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	Case 3:17-cv-00410-L-NLS Document 1	Filed 02/28/17 PageID.1 Page 1 of 13						
1	JON Y. VANDERPOOL, ESQ. (SBN 1610 JON CADIEUX, ESQ. (SBN 265155) SMITH, STEINER, VANDERPOOL	611)						
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6	RASEAN JOHNSON							
7								
8	UNITED STATE	UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA						
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10								
11 12	RASEAN JOHNSON, an individual,)	CASE NO. <u>'17CV410 l nls</u>						
13	,, /	COMPLAINT FOR DAMAGES						
14)))))))))))))))))))	FOR:						
15		(1) Religious Discrimination						
16		(2) Hostile Work Environment(3) Retaliation						
17		DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL						
18	Defendants.)	DEMAND FOR JUNE INIAL						
19								
20	PARTIES & CI	AIMS OVERVIEW						
21	1. Plaintiff Rasean Johnson ("Johnson") is a life-long resident of San Dieg							
22	County and a third-generation San Diego City employee. Initially hired as a Record							
23	Stock Clerk in the City's Downtown Government Administration Building in September							

Stock Clerk in the City's Downtown Government Administration Building in September
24 2004, Johnson's hard-work and consistently strong job performance quickly propelled
25 him to a Supervisor position in the City Clerk's Office. But, after he resisted and
26 reported Deputy Director Shelia Beale's efforts to inject her personal religious beliefs
27 into the workplace, the City removed his Supervisor job-title, transferred him to the

Public Utilities Department, and assigned him to the City's Chollas Operations Yard in Southeast San Diego, an objectively less-desirable work environment.

2. Defendant City of San Diego ("City" or "the City") is a municipal entity established by Charter, pursuant to the California Constitution, Article XI, § 3. It employs more than 19,000 individuals, organized into approximately 32 Departments, and is an "employer" as defined by 42 USC § 2000e(b).

<u>VENUE</u>

3. Because the Defendant is the City of San Diego, and the acts giving rise to Johnson's claims arose in San Diego County, this judicial District is the proper venue under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(1)-(3).

JURISDICTION

4. Johnson's claims arise from Defendant's violation of Federal law, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Accordingly, this Court has original jurisdiction to hear this case under 28 U.S.C. § 1331.

5. Prior to filing this action, Johnson exhausted his administrative remedies, submitting a grievance to the City of San Diego's Equal Employment Investigations Office on September 9, 2015, in accordance with his union's collective bargaining agreement. The grievance alleged Johnson's supervisor, Deputy Director Sheila Beale, harassed and discriminated against him on the basis of religion, and that her conduct created a hostile working environment. The City's ensuing six-month-long investigation revealed "sufficient evidence" in support of Johnson's complaint. The City communicated this to Johnson in a letter dated March 28, 2016. It is not known who investigators interviewed or what other actions were undertaken as part of the months-long investigation.

6. Despite sustaining Johnson's internal complaint/grievance, the City did not take any disciplinary or other remedial action against Beale. Instead, the City reassigned Johnson from the City Clerk's Office to an objectively less-desirable position in the

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Public Utilities Department, resulting in diminished promotional opportunities and harm to his professional reputation, among other deleterious repercussions.

7. Dissatisfied with the City's response to its own investigatory findings, Johnson filed a charge of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") on June 10, 2016. Johnson requested an immediate right-to-sue notice on January 17, 2017, which the EEOC is required to issue pursuant to 29 CFR 1601.28(a)(1). EEOC Director Chris Green approved the request on January 25, 2017, instructing the Department of Justice to issue a right-to-sue notice. Johnson has thus fully exhausted his administrative remedies.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

8. Johnson commenced his City employment with the City in September 2004 as a Records Stock Clerk in the City Records Management Department. A thirdgeneration City employee, Johnson was proud to follow in the footsteps of his two uncles, three cousins, great-uncle, and great-grandfather, who dutifully served the City for 32 years.

9. The Records Management Department supports the City Clerk and is responsible for keeping, handling, and maintaining official City records, which it has done for more than 100 years, as required by the City Charter and Municipal Code.

10. Based on Johnson's strong and consistent job performance, the City quickly promoted him from Records Clerk to Records Center Administrator in December 2005.
Around this same time, the City hired Shelia Beale as Records Analyst, a position similar to Johnson's. Both reported to the then-Deputy Director, Kathryn Joy.

11. Johnson respected Beale's enthusiasm and they worked collaboratively on several major projects, helping make public documents more easily accessible and improving the efficiency with which records are archived and retrieved. His efforts earned him a promotion to Records Supervisor in 2007, which included oversight of the City Clerk's Imaging Center. But fostering cooperation between himself and Beale grew increasingly difficult amidst her consistently inappropriate comments about religion.

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12. A devout and very demonstrative Christian, Beale routinely injected her religious beliefs into the workplace. In Fall 2008, California voters faced a ballotinitiative aimed at preventing same-sex marriage, commonly known as "Prop 8." After raising this controversial topic in the office, Beale asked Johnson if he thought it was "okay if gays marry." When Johnson replied that he had no problem with people marrying whomever they want, Beale told him he was "not a child of God." Another employee overheard this exchange and reported it to Deputy Director Joy. She convened a 'counseling session' with Beale and Johnson, directed Beale to apologize, and told her that it was inappropriate to make such comments at work.

13. Kathryn Joy retired from her position as Deputy Director April of 2011. The City selected Beale as her replacement. As Deputy Director, Beale reported directly to the City Clerk and was responsible for supervising the records and imaging department staff, including Johnson.

14. But even after being promoted to Deputy Director, Beale continued to demonstrably and vocally profess her religious beliefs at work. She led 'prayer sessions' during staff meetings, extolled her employees to attend church, and inquired about individuals' religious affiliations. Although uncomfortable, Johnson bowed his head and sat quietly during Beale's prayers, indulging her need for religious rituals as they tended to keep her in a positive frame of mind.

15. Johnson also did his best to ignore Beale's derogatory comments about his own personal beliefs, or at least her perception of them. These comments, often made in front of his co-workers and subordinates, include telling him at a staff meeting in February 2009 that he and his significant other did not have a "blessed" relationship because they weren't "married under the Lord."

16. Johnson received another promotion to Records and Imaging Supervisor in 2013. Though he received an increase in pay, and increased responsibilities, the other aspects of his job remained the same and he continued to report to Deputy Director Beale. Working out of the City's Government Administration Building in Downtown San

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Diego, Johnson oversaw a professional staff of approximately six employees, as well as everyone assigned to the City Clerk's office through the City's volunteer program.

17. But despite his professional success, Johnson felt increasingly marginalized and stigmatized by Beale's hostile comments about religion, prompting him to apply for a job with the City of Chula Vista in 2013. Chula Vista ranked his application 13th out of more than 500 applicants and invited him for an interview. To Johnson's surprise, Beale sat on Chula Vista's Civil Service Commission and was thus part of the hiring panel. Chula Vista did not offer Johnson the position. Following this interview process, Beale's derogatory comments toward Johnson regarding religion increased in both frequency and intensity.

11 18. In December 2013, while meeting with Johnson for his one-on-one
12 performance review, Beale warned him that he better start reading his bible, because
13 "even good people go to hell if they don't give their life to the word of God."

19. In November 2014, Beale told one of Johnson's direct reports not to follow Johnson's directives because he was a "non-believer." This undermined Johnson's ability to effectively lead his team and carry out his Supervisory duties. It also represented the first step in Beale's campaign to force him out of the City Clerk's office.

20. After Johnson took a brief bereavement leave in December 2014, Beale called him into her office, told him to "seek the word of God" and asked him to pray with her before resuming his job duties. Johnson told Beale he was uncomfortable and politely declined her request to pray.

21. Following this incident, Beale sought to reassert her dominance and control by assigning Johnson to perform menial tasks outside his job description. For example, on July 25, 2015, Beale directed Johnson to extract hundreds of archived records from the storage facility basement for scanning, even though this task is one historically performed by Records Stock Clerks, the same entry-level position Johnson held when first hired in 2004.

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22. A few days later, on July 27, 2015, Beale announced the Department would be holding a "Christmas Celebration, not a winter celebration," and anyone that didn't like it, shouldn't attend. Although she addressed her comment to a group of employees, it was meant for Johnson, which she confirmed the following day when she lashed out at him in front of his co-workers and subordinates, saying he was not "blessed" and had "no credibility."

23. On August 20, 2015, Beale directed Johnson to perform physical labor,
moving heavy cabinets, shelving units, boxes, tables, and wood pallets out of the City's
storage facility in preparation for painting. This required Johnson to use power tools and
other equipment he had not been trained on, and resulted in him cutting his hand, tearing
his dress pants, and inhaling significant amounts of dust. Based upon Beale's
increasingly hostile comments about Johnson, attempts to undermine his authority with
his staff, and assignment of menial and/or dangerous tasks, Johnson decided he could not
keep quiet any longer and sought assistance from his labor union, the San Diego
Municipal Employees Association ("MEA").

24. MEA filed a grievance on behalf of Johnson and two other employees, with the City's Human Resources Department on September 9, 2015. The grievance alleged Beale had created a hostile work environment, harassed, and discriminated against Johnson and the other two employees. The City initiated a fact-finding process on September 27, 2015 and referred the alleged EEOC violations to its Equal Employment Investigation Department.

25. Although the City told Beale about Johnson's grievance, it took no known, or meaningful measures, to protect Johnson from Beale's retaliatory treatment. It did not place her on paid leave, offer Johnson a temporary assignment, or change his supervisor to someone other than Beale. Accordingly, in October 2015, while the investigation was still pending, Beale removed Johnson's supervisory duties, reassigned his staff to another manager, and excluded him from projects that would normally fall within his job description.

26. For example, upon receiving complaints from the City Attorney's Office that inactive records were not being picked up, Johnson intervened – offering to process the backlog and ensure the records were properly scanned and copies delivered to the appropriate parties. Beale, however, told him the records center was no longer his responsibility and directed him not to process the inactive records. She also prohibited him from assisting with the City's electronic records database, directing employees to contact the independent software vendor even though Johnson was fully trained and capable of handling the technical issues in-house.

27. The City concluded its investigation of Johnson's grievance after a sixmonth investigation. It sent Johnson a letter dated March 28, 2016, which said the investigation had found sufficient evidence to support Johnson's allegations, confirming the veracity of his complaints regarding Beale's misconduct. The letter did not address what, if anything, the City would do to correct her conduct or protect Johnson from further retaliation.

28. On April 21, 2016, the City's Human Resources Director, Judy von Kalinowski, told Johnson's MEA representative, Kelley Cruz, that transferring Johnson to a different department was the only solution the City could offer. According to Kalinowski, this was being done as "a favor" to Johnson because, otherwise, he'd have to continue working for Beale.

29. Former Deputy Director Kathryn Joy unexpectedly called Johnson three days later. She said she had heard he was being forced out of the Clerk's Office and called to console and encourage him to give the new position a try.

30. Johnson heeded Joy's advice and excelled in his new role, despite the undesirable conditions in which he now had to work. As Records and Imaging Supervisor, Johnson managed a team of employees and worked in an air-conditioned, professional office in downtown San Diego among a diverse group of City employees, including the City Clerk and other high-ranking City Officials. He now has no job title, reports to a Program Manager instead of a Deputy Director, and works in a hot, dirty,

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industrial yard in East San Diego with approximately 100 other men and dangerous materials, including canisters of methane.

31. Johnson used to look at the City's official seal as a source of pride and inspiration but now its maxim, *Semper Vigilans* ("ever vigilant"), seems ironic and hypocritical. Johnson had done everything in his power to stem Beale's inappropriate conduct: participating in mediation, ignoring her derogatory comments, and avoiding unnecessary interactions. But Beale persisted. Even after the City's investigation confirmed Beale had engaged in unlawful conduct, it took no action against her and, instead, stripped Johnson of his Supervisor job title and transferred him to a remote jobsite.

32. Ms. Beale continues to make derogatory comments about Johnson to City officials and he has been directed not to discuss the reasons for his transfer to the Public Utilities Department. As a result, his new supervisor and other City managers believe he was transferred for disciplinary purposes. Despite Johnson's more than 12-years' of outstanding job performance he now struggles under a tarnished reputation to salvage his once promising career.

First Cause of Action

Religious Discrimination [42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2]

33. Plaintiff incorporates paragraphs 1 through 32 by reference, as if fully set forth herein.

34. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VII") prohibits employers from discriminating against an individual "with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of his . . . religion." 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(1). It is also unlawful for employers to "limit, segregate, or classify . . . employees . . . in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee." 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(2).

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35. The City of San Diego is engaged in an industry affecting commerce and employs more than fifteen persons. Accordingly, it is an "employer" under Title VII. 42 U.S.C. § 2000e(b). Deputy Director Beale acted as The City's agent with regard to the events and circumstances relevant to this complaint.

Johnson has maintained an exemplary employment record over his 12+ 36. years as a City Employee, including positive job performance assessments, promotions, and raises.

8 37. Beale's repeated questions, comments, and derogatory remarks about 9 Johnson and his religious beliefs evidence her perception that Johnson is a "non-10 believer," or at least does not share her faith. Based on this perception, Beale initiated a series of escalating adverse employment actions against him - encouraging subordinates to refuse to follow his directives, telling co-workers he is not a "man of God" and lacks credibility, assigning him to perform menial tasks outside his job description, stripping him of all supervisory duties, and marginalizing his role in the Department.

Despite its investigative findings, which confirmed Beale had engaged in the 38. alleged misconduct, the City took no disciplinary action against her and, instead, gave Beale what she wanted by transferring Johnson out of her Department, removing him from a management position, and requiring him to work in a hot, dirty, industrial yard on the city's eastern boundary with Lemon Grove.

39. As a result of Defendant's conduct, Johnson has suffered and continues to suffer economic losses, including harm to his professional reputation, lost earning capacity, and impaired chances for advancement. He has also suffered non-pecuniary harm, including emotional pain, suffering, inconvenience, mental anguish, and loss of enjoyment of life. Johnson also seeks to recover legal fees and costs incurred in attempting to remedy Defendant's unlawful conduct pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(k). ///

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Second Cause of Action

Hostile Work Environment [42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2]

40. Plaintiff incorporates paragraphs 1 through 39 by reference, as if fully set forth herein.

41. Under Title VII, an employer has an affirmative obligation to maintain a work environment free of harassment, intimidation and repeated insult. This includes quid pro quo and hostile work environment harassment.

42. Beale's persistent questions, comments, and discussion of religion, including leading group prayer at staff meetings and making derogatory remarks about Johnson being a "non-believer," and thus untrustworthy, are not only offensive and inappropriate for the workplace, they have deleteriously impacted Johnson' job, career, and professional reputation.

43. Beale's comments about religion occurred on an almost daily basis from 2008 until the City transferred Johnson from the City Clerk's office to the Chollas Operations Yard in April 2016 due to the severity and pervasiveness of her harassment.

44. Because Beale was Johnson's direct supervisor, the City is vicariously liable for the harassment and resulting tangible employment actions taken against Johnson, including her undermining his authority with subordinates, removing his supervisory duties, and assigning him to perform manual labor and menial tasks outside his job description. Moreover, after Johnson reported the harassment and the City's investigation confirmed Beale had engaged in the alleged misconduct, it refused to restore his Supervisor job-title, reassigned him to a remote worksite, and directed him to keep the reason for his transfer a secret, even from his new manager.

45. As a result of Defendant's conduct, Johnson has suffered and continues to suffer economic losses, including harm to his professional reputation, lost earning capacity, and impaired chances for advancement. He has also suffered non-pecuniary harm, including emotional pain, suffering, inconvenience, mental anguish, and loss of

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enjoyment of life. Johnson also seeks to recover legal fees and costs incurred in attempting to remedy Defendant's unlawful conduct pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(k).

Third Cause of Action

Retaliation [42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3]

46. Plaintiff incorporates herein by reference paragraphs 1 through 45, as if fully set forth herein.

47. Title VII also prohibits employers from retaliating against an employee for engaging in protected conduct. (42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a).)

9 48. Johnson engaged in protected conduct when he opposed Beale's efforts to
10 inject her religious beliefs into the workplace by refusing to pray with her or follow her
11 directive to "get back to church." He also engaged in protected conduct when he filed the
12 grievance regarding Beale's discriminatory and harassing behavior, and participated in
13 the ensuing investigation.

49. Less than a month after Johnson filed his September 9, 2015 grievance, and despite his consistently positive job performance, Beale removed his supervisory duties, reassigned his staff to other managers, and directed him to perform menial tasks and physical labor, including cleaning up bags of shredded records and preparing the storage facility for painting.

50. Although Beale told Johnson his changed role was the result of "restructuring," she was unable to provide any reason why such restructuring was necessary, or why it only impacted Johnson. In reality, Beale took these actions in retaliation for Johnson's grievance, in an effort to marginalize, ostracize, and force his resignation.

51. As a result of Defendant's conduct, Johnson has suffered and continues to suffer economic losses, including harm to his professional reputation, lost earning capacity, and impaired chances for advancement. He has also suffered non-pecuniary harm, including emotional pain, suffering, inconvenience, mental anguish, and loss of

1	enjoyment of life. Johnson also seeks to recover legal fees and costs incurred in						
2	attempting to remedy Defendant's unlawful conduct pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(k).						
3							
4	PRAYER FOR RELIEF						
5	WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Rasean Johnson requests a jury trial and entry of						
6	judgment against Defendant as follows:						
7	1. For back-pay and front-pay, according to proof;						
8	2. For damages to plaintiff's professional reputation;						
9	3. For compensatory damages, including emotional pain and suffering, mental						
10	anguish, and loss of enjoyment;						
11	4. For injunctive and declaratory relief;						
12	5. For attorney fees and costs;						
13	6. For prejudgment interest on all amounts claimed; and						
14	7. For any other and further relief that the court considers proper.						
15							
16	Dated: <u>February 28, 2017</u> SMITH, STEINER, VANDERPOOL						
17	& WAX, APC						
18							
19	By: /s Jon Vanderpool						
20	Jon Y. Vanderpool						
21	Email: jvanderpool@ssvwlaw.com Jon Cadieux						
22	Attorneys for Plaintiff						
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JS 44 (Rev. 12/12)

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS RASEAN JOHNSON				DEFENDANTS CITY OF SAN DIEGO, and DOES 1 through 5, inclusive			
(b) County of Residence o (E		County of Residence of First Listed Defendant <u>San Diego</u> (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.					
(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Jon Y. Vanderpool, Esq. Smith, Steiner, Vanderpo 401 West A Street, Suite	/ Jon Cadieux, Esq. ool & Wax (619) 2	239-7200	Attorneys (If Known)				
II. BASIS OF JURISD	ICTION (Place an "X" in ()ne Box Only)			RINCIPAL PARTIE	${f S}$ (Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff	
I U.S. Government Image: Second seco		Not a Party)	(For Diversity Cases Only) PTF DEF Citizen of This State Citizen of This State				
2 U.S. Government Defendant	4 Diversity (Indicate Citizensh)	3 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)			2 D 2 Incorporated and Principal Place D 5 D 5 of Business In Another State		
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IV. NATURE OF SUIT			napchurus	TOPINAL	HANKOMBRAN		
CONTRACT I 10 Insurance 120 Marine 130 Miller Act 140 Negotiable Instrument 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment 151 Medicare Act 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excludes Veterans) 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits 160 Stockholders' Suits 190 Other Contract 195 Contract Product Liability 196 Franchise REAL PROPERTY 210 Land Condemnation 220 Foreclosure 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment 240 Torts to Land 245 Tort Product Liability 290 All Other Real Property	PERSONAL INJURY 310 Airplane 315 Airplane Product Liability 320 Assault, Libel &	PERSONAL INJURY 365 Personal Injury - Product Liability 367 Health Care/ Pharmaceutical Personal Injury Product Liability PBRSONAL PROPER 370 Other Fraud 380 Other Personal Property Damage 385 Property Damage Product Liability PERSONAL PROPER 370 Other Fraud 380 Other Personal Property Damage 385 Property Damage Product Liability PRISONER PETITION Habeas Corpus: 463 Alien Detainee 530 General 535 Death Penalty Other: 540 Mandamus & Othe 555 Prison Condition 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Conditions of S60 Civil Detainee - Conditions of S60 Conditions of	of Prope: G90 Other G90 Other CAU CTY T10 Pair Labo Act CT20 Labor/Mt Relations T40 Railway T51 Family at Leave At T90 Other Lai T90 Other Lai S T91 Employed Income St Income	ated Seizure ty 21 USC 881 BOR or Standards magement abor Act ad Medical of Litigation Retirement ecurity Act BACION	BANKRUPTCY 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157 PROPERIN RIGHTS 820 Copyrights 830 Patent 840 Trademark SOCIAL SECURITY 861 HIA (1395ff) 862 Black Lung (923) 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) 864 SSID Title XVI 865 RSI (405(g)) FEDERAL TAX SUITS 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant) 871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609	OTHER STATUTES 375 False Claims Act 400 State Reapportionment 410 Antinust 430 Banks and Banking 450 Commerce 450 Deportation 470 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations 480 Consumer Credit 490 Cable/Sat TV 850 Securities/Commodities/ Exchange 890 Other Statutory Actions 891 Agricultural Acts 892 Environmental Matters 895 Freedom of Information Act 896 Arbitration \$95 Oconstitutionality of Agency Decision 950 Constitutionality of State Statutes	
V. ORIGIN (Place an "X" in	one Box Only)	I			<u></u>	I	
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTIC	N 42 USC 2000e Brief description of ca	tute under which you ar use: ination; Hostile Wor	k Environment;	arisdictional state Retaliation	ties unless diversity):	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	CHECK IF THIS UNDER RULE 2	IS A CLASS ACTION 3, F.R.Cv.P.	DEMAND S	\$ 	CHECK YES only JURY DEMAND	y if demanded in complaint: : X Yes 🗇 No	
VIII. RELATED CASE IF ANY	(See instructions):	IUDGE		DOCKET NUMBER			
DATE 02/28/2017	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	SIGNATURE OF ATT /s/ Jon Y. Vande		>			
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