

1 **COMPLAINT OF EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION**
2 **BEFORE THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**
3 **Civil Rights Department**
4 **Under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act**
5 **(Gov. Code, § 12900 et seq.)**

6 **In the Matter of the Complaint of**

7 Stephanie Lynne Cockrell

CRD No. 202509-31280118

8 Complainant,

9 vs.

10 San Diego Police Department

11 Respondents

12 1. Respondent **San Diego Police Department** is an **employer** subject to suit under the
13 California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) (Gov. Code, § 12900 et seq.).

14
15 2. Complainant **Stephanie Lynne Cockrell**, resides in the City of , State of .

16 3. Complainant alleges that on or about **September 17, 2025**, respondent took the
17 following adverse actions:

18 **Complainant was harassed** because of complainant's sex/gender, other, sexual
19 harassment.

20 **Complainant was discriminated against** because of complainant's sex/gender and as a
21 result of the discrimination was denied hire or promotion, reprimanded, asked impermissible
22 non-job-related questions, denied any employment benefit or privilege, other, denied work
23 opportunities or assignments.

24 **Complainant experienced retaliation** because complainant reported or resisted any form
25 of discrimination or harassment, participated as a witness in a discrimination or harassment
26 complaint and as a result was denied hire or promotion, reprimanded, asked impermissible
27 non-job-related questions, denied any employment benefit or privilege, other, denied work
28 opportunities or assignments, given additional work responsibilities or assignments.

1 **Additional Complaint Details:** Claimant Stephanie Cockrell (“Claimant”) began her career
2 with the San Diego Police Department (the “Department”) on October 26, 2012, as a Deputy
3 Officer. Throughout her more than thirteen years of service, Claimant consistently received
4 outstanding performance reviews and was recognized for her dedication, professionalism,
5 and commitment to public safety. Claimant fully intended to dedicate her entire career to the
6 Department. However, despite her exemplary record, Claimant has been subjected to
7 repeated and ongoing sexual harassment, discrimination, retaliation, and a failure by the
8 Department to provide protection from such misconduct. As a result, she has been forced to
9 work in a hostile, intolerable, and unsafe environment.

7 During her employment, Claimant met and later married fellow Deputy Officer Tyler Cockrell
8 (“Cockrell”). The couple eventually had a child together. In June 2021, while Claimant was
9 on maternity leave, she discovered that Cockrell was engaged in an extramarital affair with
10 his subordinate, another Deputy Officer (hereinafter “Deputy X”). Recognizing the violation
11 of Department policy created by a supervisor–subordinate relationship, Claimant reported
12 the matter to a Lieutenant, who happened to be Deputy X’s uncle, and a ranking officer
13 senior to Claimant, Cockrell, and Deputy X.

11 To make it appear he was following policy, the Lieutenant initiated an Internal Affairs (“IA”)
12 investigation. However, the investigation was inadequate, incomplete and rushed. The IA
13 investigators failed to review or credit Claimant’s substantial written evidence, including text
14 messages, planner entries documenting events, and corroborating travel records,
15 demonstrating the existence of the inappropriate relationship. Despite this evidence, and
16 due to the investigators’ refusal to review highly relevant information, the investigation was
17 quickly closed, and no meaningful action was taken against Cockrell or Deputy X.

15 Cockrell and Deputy X made every attempt to defame Claimant in retribution for her
16 complaint. Cockrell attempted to file a police report against Claimant with the La Mesa
17 Police Department, but when the department did nothing to address the allegations, he
18 attempted to go through family court and obtain a restraining order. The Court denied the
19 restraining order.

18 Still, Cockrell and Deputy X would not stop trying to destroy Claimant. In July 2022, Deputy
19 X submitted internal allegations against Claimant. Cockrell and Deputy X proceeded to
20 accuse Claimant of bullying and harassing them. These allegations triggered a biased and
21 retaliatory IA investigation against Claimant. In contrast to the cursory review of Cockrell and
22 Deputy X’s misconduct, the Department produced an investigative report and findings
23 against Claimant. That report portrayed Cockrell as allegedly “fearing” Claimant, despite his
24 being six feet five inches tall, a former Mixed Martial Arts (“MMA”) fighter, and a trained
25 Deputy Officer. During the course and scope of the investigation, Claimant made every
26 attempt to submit documents and information in support of her position but the IA
27 investigators failed to collect crucial information that would have strongly supported her
28 defenses.

1 At the time, Chief of Police David Nisleit (“Nisleit”), a long-time personal friend of the
2 Lieutenant who was Deputy X’s uncle, reviewed the IA report. Relying on the biased
3 findings, Nisleit sustained multiple charges against Claimant and recommended her
4 termination.

5 In contrast, Cockrell and Deputy X faced no discipline for their unethical and policy-violating
6 supervisor–subordinate sexual relationship. To this day, Cockrell and Deputy X have openly
7 continued their relationship and are expecting a child together. Despite making claims of
8 bullying, harassment, and claiming fear for their lives at the hands of Claimant, they recently
9 purchased a home only a mile away from Claimant’s home.

10 Claimant retained legal counsel and appealed the termination notice. Her legal team
11 retained a private investigator, who produced a report corroborating Claimant’s original
12 allegations against Cockrell and Deputy X. The investigator’s findings directly contradicted
13 the testimony Cockrell and Deputy X had given to IA. Despite this evidence of misconduct
14 and dishonesty by Cockrell and Deputy X, the Department failed to initiate any additional
15 investigation into their conduct.

16 Shortly thereafter, Nisleit retired and was succeeded by Chief Scott Wahl (“Wahl”). Upon
17 taking office, Chief Wahl reviewed numerous disciplinary cases. In numerous instances, he
18 overturned terminations and recommended terminations of Deputy Officers, substituting
19 lesser penalties instead. Upon information and belief Claimant was the only female Deputy
20 Officer to have her termination overturned. Upon information and belief, Wahl overturned at
21 least five male Deputy Officers’ terminations or recommended terminations. In Claimant’s
22 case, Wahl specifically found that the IA report against Claimant (related to a domestic
23 dispute and not her ability to perform her job) was insufficient to justify permanent
24 termination.

25 While the male Deputy Officers with misconduct or termination recommendations had their
26 cases overturned and reinstated without harassment, Claimant was met with immediate
27 sexist backlash, harassment, and retaliation. Rumors spread like wildfire within the
28 Department accusing her of having provided sexual favors to Chief Wahl in exchange for
leniency. An anonymous letter was submitted to the City Council falsely alleging an
extramarital affair between Claimant and Wahl.

These false rumors quickly escalated and were openly condoned by Claimant’s co-workers
and supervisors at every level. Upon information and belief, the Department was aware of
the rumors, and the discriminatory and harassing behavior that followed, but made no
attempts to protect Claimant. Claimant’s ability to grow within the Department quickly faded.
Claimant was placed on the promotion list for sergeant, and was denied the promotion.

By January 2025 the rumors had gotten so bad and widespread that the Department
launched yet another targeted IA investigation against Claimant, this time concerning the
fabricated allegations of a sexual relationship between her and Wahl. Claimant was
repeatedly interrogated about her personal life, and the rumors. The process was
humiliating and debilitating for Claimant, and caused extreme emotional distress. The
rumors were so bad, people were even saying her son was a child of Wahl. Ultimately, the

1 findings were unsubstantiated, because the rumors were untrue, but the investigation itself
2 further damaged her reputation and credibility, especially as media got wind of the
allegations and investigation.

3 Claimant made every effort to keep her head down and continue fulfilling her duties despite
4 the emotional distress she was suffering. However, the daily harassment and retaliatory
treatment continued to escalate. In February 2025, Claimant interviewed for another position
5 within the Department but was again denied the opportunity.

6 By March 2025, the details of the rumors were leaked to local activist Tasha Williamson
7 (“Williamson”), who published the rumors on social media, using Claimant’s name.
Williamson publicly accused Claimant and Wahl of engaging in a sexual relationship
involving nepotism and favoritism and publicly called for their removal.

8 As a result, Claimant continues to endure ongoing harassment, ridicule, and gossip from
9 colleagues. On a daily basis, she is subjected to degrading questions about whether Wahl is
“good in bed” and taunts implying she must be “bad in bed,” given her lack of promotion
10 despite the alleged relationship. This pervasive harassment has left Claimant in an
environment that is hostile, humiliating, and unsafe, forcing her to navigate a workplace
11 poisoned by sexism, retaliation, and false accusations. The Department is aware of the
treatment yet has failed to take any action to protect Claimant or punish the wrongdoers.

12 As of the date of this Claim, Claimant continues to endure ongoing harassment, retaliatory
13 denial of opportunities, and a hostile work environment that has made her workplace
intolerable, unsafe, and career-damaging.

1 VERIFICATION

2 I, **Emilia Arutunian**, am the **Attorney** in the above-entitled complaint. I have read
3 the foregoing complaint and know the contents thereof. The matters alleged are based
4 on information and belief, which I believe to be true. The matters alleged are based
5 on information and belief, which I believe to be true.

6 On September 17, 2025, I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State
7 of California that the foregoing is true and correct.

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San Diego, California