ENDORSED 1 PORTER | SCOTT A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION Martin N. Jensen, SBN 232231 19858 28 PH 2:56 Thomas L. Riordan, SBN 104827 3 350 University Ave., Suite 200 LEGAL PROCESS #6 Sacramento, California 95825 4 TEL: 916.929.1481 FAX: 916.927.3706 5 Attorneys for Plaintiff and Cross-Defendants 6 THE NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY and EDWARD L. LUTTRELL 7 8 IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA 9 IN THE COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO 10 11 THE NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER Case No. 34-2012-00130439 OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY, a 12 Washington, D.C. nonprofit corporation, NATIONAL GRANGE'S AND EDWARD L. 13 LUTTRELL'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS Plaintiff, AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF 14 DEMURRER TO EACH OF THE CAUSES OF ACTION IN MCFARLAND'S CROSSvs. 15 **COMPLAINT** THE CALIFORNIA STATE GRANGE, a 16 California nonprofit corporation, and ROBERT [Code Civ. Proc., §§ 430.10, 430.30, 430.50] McFARLAND, JOHN LUVAAS, GERALD 17 CHERNOFF and DAMIAN PARR, Date: May 14, 2013 Time: 2:00 p.m. 18 Defendants. Dept.: 53 19 RESERVATION #1804368 ROBERT MCFARLAND, an individual, 20 Cross-Complainant, 21 VS. 22 THE NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY, a Washington, D.C. nonprofit corporation, 23 MARTHA STEFENONI, an individual, and 24 EDWARD L. LUTTRELL, an individual, and 25 ROES 1 through 10, inclusive, 26 Cross-Defendants. 27 28

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#### INTRODUCTION

Cross-Defendants The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry (hereafter the "National Grange") and Edward L. Luttrell, who serves as Master of the National Grange, demur to the allegations of the Cross-Complaint by Robert McFarland for uncertainty and failure to set forth facts stating a cause of action as to each of the six causes of action. Although the Cross-Complaint attempts to avoid acknowledging the inseparable interrelationship between the National Grange and the California State Grange, for which McFarland has served as elected Master, the bylaws of the two organizations have already been filed in this action and make clear that the California State Grange is actually a constituent part of the National Grange, which is the pinnacle of the organization referred to as the "Order." The court is requested to take judicial notice of these bylaws. The bylaws of both related organizations establish that the bylaws and decisions of the National Grange have supremacy over those of the California State Grange, although thorough internal adjudication and appeal procedures are built into the bylaws for resolving disputes and disciplinary charges.

Where independent private organizations, such as the Order, have their own internal rules, California state law cautions the judiciary not to become involved in deciding substantive disagreements within the organization. It is only where clear bylaws are disregarded by a party to them that the courts have a role, but again the court's jurisdiction should be strictly limited to requiring the parties to follow the bylaws by which they are governed. The causes of action alleged by McFarland in the instant Cross-Complaint, however, do not seek to require the National Grange to adhere to the specific language of any of the bylaws. On the contrary, McFarland improperly seeks to involve the court in the internal question of whether the bylaws may be interpreted so as to prevent the National Grange from imposing discipline upon him for violating rules of the Order. Whether the charges against McFarland are ultimately upheld as true or rejected as untrue is not to be determined in civil court. This dispute should properly be adjudicated initially within the Order's internal judicial procedures, and only subject to review by the courts if the organizations own bylaws are clearly disregarded.

By contrast, the National Grange sought previously in this action to compel the State Grange to follow the clear bylaws regarding suspension of its Master and its own charter, which actions are both

exclusively authorized by the bylaws. The California State Grange, under McFarland's direction, has expressly asserted that as a California corporation it is not bound at all by the bylaws authorizing the National Grange to suspend its Master and charter, and the State Grange refuses to submit to the Order's written procedures for adjudicating internal disputes. While the courts may preclude parties from disregarding their own clear bylaws, such courts should not be determining the meaning and interpretation of rules and bylaws in complex interaction within an organization.

In any event, none of McFarland's six claims alleged in his Cross-Complaint sets forth facts sufficient to state a cause of action. Indeed, the alleged facts and those available to the court through judicial notice preclude as a matter of law any of the alleged causes of action from proceeding forward. First, McFarland's cause of action for defamation fails as a matter of law. Not only does he conspicuously fail to attach as an exhibit, or quote extensively from, the February 7, 2012, letter he describes as containing false statements, but the vague references taken out of context do not indicate that Luttrell was asserting facts, instead of merely setting forth his opinion about perceived problems with the governance of the California State Grange under McFarland. In any event, without specifically and factually alleging malicious intent by Luttrell, the statements allegedly transmitted to members of the Executive Committee of the California State Grange are clearly within the Civil Code section 47, subdivision (c), privilege, which provides immunity for communications by another "interested person." Next, McFarland's second cause of action alleging "public disclosure of private facts" fails because it does not involve highly personal, private or confidential facts at all, but rather only his observable performance as elected head of California's State Grange, and it was only transmitted to a small group of interested persons. McFarland's third cause of action is labeled one for intrusion, but the alleged facts do not suggest any physical or electronic violation of his personal space, and no offensive revelation of embarrassing private personal facts occurred. McFarland's fourth cause of action for intentional interference with contractual relations fails because the National Grange is alleged to act as his employer, so there is no party separate from the contract. McFarland's fifth cause of action is for interference with prospective economic advantage, but no facts support his vague claims that he personally could have profited financially from relationships with smaller units of the Grange. Finally,

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McFarland's sixth cause of action alleges infliction of emotional distress, but for that tort the defendant must have intentionally harmed the plaintiff by conduct so outrageous and extreme "as to exceed all bounds of that usually tolerated in a civilized community. No facts support such a claim here.

### FACTUAL BACKGROUND

For purposes of this demurrer only, Cross-Defendants the National Grange and Luttrell assume as true the following factual allegations set forth by Robert McFarland with the corresponding paragraph number. McFarland is currently serving his second two-year term as president of the State Grange, by which he is employed. (¶1) The National Grange is a nonprofit corporation organized under the laws of the District of Columbia. (¶ 2) Luttrell is the National Master for the National Grange. (¶ 3) Martha Stefenoni is the Overseer of the State Grange and member of its Executive Committee. (¶ 4) On or about October 5, 2011, Stefenoni contacted Luttrell and the National Grange and accused McFarland of wrongfully processing applications for several new California subchapter Granges and attempting to seat unqualified delegates for the State Grange annual convention. (¶ 10) Luttrell flew to California to investigate the matter, but agreed to withhold a threatened suspension of McFarland pending a State Grange investigation of the accusations. (¶ 11) The Executive Committee of the State Grange investigated the accusations from October 2011 to January 2012, when the majority submitted its report exonerating McFarland of any wrongdoing. (¶ 12) Stefenoni, who would take over if McFarland was suspended or terminated, assisted in drafting an unauthorized "minority report" that contradicted the majority's conclusions. (¶ 13) On January 25, 2012, Stefenoni caused the malicious minority report to be published to Luttrell and the National Grange. On February 7, 2012, Luttrell as National Grange Master sent McFarland a disparaging and false employment evaluation, including that McFarland was a bully in the workplace and lacked the integrity required of a State Grange President. (¶ 14) Luttrell, acting in collusion with Stefenoni, caused the February 7 report to be published to members of the Executive Committee of the State Grange. (¶ 15) Luttrell adopted the findings of the January 2012 minority report to bring charges against McFarland, requiring McFarland to defend himself between February 2012 and June 2012. McFarland agreed to accept a two-month suspension to last through June and July 2012. (¶ 16) Stefenoni became acting president of the State Grange during

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McFarland's suspension. (¶17) Stefenoni manufactured further charges against McFarland so she could take over the State Grange presidency. (¶ 18) On July 26, 2012, Stefenoni contacted an attorney who had represented the State Grange during a 2009 legal dispute to gather information. (¶19) Stefenoni and Luttrell used this 2009 information in order to expel McFarland from the State Grange. (¶ 20) Immediately after McFarland returned from his initial suspension on August 1, 2012, Luttrell informed McFarland that there was a new set of charges against him, and he was again suspended as president. (¶21)

#### LEGAL ARGUMENTS

"[A] complaint otherwise good on its face is subject to demurrer when facts judicially noticed render it defective." (Evans v. City of Berkeley (2006) 38 Cal.4th 1, 6; Code Civ. Proc., § 430.30, subd. (a).) A demurring party thus may request the court to take judicial notice of the existence of certain documents that have already been filed in court. (Evid. Code, § 452, subd. (d); Gilbert v. Cal. (1990) 218 Cal. App.3d 234, 240-241 & fn. 5.) Accompanying this demurrer, the National Grange and Edward Luttrell have requested that the court take judicial notice of the existence of portions of the constitutions, articles of incorporation and bylaws of both the National Grange and the California State Grange, which have already been filed in this same action with our initial Complaint, and are thus already court records.

I. THE COURT SHOULD REFRAIN FROM EXERCISING JURISDICTION REGARDING AN INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL DISPUTE.

The court should not exercise subject matter jurisdiction at all over the substantive factual claims alleged by McFarland's Cross-Complaint. All McFarland's causes of action stem directly from his role as master or president of the California State Grange, which is a constituent element of the Cross-Defendant National Grange. The California Supreme Court explained the narrowly limited role of the judiciary regarding the internal rules of private associations, such as the Grange. Specifically, California Dental Assn. v. American Dental Assn. (1979) 23 Cal.3d 346, 353-354, stated:

As was recognized in Dingwall v. Amalgamated Assn. etc. (1906) 4 Cal. App. 565, 569 [88 P. 597], "the rights and duties of the members as between themselves and in their relation to [a private voluntary] association, in all matters affecting its internal government and the management of its affairs, are measured by the terms of [its]

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constitution and by-laws." (See also Stoica v. International etc. Employees (1947) 78 Cal.App.2d 533, 535-536 [178 P.2d 21].) In many disputes in which such rights and duties are at issue, however, the courts may decline to exercise jurisdiction. Their determination not to intervene reflects their judgment that the resulting burdens on the judiciary outweigh the interests of the parties at stake. One concern in such cases is that judicial attempts to construe ritual or obscure rules and laws of private organizations may lead the courts into what Professor Chafee called the "dismal swamp." (Chafee, The Internal Affairs of Associations Not for Profit (1930) 43 Harv.L.Rev. 993, 1023-1026.) Another is with preserving the autonomy of such organizations. (Note, Developments in the Law – Judicial Control of Actions of Private Associations (1963) 76 Harv.L.Rev. 983, 990-991.)

In essence, McFarland complains that his performance as elected head of the California State Grange has been unfairly attacked for supposedly violating the rules of the Order. This dispute, however, is inextricably intertwined with the internal interpretation and adjudication of bylaws and other rules of the Order. The bylaws of both the National Grange (§ 4.107) and State Grange (§ 14.13) are structured to adjudicate such disputes, including appeals. There is no basis for a court to get involved in interpreting the bylaws, which each of the parties insists they are following.

II. THE CROSS-COMPLAINT FAILS TO SET FORTH FACTS SUFFICIENT TO STATE A CAUSE OF ACTION FOR DEFAMATION, AND IS OTHERWISE UNCERTAIN.

The first cause of action alleged by the California State Grange is for defamation. The California Supreme Court set forth the requisite elements in *Taus v. Loftus* (2007) 40 Cal.4th 683, 720:

The tort of defamation "involves (a) a publication that is (b) false, (c) defamatory, and (d) unprivileged, and that (e) has a natural tendency to injure or that causes special damage." (5 Witkin, Summary of Cal. Law (10th ed. 2005) Torts, § 529, p. 782, citing Civ. Code, §§ 45–46 and cases.)

Thus, in order to be tortiously defamatory, statements attributed to a person must be assertions of fact, not opinions. (*Ibid.*) McFarland conspicuously declines either to quote directly the statements he suggests are defamatory, or to attach Luttrell's February 7, 2012, letter as an exhibit to his Cross-Complaint. By declining to do so, McFarland makes it impossible for the court to ascertain whether Luttrell published factually false statements or had simply come to an unfavorable opinion about the way McFarland was acting as president of the State Grange. The few individual words McFarland quotes out of context from the letter do not indicate Luttrell was making factually false statements about McFarland. Baldly asserting the existence of "falsehood" or "malice" without more does not suffice to

support a cause of action for defamation.

Moreover, the members of Executive Board of the California State Grange would qualify as "interested parties" within the meaning of the Civil Code section 47, subdivision (c), privilege which provides immunity for communications by an "interested person," such as a fellow member of an organization, as long as the statement is not malicious in nature. (See, e.g., King v. United Parcel Serv., Inc. (2007) 152 Cal.App.4th 426, 440 [privilege applies to "an employer's statements to employees regarding the reasons for termination of another employee"]; Kelly v. Gen. Tel. Co. (1982) 136 Cal.App.3d 278, 285 [privilege applies to "[c]ommunication among a company's employees that is designed to insure honest and accurate records"].) In order to defeat such immunity, the plaintiff must allege malice in a very specific manner, with "detailed facts showing defendant's ill will toward him." (Robomatic, Inc. v. Vetco Offshore (1990) 225 Cal.App.3d 270, 276.) McFarland's vague boilerplate allegations of malice are insufficient to defeat application of the privilege, because they are not detailed facts demonstrating Luttrell's ill-will toward McFarland.

In any event, the allegations of defamation in McFarland's Cross-Complaint are fatally uncertain. *Ankeny v. Lockheed Missiles & Space Co.*(1979) 88 Cal.App.3d 531, 537, explains:

It is settled law that a pleading must allege facts and not conclusions, and that material facts must be alleged directly and not by way of recital. (Vilardo v. County of Sacramento (1942) 54 Cal. App. 2d 413, 418-419.) Also, in pleading, the essential facts upon which a determination of the controversy depends should be stated with clearness and precision so that nothing is left to surmise. (Philbrook v. Randall (1924) 195 Cal. 95, 103.) Those recitals, references to, or allegations of material facts which are left to surmise are subject to special demurrer for uncertainty. (Bernstein v. Piller (1950) 98 Cal. App. 2d 441, 443-444.)

Because McFarland has made it impossible for the court to determine whether Defendants' allegedly defamatory statements were in fact false statements of fact, rather than opinion, the demurrer for uncertainty must be sustained.

III. THE CROSS-COMPLAINT FAILS TO SET FORTH FACTS SUFFICIENT TO STATE A CAUSE OF ACTION FOR PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF PRIVATE FACTS.

McFarland's second cause of action alleges "public disclosure of private facts" against the National Grange and Luttrell. McFarland characterizes Luttrell's February 7, 2012, letter as a "confidential employment evaluation." The tort is designed to protect a person from the spreading of

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true but private facts about him in an offensive manner. (Shulman v. Group W Productions, Inc. (1998) 18 Cal.4th 200, 214.) The facts that were allegedly disclosed without his consent all arose out of McFarland's purported "employment" relationship. There are several problems with such a label. The Cross-Complaint does not allege McFarland was ever actually employed by the National Grange or Luttrell. Indeed, Luttrell could be properly viewed as holding an organizationally superior position as Master of the National Grange, whereas McFarland was only Master of the California State Grange, which must abide by the bylaws of the National Grange, but this is not actually an employment relationship. McFarland's employer is the State Grange. (Complaint, ¶ 1) Both Luttrell and McFarland were elected officers by different parts of the Grange organization, and the information shared with the Executive Board was by no means "private" or "confidential," but matters open to the officers and boards of the organizations involved. Because McFarland was elected to lead this statewide organization, he cannot reasonably claim that his performance of organizational duties for the Order were private facts.

Moreover, McFarland does not allege Luttrell sent the letter to anyone outside the State Grange or National Grange Executive Boards. "The tort must be accompanied by publicity in the sense of communication to the public in general or to a large number of persons as distinguished from one individual or a few." (Kinsey v. Macur (1980) 107 Cal. App. 3d 265, 270.) No such sharing of private information occurred here. In the instant case, the February 7, 2012, letter was sent only to those few individuals serving on the Executive Committee of the State Grange. (Complaint, ¶ 25) Finally, Civil Code section 47, subdivision (c), again provides immunity for communications by an "interested person," such as Luttrell as an individual Cross-Defendant, to other members of the State Grange Executive Committee regarding McFarland's performance as Master or President.

#### IV. THE CROSS-COMPLAINT FAILS TO SET FORTH FACTS SUFFICIENT TO STATE A CAUSE OF ACTION FOR INTRUSION.

McFarland's third cause of action is labeled one for intrusion, which is a tort based upon an unauthorized person physically or electronically entering the private space of another to obtain and publicize private information. McFarland alleges no such facts here. Miller v. National Broadcasting Co. (1986) 187 Cal.App.3d 1463, 1482, relied upon Rest.2d Torts, § 652B, to hold: "One who

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intentionally intrudes, physically or otherwise, upon the solitude or seclusion of another or his private affairs or concerns, is subject to liability to the other for invasion of his privacy, if the intrusion would be highly offensive to a reasonable person." Shulman v. Group W Productions, Inc., (1998) 18 Cal.4th 200, 232, explains further: "The intrusion tort is available where 'the plaintiff had an objectively reasonable expectation of seclusion or solitude in the place, conversation or data source.' (Rest.2d Torts, § 652B, com. c, p. 379.)"

McFarland, however, does not allege any facts that might support his cause of action for intrusion. Indeed, the cause of action alleges nothing beyond Luttrell simply sending what the Cross-Complaint describes as a "confidential employment evaluation" to the Executive Board of the California State Grange, which is actually McFarland's employer. McFarland does not allege that facts were obtained by Luttrell through physical or electronic violation of McFarland's zone of privacy. The facts surrounding McFarland's performance as master or president were all readily available, since it is an elected office for which McFarland had responsibility toward both the State and National Grange. Certainly, there are no private facts alleged, the public disclosure of which would deemed highly offensive by a reasonable person. The tort does not create liability for just any possible sharing of facts that a reasonable person would find somewhat uncomfortable or embarrassing personally for his employment.

V. THE CROSS-COMPLAINT FAILS TO SET FORTH FACTS SUFFICIENT TO STATE A CAUSE OF ACTION FOR INTENTIONAL INTERFERENCE WITH CONTRACTUAL RELATIONS.

McFarland's fourth cause of action is for intentional interference with contractual relations against the National Grange and Luttrell. The contract at issue is McFarland's employment contract with the California State Grange. The National Grange, however, is not a party wholly independent of that contract, and thus it cannot be liable for this tort. (Applied Equipment Corp. v. Litton Saudi Arabia Ltd. (1994) 7 Cal.4th 503, 514.) Although the National Grange is not actually McFarland's employer, in that it does not pay McFarland's salary, the request for judicial notice filed previously in this action (encompassing the bylaws of the National Grange and the California State Grange) elucidates the role of the National Grange and Luttrell in making possible McFarland's employment with one part of the

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Grange organization. The National Grange is thus inextricably intertwined with the officers of the State Grange. To maintain his position within the Order, McFarland as president or master of the State Grange is required to adhere to the laws and determinations of the National Grange. Moreover, because Plaintiff alleges in paragraph 14 of this very Cross-Complaint that the February 7, 2012, letter from Luttrell was an employment evaluation, it must follow that the National Grange was also acting generally in the manner of his employer and Luttrell as his supervisor. Luttrell, of course, cannot be personally liable for interfering with an employment contract to which his employer is a party. (Klein v. Oakland Raiders (1989) 211 Cal. App. 3d 67, 81.)

VI. THE CROSS-COMPLAINT FAILS TO SET FORTH FACTS SUFFICIENT TO STATE A CAUSE OF ACTION FOR INTENTIONAL INTERFERENCE WITH CONTRACTUAL RELATIONS.

McFarland's fifth cause of action is for interference with prospective economic advantage beyond his own employment contract with the California State Grange. McFarland's vague claims that he personally could have economically profited from relationships with persons and smaller Granges he established on behalf of the State Grange are without specific factual support, and are indeed somewhat nefarious by implication. An officer cannot profit individually at the expense of the Grange for whom he acts. Such economic benefit thus cannot support the alleged tort.

To the extent that McFarland alleges Luttrell's disparaging assessment of McFarland's actions as Master have caused existing members to drop their membership in the State Grange, and caused other prospective members from joining (¶ 56), there is still no potential economic loss whatsoever to McFarland. Furthermore, the National Grange and Luttrell are clearly not alleged to be strangers to the economic relationships with other Granges (Kasparian v. County of Los Angeles (1995) 38 Cal. App. 4th 242, 262) and the Complaint does not allege any conduct by Luttrell that is independently unlawful under statute (Korea Supply Co. v. Lockheed Martin Corp. (2003) 29 Cal.4th 1134, 1158-1159).

VII. THE CROSS-COMPLAINT FAILS TO SET FORTH FACTS SUFFICIENT TO STATE A CAUSE OF ACTION FOR INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS.

McFarland's sixth cause of action alleges infliction of emotional distress by Luttrell and the National Grange. This cause of action is fatally uncertain because it lumps together negligent and intentional infliction of emotional distress. There is no independent tort of negligent infliction of

emotional distress in California. (Ragland v. U.S. Bank National Assn. (2012) 209 Cal. App. 4th 182, 205.) Thus, to the extent the Complaint alleges that the National Grange and Luttrell may have negligently caused McFarland's emotional distress, there is no independent tort. In order to establish intentional infliction of emotional distress, however, the defendant must have intentionally harmed the plaintiff by conduct so outrageous and extreme "as to exceed all bounds of that usually tolerated in a civilized community." (Hughes v. Pair (2009) 46 Cal.4th 1035, 1051.) None of the conduct ascribed in the Cross-Complaint to the National Grange or Luttrell rises to the requisite level.

#### CONCLUSION

For all the foregoing reasons, the court must sustain Cross-Defendants' demurrer without leave to amend McFarland's Cross-Complaint. McFarland has failed to allege facts sufficient to state a cause of action and there is no reasonable possibility that the State Grange could so allege facts in light of the bylaws of the Order. (Cooper v. Leslie Salt Co. (1969) 70 Cal.2d 627, 636.)

Date: February 28, 2013 PORTER SCOTT

A Professional Corporation

By Martin N. Jensen

Thomas L. Riordan

Attorneys for Plaintiff and Cross-Defendants THE NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER

OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

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#### **DECLARATION OF SERVICE**

I am a citizen of the United States and a resident of Sacramento County, California. I am over the age of eighteen years and not a party to the within above-entitled action. My business address is 350 University Avenue, Suite 200, Sacramento, California. I am familiar with this Company's practice whereby the mail, after being placed in a designated area, is given the appropriate postage and is deposited in a U. S. mailbox in the City of Sacramento, California, after the close of the day's business.

On the below date, I served a copy of the following document(s):

### NATIONAL GRANGE'S AND EDWARD L. LUTTRELL'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF DEMURRER TO EACH OF THE CAUSES OF ACTION IN MCFARLAND'S CROSS-COMPLAINT

on all parties in the said action as addressed below by causing a true copy thereof to be:

- By Mail. I caused such envelope with postage thereon fully prepaid to be placed in the United States mail at Sacramento, California.
- By Personal Service. I caused such document to be delivered by hand to person(s) listed below.
- By Overnight Delivery. I caused such document to be delivered by overnight delivery to the office of the person(s) listed below.
- By Facsimile. I caused such document to be transmitted by facsimile machine to the office of the person(s) listed below.
  - By E-Mail. I caused such document to be transmitted by electronic format to the office of the person(s) listed below.

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I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed at Sacramento, California on February 28, 2013

Cindy Capnon