

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – November 25, 2024

Walter Clark Legal Group files taxpayer action against Riverside County and its County Executive Officer, Jeff Van Wagenen, for the illegal expenditure and waste of taxpayer funds in the Department of Animal Services

(Rancho Mirage, California) A Complaint for Injunctive Relief was filed on November 25, 2024, in Riverside County Superior Court against the County of Riverside and Jeff Van Wagenen, the County Executive Officer.

The taxpayer suit arises out of Van Wagenen orchestrating the hiring of Erin Gettis as Director of Animal Services with no qualifications or experience (she had a degree in Architecture and experience in Parks and Rec), as a favor to her spouse who was Riverside County counsel, then removing her two weeks after an action for her mismanagement of Animal Services was filed by Walter Clark Legal Group and spinning it publicly as a “promotional opportunity” to an Executive Director position in Riverside University Health System (with no experience in healthcare management and patient care), and lastly hiring a fringe consultant, Kristen Hassen (who Van Wagenen touted as the only person in the animal services world who could provide this work), for \$2.5 million to fix the mess he created by hiring Gettis in the first place.

Attorneys [Walter T. Clark](#) and [Dan C. Bolton](#) represent the eleven Plaintiffs in the case who filed this action to bring to public light the true facts hidden from taxpayers in Riverside County relating to the illegal and wasteful expenditure of taxpayer funds, in the Riverside County Department of Animal Services (“RCDAS”), and the fraud and concealment, collusion, and *ultra vires* (outside the scope of authority) actions associated with such wasteful and useless expenditure of public funds in hiring decisions that were all conducted by Van Wagenen in violation of his fiduciary duties to act in good faith consistent with the public trust inherent in his position.

As Mr. Bolton states: “The mistreatment of animals and misuse of public funds by Riverside County must stop. Government service is a public trust. It is not an opportunity for those in power to reward others with employment opportunities which they are woefully unqualified for

or financial windfalls which waste taxpayer money and provide no public benefit.”

The \$2.5 million in the Hassen contract could go a long way to improving the lives of animals at the shelter, rather than enriching someone whose approach to shelter management is nothing more than a house of cards—based on reducing intake numbers by keeping dogs and cats out of the shelter and left to roam in the community—is right out of the 1800’s and has been a disaster in every community that has followed the inhumane Hassen approach, including Tucson, Arizona, Austin, Texas, and El Paso, Texas.

The complaint requests, among other things, that the Hassen contract be cancelled and Van Wagenen be ordered to provide restitution to Riverside County for all public funds paid under the boondoggle Hassen contract, as well as for the taxpayer money wasted on Gettis’ employment, who has now been given two positions in the County, both of which were gifted to her and neither of which she was qualified for.

Mr. Clark notes: “The use of municipal funds with no public benefit violates the fiduciary duties Riverside County management owes to its constituents and taxpayers. This case is grounded in California law enacted over a century ago to permit a taxpayer to challenge wasteful and useless government expenditures, such as those here, that provide no public benefit.”

To learn more about Walter Clark Legal Group, please visit <https://walterclark.com/>

To learn more about this case and see the latest coverage, please visit <https://walterclark.com/riverside-county-dept-animal-services/>

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