
25			C.	Process for both the inmate and the publisher to appeal the rejection or denial to the Warden/designee.		
26		.2	Facility mailroom staff will document receipt of prohibited publication			
27			on OCR Form# 8324 "Prohibited Publication".			
28		.3		by of OCR Form # 8324 "Prohibited Publication" must be sent to publisher. The publisher has up to seven (7) calendar days from		

- receipt to appeal. The Warden will provide a response to the appeal from the Publisher or third parties within thirty (30) days.
- .4 Inmate appeals shall be made through the inmate grievance system within fifteen (15) calendar days of a rejected publication.
- .5 The publications must be retained at the facility's mailroom for the duration of the appeals process as evidence; the inmate shall pay for the postage of any rejected publications they wish either returned to the publisher for refund or sent to a private party.
- .6 In the event the publication(s) is deemed appropriate based on the outcome of an investigation and/or grievance, the publication will be forwarded to the inmate.
- 24. In addition to DCR's Publication Policy, each of DCR's eight facilities has a separately posted policy pertaining to mail procedures. The mail procedures for seven of those facilities (including HCCC, KCCC, MCCC, OCCC, HCF, WCF and WCCC) all state that "[b]ooks, magazines, food items, etc. may not be sent to an inmate." PDFs of each facilities' mail procedures are posted on DCR's public website. As an example, OCCC's mail procedures are available at https://dcr.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/OCCC-Inmate-Procedures-Update-3.30.22.pdf (last visited July 15, 2025), and HCF's mail procedures are available at https://dcr.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HCF-Inmate-Procedures-Update-3.22.23.pdf (last visited July 15, 2025).
- 25. Defendants' Publication Policy and their facility-specific policies pertaining to mail procedures are unconstitutional on their face and as applied to HRDC, and are unduly broad and vague. This is especially true because the books and magazines published and/or distributed by HRDC cover topics of great public concern and contain core protected speech, including political speech and social commentary, and educational information relating to the rights of incarcerated persons, pertinent legal cases, and incarcerated persons' health and safety, and are thus entitled to the highest protection afforded by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.
- 26. The grounds whereby Defendants may reject mailed publications listed in Defendants' Publication Policy are overly broad and/or too vague for a sender to

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understand what is prohibited and what is permissible.

- The mail procedures and practices of each DCR facility, which 27. preclude the delivery of any books or magazines to incarcerated persons, including HRDC's publications, are also violative of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.
- 28. Although Defendants' Publication Policy requires DCR staff to provide senders of censored publications with notice and an opportunity to appeal censorship decisions, DCR has not provided HRDC with notice or an opportunity to appeal the censorship of any of its publications and correspondence mailed to incarcerated persons.
- Between April 2024 and July 2025, HRDC sent books, magazines, 29. informational brochures, and correspondence to individuals confined at DCR facilities. During that time period, fifty-six (56) of those items were returned to HRDC by DCR. The items returned were addressed to individuals confirmed to still be in custody at DCR facilities on the day HRDC received the returned mail.
- The fifty-six (56) returned items consisted of: fifteen (15) issues of 30. Prison Legal News; thirteen (13) issues of Criminal Legal News; ten (10) informational brochures; eight (8) copies of PYHS; seven (7) copies of Prisoners' *Handbook*; and three (3) follow-up letters.
- 31. Most of the rejected items were marked with an ink stamp or a label containing the words "RETURN TO SENDER" and "UNAUTHORIZED MAIL." One of the items was also marked with an ink stamp containing the word "CENSORED."
- 32. Defendants failed to provide HRDC with notice and an opportunity to appeal these censorship decisions. Other than the vague markings on the outside of the items returned via the United States Postal Service's Return to Sender service, Defendants did not provide HRDC with notice of the reason any mailing was rejected. Nowhere on the returned items of mail was notice provided of a right to

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- challenge the censorship decision, or any information on whether or how HRDC could appeal Defendants' decision to refuse to deliver the publication or correspondence to the intended recipient.
- Because of Defendants' actions as described above, HRDC has 33. suffered damages, and will continue to suffer damages, including, but not limited to: the suppression of HRDC's speech; the impediment of HRDC's ability to disseminate its message; frustration of HRDC's non-profit organizational mission; the loss of potential subscribers and customers; and, the inability to recruit new subscribers and supporters; the loss of reputation; and the cost of printing, handling, mailing, and staff time, among other damages.
- Defendants, and other agents of DCR, are responsible for or personally 34. participated in, creating and implementing these unconstitutional polices, practices, and customs, or for ratifying and adopting them. Further, Defendants are responsible for training and supervising the employees of DCR, whose conduct has injured and continues to injure HRDC.
- 35. Defendants' actions and inactions were and are impermissibly motivated, and were and are all committed under color of state law with deliberate indifference to HRDC's rights.
- Defendants' actions and inactions were and are undertaken with 36. reckless disregard for Plaintiff's rights and/or motivated by ill motive and intent, and were and are all committed under color of law with deliberate indifference to HRDC's rights.
- 37. Plaintiff will continue to send its books and magazines to subscribers, customers, and other individuals imprisoned at DCR facilities.
- Defendants' unconstitutional policy, practices, and customs continue to 38. violate HRDC's rights, and they were and are the moving force behind the injuries HRDC suffered as a direct result of the constitutional violations. As a result, HRDC has no adequate remedy at law.

39. Defendants' conduct prohibiting or not delivering HRDC's mailed publications and correspondence to persons incarcerated at DCR facilities violates the First Amendment by censoring HRDC's freedom of speech and expression, and has a chilling effect on future speech and expression directed at the persons incarcerated at the Detention Facility.

- 40. The accommodation of the free speech, free expression, and due process rights of HRDC will not have any significant impact on DCR's staff, other prisoners at the DCR, Defendants' allocation of resources, or security at the DCR's facilities.
- 41. HRDC is entitled to declaratory relief as well as injunctive relief prohibiting Defendants from refusing to deliver publications from HRDC and other similarly-situated senders without legal justification, and prohibiting Defendants from censoring mail without due process of law.

(Violations of the First Amendment (Free Speech)—42 U.S.C. § 1983)

- 42. HRDC re-alleges and incorporates the allegations of paragraphs 1 through 41 of the Complaint as if fully set forth herein.
- 43. Defendants' acts described above constitute violations of HRDC's right to communicate with persons incarcerated at DCR under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, a right clearly established under existing case law.
- 44. Defendants' conduct was objectively unreasonable and was undertaken recklessly, intentionally, willfully, with malice, and with deliberate indifference to the rights of others.
- 45. HRDC's injuries and the violations of its constitutional rights were directly and proximately caused by Defendants' policies, practices, and customs, which were and are the moving force of the violations.
- 46. Defendants' acts described above have caused damages to HRDC, and if not enjoined, will continue to cause damage to HRDC.

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47. HRDC seeks declaratory and injunctive relief, and nominal and compensatory damages against all Defendants. HRDC also seeks punitive damages solely against the individual Defendants in their individual capacities.

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SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF (Violation of the Fourteenth Amendment (Due Process)—42 U.S.C. § 1983)

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48. HRDC re-alleges and incorporates the allegations of paragraphs 1 through 47 of the Complaint as if fully set forth herein.

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49. HRDC has a constitutionally-protected liberty interest in communicating with persons incarcerated at DCR by sending publications and correspondence to them via the United States Postal Service, a right clearly established under existing case law.

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50. HRDC has the right under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to receive notice and an opportunity to object and/or appeal Defendants' decisions to prevent the publications and correspondence mailed by HRDC from reaching the intended recipients incarcerated at DCR.

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51. Defendants have failed to give HRDC sufficient notice of the censorship of its publications and correspondence, and an opportunity to be heard with respect to that censorship. In doing so, Defendants have deprived and continue to deprive HRDC of liberty and property without due process of law, in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

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52. Defendants' conduct was objectively unreasonable and was undertaken recklessly, intentionally, willfully, with malice, and with deliberate indifference to the rights of others.

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53. HRDC's injuries and the violations of its constitutional rights were directly and proximately caused by Defendants' policies, practices, and customs, which were and are the moving force of the violations.

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54. Defendants' acts described above have caused damages to HRDC, and if not enjoined, will continue to cause damage to HRDC.

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1	55. HRDC seeks declaratory and injunctive relief, and nominal and					
2	compensatory damages against all Defendants. HRDC also seeks punitive damages					
3	solely against the individual Defendants in their individual capacities.					
4	REQUEST FOR RELIEF					
5	WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff respectfully requests relief as follows:					
6	1. A declaration that Defendants' policies, practices, and customs violat	e				
7	the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution;					
8	2. A preliminary and permanent injunction preventing Defendants and					
9	their employees, agents, and any and all persons acting in concert with them from					
10	further violation of HRDC's civil rights under the First and Fourteenth Amendments					
11	to the United States Constitution; and providing other equitable relief;					
12	3. Nominal damages for each violation of HRDC's rights by the					
13	Defendants;					
14	4. Compensatory damages in an amount to be proved at trial;					
15	5. Punitive damages against the individual Defendants in an amount to be	be				
16	proved at trial;					
17	6. Costs, including reasonable attorneys' fees, under 42 U.S.C. § 1988					
18	and under other applicable law; and					
19	7. Any other relief that this Court deems just and equitable.					
20	JURY DEMAND					
21	Plaintiff, by and through its attorneys, hereby demands a trial by jury pursua	ant				
22	to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 38(b) on all issues so triable.					
23						
24	Respectfully submitted,					
25	DATED: July 24, 2025 ROSEN BIEN GALVAN & GRUNFELD LL	P				
26	By: /s/ Ernest Galvan					
27	Ernest Galvan					
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Case 1:25-cv-00311

Document 1