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## **Court Rules in Favor of City in CVRA Lawsuit**

**Rancho Santa Margarita, CA** — The Orange County Superior Court has ruled in favor of the City of Rancho Santa Margarita in the matter of Jackson v. City of Rancho Santa Margarita, rejecting and denying the plaintiff's \$500,000 California Voting Rights Act lawsuit, finding the plaintiff's allegations baseless and determining that the City owes \$0 to attorney Michelle R. Jackson.

Mayor Tony Beall stated, "We are very appreciative of the Court's thorough review in this matter. The evidence was abundantly clear: this was a meritless lawsuit based on a frivolous demand for payment." The City argued that Ms. Jackson's claim for reimbursement was in violation of California law and not supported by the evidence, including: the documentation supporting Ms. Jackson's claim for reimbursement was insufficient and contained a number of red flags, including:

- Refusal to identify a prospective plaintiff on whose behalf the demand letter was submitted
- The "demographer" who purportedly provided services to support her demand had no training and experience, admitted he did not perform the study for which she requested reimbursement on her invoice, and admitted that he did not know how to conduct the study
- Unsubstantiated identification of a qualified demographic expert with whom she consulted and requested reimbursement
- Questionable billing entries and other discrepancies
- Refusal to provide additional information to corroborate her costs as authorized by the Elections Code.

The court ruled, based on Ms. Jackson's refusal and failure to provide proof of a prospective plaintiff on whose behalf she submitted a demand letter, that the City must switch to district-based elections for the City Council. The City argued, and the Court agreed, that such proof and existence of a prospective plaintiff is a requirement for reimbursement of legal charges and costs under the Elections Code.

The lawsuit was premised on a June 23, 2023 letter the City received from the Law Offices of Michelle R. Jackson, asserting violations of the California Voting Rights Act, that the City engaged in a system of racially polarized voting, and demanding that the City voluntarily change its at-large system for electing Council Members to a district-based system to avoid litigation. The City voluntarily switched to a district-based system as of October 11, 2023, in order to avoid costly litigation. Ms. Jackson submitted an invoice for reimbursement in the amount of \$38,000. The City requested corroborating information in order to reimburse Ms. Jackson, which she refused to provide. Ms. Jackson thereafter initiated and filed the lawsuit against the City of Rancho Santa Margarita on August 13, 2024, ultimately claiming \$500,000 in total compensation and legal fees for the non-payment of the initial \$38,000 invoice, which the court has now determined the City was within its rights to withhold payment.

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