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8	STATE OF WASHINGTON SPOKANE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT		
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10	WASHINGTON STATE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, presenting the case in support	NO. 22-2-01759-32	
11	of the complaints filed by SHARELL NEAL, CAROL RICHEY, AND GARY COX,		
12	Plaintiff,	COMPLAINT FOR RELIEF UNDER THE WASHINGTON LAW	
13	ŕ	AGAINST DISCRIMINATION	
14	V.		
15	ROBERT SARACENO and FRANCINE SARACENO, the marital community		
16	comprised thereof and d/b/a ACTION AUTO AND BOAT REPAIR, a/k/a ACTION AUTO		
17	SALES, a/k/a ACTION AUTO REPAIR, a/k/a		
18	ACTION AUTO, and FRANCINE SARACENO, individually and as personal		
19	representative of the ESTATE OF ROBERT JOHN SARACENO,		
20	r		
21	Defendants.		
22			
23	I. INTROD	OUCTION	
24	1.1 Plaintiff Washington State Human	Rights Commission, by and through its	
25	attorneys Emily C. Nelson and Alfredo González Be	enítez, Assistant Attorneys General, files this	

action against Defendants Robert and Francine Saraceno, both as a marital community and doing

1	business as Action Auto and Boat Repair, a/k/a Action Auto Sales, a/k/a Action Auto Repair,	
2	a/k/a Action Auto; and Francine Saraceno, individually and as personal representative of the	
3	Estate of Robert John Saraceno (collectively, Defendants) to remedy unlawful sex discrimination	
4	and retaliation in the rental of residential housing.	
5	II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE	
6	2.1 The Commission has jurisdiction to prosecute this case. RCW 49.60.030(2), .340.	
7	The Commission must investigate complaints of housing discrimination and, if it makes a	
8	finding of reasonable cause to believe the respondent of the complaint has engaged in housing	
9	discrimination, to seek relief. RCW 49.60.240(1)(c). If the Commission is unable to reach a	
10	voluntary agreement with the respondent to resolve the matter through conciliation, the	
11	complainant or respondent may elect to have the claims on which the Commission found	
12	reasonable cause decided in a civil action in superior court. RCW 49.60.340. After the	
13	Commission's reasonable cause finding in this case, Defendants made such an election.	
14	2.2 This matter is timely because the Commission has commenced this action within	
15	thirty days of Defendant Francine Saraceno's election. RCW 49.60.340(2).	
16	2.3 The violations alleged in this Complaint were committed in whole or in part in	
17	Spokane County, and Defendants transact business in Spokane County. Venue is thus proper in	
18	Spokane County pursuant to RCW 4.12.020 and RCW 4.12.025.	
19	III. FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS	
20	3.1 Plaintiff is the Washington State Human Rights Commission, a state agency with	
21	statutory authority to eliminate and prevent certain forms of discrimination, including housing	
22	discrimination on the basis of sex. RCW 49.60.010.	
23	3.2 At all times relevant to this action, Defendants Robert and Francine Saraceno	
24	were a married couple who resided in Spokane County.	
25	3.3 Robert Saraceno died testate on July 26, 2021.	
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- 3.4 On or about October 10, 2021, Spokane County Superior Court appointed Defendant Francine Saraceno as the personal representative of the Estate of Robert John Saraceno, and admitted the Last Will and Testament of Robert John Saraceno to probate. See In re Estate of Robert John Saraceno, No. 21-4-02043-32 (Spokane Cnty., Wash. Super. Ct., Oct. 10, 2021).
- 3.5 On or about May 11, 2022, and pursuant to RCW 11.40.070, the Commission filed a creditor's claim in *In re Estate of Robert John Saraceno*, No. 21-4-02043-32.
- 3.6 At all times relevant to this action, Action Auto and Boat Repair, a/k/a Action Auto Sales, a/k/a Action Auto Repair, a/k/a Action Auto, was a sole proprietorship owned by Robert and Francine Saraceno, located at 7419 East Trent Avenue, Spokane Valley, Washington (Action Auto).
- 3.7 At all times relevant to this action, Defendants Robert and Francine Saraceno owned residential rental properties located at 23 and 27 South Haven Street, Spokane, Washington; and a commercial property located at 7413 East Trent Avenue, Spokane Valley, Washington, which they rented to tenants as a residence (collectively, the rental properties).
- 3.8 The rental properties described in paragraph 3.7 are "[d]wellings" under RCW 49.60.040(9).
- 3.9 At all times relevant to this action, Defendants engaged in "[r]eal estate transactions" by renting and/or leasing the properties described in paragraph 3.7 to tenants in Spokane County. RCW 49.60.040(22).
- At all times relevant to this action, Defendants controlled all aspects of management of the rental properties including, but not limited to, advertising vacancies, accepting or rejecting prospective tenants, setting rates for rent and security deposits, collecting rent, accepting or rejecting requests for repairs, and evicting tenants.
- 3.11 Complainant Sharell Neal is a 41-year-old woman who rented the 23 South Haven Street residence from Defendants, in or around June 2016 until July 30, 2018.

1	3.12	Complainant Carol Richey is a 35-year-old woman who rented the 23 South
2	Haven Street 1	residence from Defendants, in or around June 2018 until May 30, 2021.
3	3.13	Complainant Gary Cox is a man who rented the 23 South Haven Street residence
4	from Defenda	nts, in or around June 2018 until May 30, 2021. Mr. Cox is Ms. Richey's fiancé,
5	and together tl	hey parent five children.
6	3.14	By virtue of his relationship with Ms. Richey, Mr. Cox is associated with
7	someone who	is a member of a protected class.
8	3.15	During Complainants' tenancies, Defendants subjected them to unlawful
9	discrimination on the basis of sex, including quid pro quo sexual harassment and/or severe	
10	pervasive, and unwelcome sexual conduct that created a hostile housing environment. The sexua	
11	conduct was carried out by Robert Saraceno. Defendants additionally made their housing	
12	unavailable, expelled them, and retaliated against them for resisting Robert Saraceno's sexua	
13	advances.	
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14	A. Comp	lainant Sharell Neal
14 15	A. Comp	lainant Sharell Neal In or around June 2016, Ms. Neal moved into the 23 South Haven Street residence
	3.16	
15	3.16 with her then-	In or around June 2016, Ms. Neal moved into the 23 South Haven Street residence
15 16	3.16 with her then-	In or around June 2016, Ms. Neal moved into the 23 South Haven Street residence 15-year-old daughter. She agreed to pay \$600 per month in rent, in cash. Although
15 16 17	3.16 with her then-Ms. Neal required 3.17	In or around June 2016, Ms. Neal moved into the 23 South Haven Street residence 15-year-old daughter. She agreed to pay \$600 per month in rent, in cash. Although tested a lease, Mr. Saraceno refused to provide one.
15 16 17 18	3.16 with her then-Ms. Neal required 3.17	In or around June 2016, Ms. Neal moved into the 23 South Haven Street residence 15-year-old daughter. She agreed to pay \$600 per month in rent, in cash. Although tested a lease, Mr. Saraceno refused to provide one. Soon after she moved in, Mr. Saraceno began making many unwelcome and
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- 3.18 Robert Saraceno made many of these unwelcome and threatening statements while collecting rent from Ms. Neal at her residence, and on the premises of Action Auto where Ms. Neal eventually began paying rent.
- 3.19 Ms. Neal verbally rejected Mr. Saraceno's advances by telling him no, turning down his offer to pay her for sex, and at one point telling him something to the effect of, "you don't get it, we're never having sex."
- 3.20 On several occasions, Mr. Saraceno requested sexual favors in exchange for rental improvements, repairs, and maintenance services. These improvements, repairs, and maintenance services included, but were not limited to, the purchase of a washer and dryer for Ms. Neal's residence, and regular yard maintenance. Because Ms. Neal rejected Mr. Saraceno's requests and advances, Mr. Saraceno refused to complete the previously offered or requested improvements, repairs, and maintenance services.
- 3.21 In or around November 2017, the upstairs plumbing began leaking sewage into Ms. Neal's kitchen, rendering it unusable. Ms. Neal reported the leak to Mr. Saraceno, and he re-routed the plumbing to drain wastewater directly on the ground outside of the residence. When Ms. Neal requested that Mr. Saraceno find a more permanent solution, as the human waste had begun attracting flies, Mr. Saraceno told Ms. Neal he would fix it if she would have sex with him.
- 3.22 As a result of Mr. Saraceno's harassing behavior, Ms. Neal began experiencing significant fear and distress. At the time, Ms. Neal worked two jobs, and worried about leaving her daughter alone. Ms. Neal began sleeping with a knife under her pillow, out of fear that Mr. Saraceno may try to enter her home at night, since he had a key.
- 3.23 Eventually, Ms. Neal located a house to purchase, and moved out of the residence on or around July 30, 2018. She did not provide Mr. Saraceno with advance notice, as she did not want him potentially to find out where she was moving. Ms. Neal would have stayed longer at the residence, but found alternative housing because she no longer felt safe at 23 South Haven.

- 3.24 Prior to vacating, Ms. Neal allowed her cousin, Complainant Carol Richey, and her family to move in with her. Ms. Neal wanted to help Ms. Richey and her family because they were homeless, and Ms. Neal did not believe Mr. Saraceno would bother Ms. Richey because she lived with her fiancé, Complainant Gary Cox. Ms. Richey was also in her third trimester of pregnancy at this time. Ms. Neal told Ms. Richey about some of Mr. Saraceno's behavior, but she believed it was just directed at her, and did not expect it to continue once Ms. Neal herself vacated the property.
- 3.25 After vacating, on or around August 1, 2018, Mr. Saraceno called Ms. Neal, asked for the rent, and threatened to have her removed if she did not pay. Ms. Neal informed Mr. Saraceno that she had moved out.

B. Complainants Carol Richey and Gary Cox

- 3.26 In or around June 2018, Ms. Richey, Mr. Cox, and their four children moved in to 23 South Haven. They wanted to continue to rent the residence once Ms. Neal moved out, so they went to Action Auto to see if Mr. Saraceno would agree to that arrangement.
- 3.27 When she arrived at Action Auto, Ms. Richey remembered that she had had a troubling interaction with Mr. Saraceno when purchasing a car from him in or around July 2017. Back then, Ms. Richey visited Action Auto to pick up car tabs for a vehicle she and Mr. Cox had just purchased from the business. While she was there, Mr. Saraceno made several comments to Ms. Richey, inviting her to "go for a ride," asking if she was "chicken," after she rejected his advances, and telling her something to the effect of, "your boyfriend doesn't have to know."
- 3.28 Mr. Saraceno agreed to allow them to rent the residence, and accepted \$600 cash as rent. At one point during the meeting, however, Mr. Saraceno instructed Ms. Richey to come back without her boyfriend next time in reference to Mr. Cox. Based on her previous interaction with Mr. Saraceno, Ms. Richey understood Mr. Saraceno to be implying that he wanted to be alone with her for sexual reasons. Prior to this, Ms. Richey had not realized that Robert Saraceno, who had made unwelcome sexual advances toward her at Action Auto during the car purchase,

2	housing for her children, Ms. Richey felt she had little choice but to move into the home and
3	trust that Mr. Saraceno would respect the rights of herself and her family.
4	3.29 As he had with Ms. Neal, Mr. Saraceno began making unwelcome and
5	intimidating sexual advances and comments to Ms. Richey soon after she began living at the
6	residence. This included, but was not limited to:
7	3.29.1 Groping or otherwise touching Ms. Richey's pregnant belly without her
8	consent;
9	3.29.2 Making sexual innuendos to Ms. Richey while collecting rent at her
10	residence and at Action Auto;
11	3.29.3 Visiting Ms. Richey and Mr. Cox's home without notice, when Mr
12	Saraceno knew Ms. Richey would be alone; and
13	3.29.4 Surveilling Ms. Richey from his car parked in the street in front of the
14	residence.
15	3.30 Approximately two months after Ms. Richey and Mr. Cox began renting at
16	23 South Haven, they contacted Mr. Saraceno and requested repairs to their residence. The sewer
17	leak that had begun during Ms. Neal's tenancy had gotten worse, the upstairs toilet was leaking
18	onto the kitchen table, and black mold was growing in the bathroom. The kitchen ceiling panels
19	also had begun bowing because of these leaks.
20	3.31 Mr. Saraceno visited the residence while Mr. Cox was out, and demanded a
21	damage deposit from Ms. Richey. When Ms. Richey invited Mr. Saraceno to enter the home to
22	view some improvements Mr. Cox had made since they moved in, Mr. Saraceno replied
23	something to the effect of, "I bet you want me to come inside." Ms. Richey understood this to
24	be a sexual innuendo.
25	3.32 Mr. Saraceno's actions made Ms. Richey feel afraid and upset, and she took steps
26	to avoid coming into contact with him so as not to experience his harassing behavior. These steps

1 | would now be her landlord. Because her family was homeless and she urgently needed to provide

1	included asking her brother to stay over on nights when Mr. Cox was working, and having Mr.
2	Cox deliver rent payments to Action Auto, rather than her. Ms. Richey also began feeling very
3	uneasy and unsafe in her home, as she was often alone while Mr. Cox was at work and did not
4	know when Mr. Saraceno would come by the residence.
5	3.33 Mr. Cox also was very upset by Mr. Saraceno's behavior, and the effect it was
6	having on Ms. Richey. Mr. Cox worried about his partner while he was at work, as she was in
7	her third trimester of pregnancy. Mr. Cox was frustrated by his inability to protect Ms. Richey
8	from Mr. Saraceno's unwelcome sexual advances.
9	3.34 On or about July 31, 2019, Ms. Neal filed a housing discrimination complaint
10	with the Commission against Robert and Francine Saraceno.
11	3.35 On or about August 9, 2019, Ms. Richey and Mr. Cox filed housing
12	discrimination complaints with the Commission against Robert and Francine Saraceno.
13	3.36 Approximately one week after filing their complaints, while they were still living
14	at 23 South Haven, Ms. Richey and Mr. Cox found a note on the door of their residence stating
15	they had too many people living at the rental property, and that the yard needed to be cleaned
16	up. For sale signs were also posted around the yard.
17	C. Other Female Tenants of the Saracenos' Rental Properties
18	3.37 In addition to Complainants Neal, Richey, and Cox, Defendants subjected several
19	other female tenants to unlawful discrimination on the basis of sex, including quid pro quo sexual
20	harassment and/or severe, pervasive, and unwelcome sexual conduct that created a hostile
21	housing environment. Again, the sexual conduct was carried out by Robert Saraceno.
22	3.38 The other female tenants resided at the rental properties between at least 2008 to
23	2017.
24	3.39 On several occasions, Mr. Saraceno made unwelcome sexual comments about
25	female tenants' and prospective female tenants' appearance or bodies, including their buttocks
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and breasts. Mr. Saraceno made these comments while collecting rent at the properties, while showing prospective tenants the rental properties, and when tenants paid rent at Action Auto.

- 3.40 On several occasions, Mr. Saraceno groped or attempted to grope female tenants and prospective female tenants without their consent.
- 3.41 On one occasion, Mr. Saraceno sexually assaulted a prospective female tenant while she was viewing the 27 South Haven rental property. The female tenant reported the assault to police, who conducted an investigation that included interviewing Mr. Saraceno at Action Auto and obtaining a warrant for his DNA. The female tenant had previously rented the Saracenos' 7413 East Trent Avenue rental property, from in or around winter 2011 to June 2013. During that tenancy, she experienced unwelcome sexual advances and comments from Mr. Saraceno, as well as uninvited groping or touching of her body.
- 3.42 On several occasions, Mr. Saraceno granted or offered to grant tangible housing benefits to female tenants—such as reducing the rent, approving a rental application, or allowing continued residence at the residential properties—in exchange for sexual favors.
- 3.43 As with Complainants, Robert Saraceno's sexual misconduct was unwelcome, severe, and pervasive, and caused female tenants and prospective female tenants to feel fear, stress, depression, anxiety, shame, and extreme discomfort.
- 3.44 As a result of Ms. Neal's, Ms. Richey's, and other female tenants' rejection of Robert Saraceno's sexual advances, Defendants refused to complete necessary maintenance and/or repairs; threatened to initiate, or did initiate, eviction proceedings against them; or otherwise discriminated against Complainants and other female tenants. These actions were carried out by Robert Saraceno, to the benefit of all Defendants, and would dissuade a reasonable person from engaging in protected activity.
- 3.45 The alleged conduct was objectively and subjectively intolerable and resulted in the constructive eviction of Complainant Neal and other female tenants.

- 3.46 The alleged conduct was objectively and subjectively intolerable and resulted in the deprivation of housing to otherwise qualified prospective female tenants.
- 3.47 Robert Saraceno's conduct was intentional, willful, and/or taken in reckless disregard for the rights of others.
- 3.48 Robert Saraceno's course of conduct towards Complainants, female tenants and prospective female tenants, and persons associated with them, between approximately 2008 and May 30, 2021, was part of the same unlawful housing practice.
- 3.49 Robert Saraceno committed intentional and unlawful housing discrimination on the basis of sex while conducting business that benefitted Defendant marital community of Robert and Francine Saraceno. The marital community of Robert and Francine Saraceno is therefore liable for Robert Saraceno's intentional and unlawful housing discrimination on the basis of sex.
- 3.50 Robert Saraceno committed intentional and unlawful housing discrimination on the basis of sex while conducting business that benefitted the Estate of Robert John Saraceno. The Estate of Robert John Saraceno is therefore liable for Robert Saraceno's intentional and unlawful housing discrimination on the basis of sex.
- 3.51 By virtue of her status as an owner and landlord, Defendant Francine Saraceno is joint and severally liable for Mr. Saraceno's conduct.
- 3.52 In addition to her joint and several liability, Defendant Francine Saraceno knew of Robert Saraceno's intentional and unlawful housing discrimination on the basis of sex, and did not take reasonable steps to investigate, take corrective action, or stop it. For example, in or around 2014, Ms. Saraceno was aware that Mr. Saraceno had received sexual favors from tenants in exchange for rent at the 23 South Haven residence, but did not take reasonable steps to investigate or take corrective action to end the practice.
- 3.53 As a proximate result of Defendants' actions and omissions, Complainants and persons associated with them, and other Washington residents who are past female tenants or

1	past prospective female tenants, and persons associated with them, have been injured by	
2	Defendants' sexual harassment, expulsion, retaliation, and other unlawful conduct as alleged	
3	herein. Such persons have suffered pecuniary and/or nonpecuniary injuries because of the	
4	conduct alleged in this case.	
5	IV. CAUSES OF ACTION	
6	4.1 Plaintiff realleges paragraphs 1.1 through 3.53 and incorporates them herein as if	
7	set forth in full.	
8	FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION	
9	(Violation of the WLAD – Sex Discrimination in Terms and Conditions of Housing, Harassment (Hostile Housing Environment))	
10	4.2 It is an unfair practice for a housing provider to discriminate against any person in	
11	the terms, conditions, and privileges of rental of a dwelling, or in the provision of services or	
12	facilities in connection therewith because of sex. Sexual harassment is a form of unlawful	
13	discrimination that affects the terms, conditions, and privileges of housing rental.	
14	4.3 Defendants' actions, including but not limited to the actions described above,	
15	constituted unwelcome sexual harassment of Complainants and other past female tenants and past	
16	prospective female tenants that created a hostile environment and was sufficiently severe or	
17	pervasive as to affect the terms, conditions, and privileges of the rental properties.	
18	4.4 By the actions described above, Defendants have discriminated against	
19	Complainants and other past female tenants and past prospective female tenants in the terms,	
20	conditions, and privileges of rental of a dwelling, or in the provision of services or facilities in	
21	connection therewith because of their sex, in violation of RCW 49.60.030(1)(c); .222(1)(b).	
22	SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION	
23	(Violation of the WLAD – Sex Discrimination in Terms and Conditions of Housing, Harassment (Quid Pro Quo))	
24	4.5 It is an unfair practice for a housing provider to discriminate against any person in	
25	the terms, conditions, and privileges of rental of a dwelling, or in the provision of services or	
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facilities in connection therewith because of sex. Quid pro quo sexual harassment is a form of unlawful discrimination that affects the terms, conditions, and privileges of housing rental.

- 4.6 Defendants' actions, including but not limited to the actions described above, constituted unwelcome quid pro quo sexual harassment, whereby the terms, conditions, and privileges of the rental properties were conditioned upon Complainants' and other past female tenants' and past prospective female tenants' acquiescence to Robert Saraceno's sexual demands.
- 4.7 By the actions described above, Defendants have discriminated against Complainants and other past female tenants and past prospective female tenants in the terms, conditions, and privileges of rental of a dwelling, or in the provision of services or facilities in connection therewith because of their sex, in violation of RCW 49.60.030(1)(c); .222(1)(b).

THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of the WLAD – Sex Discrimination in Housing, Making Housing Unavailable)

- 4.8 It is an unfair practice for a housing provider to discriminate in the rental of a dwelling or otherwise make a rental unavailable to a person because of sex. Sexual harassment by a housing provider is a form of unlawful discrimination that can deter prospective tenants from obtaining an otherwise available rental property and deter current tenants from remaining in their housing, thereby rendering the rental unavailable to them because of sex.
- 4.9 By the actions described above, Defendants have discriminated against or otherwise made a rental unavailable to Complainants and other past female tenants and past prospective female tenants because of their sex, in violation of RCW 49.60.030(1)(c); .222(f).

FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of the WLAD - Sex Discrimination in Housing, Expulsion)

- 4.10 It is an unfair practice for a housing provider to expel a person from occupancy of real property because of sex. Expelling a person who rejects or fails to submit to a housing provider's sexual advances constitutes expulsion on the basis of sex.
 - 4.11 By the actions described above, Defendants have expelled female tenants from their

2	FIFTH CAUSE OF ACTION	
3	(Violation of the WLAD - Retaliation)	
4	4.12 It is an unfair practice for a housing provider to coerce, intimidate, threaten, or	
5	interfere with a person in the exercise or enjoyment of, or on account of their having exercised or	
6	enjoyed, their rights granted or protected under the WLAD because of sex.	
7	4.13 By the actions described above, Defendants have coerced, intimidated, threatened,	
8	or interfered with Complainants and other past female tenants in the exercise or enjoyment of, or	
9	on account of their having exercised or enjoyed, their rights granted or protected under the WLAD	
10	because of sex, in violation of RCW 49.60.030(1)(c); .2235.	
11	SIXTH CAUSE OF ACTION	
12	(Violation of the WLAD – Aiding or Abetting Discrimination)	
13	4.14 It is an unfair practice for any person to aid, abet, encourage, or incite the	
14	commission of any unfair practice.	
15	4.15 By the actions described above, Defendant Francine Saraceno aided or abetted the	
16	commission of the above-alleged unfair housing practices by failing or refusing to correct the	
17	discriminatory actions of Robert Saraceno, in violation of RCW 49.60.220.	
18	V. PRAYER FOR RELIEF	
19	WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Washington State Human Rights Commission prays that the	
20	Court:	
21	5.1 Enjoin Defendants from discriminating on the basis of sex in any aspect of real	
22	estate or retaliating against tenants who complain of discriminatory or unfair housing practices.	
23	5.2 Adjudge and decree that Defendants have engaged in the conduct complained of	
24	herein.	
25	5.3 Adjudge and decree that Defendants' conduct violates the Washington Law Against	
26	Discrimination, including RCW 49.60.030(1)(a), .222, and .2235.	

1 \parallel housing because of their sex, in violation of RCW 49.60.030(1)(c); .222(i).

1	5.4	Award damages or other appropriate monetary relief to Complainants Neal,	
2	Richey, and O	Cox, in an amount to be proven at trial.	
3	5.5	Award damages or other appropriate monetary relief to all additional tenants	
4	aggrieved by	Defendants' conduct in an amount to be proven at trial.	
5	5.6	Assess a civil penalty against Defendants in the amount of up to \$10,000 pursuant	
6	to RCW 49.6	0.225(1)(a).	
7	5.7	Award attorney fees and costs of suit.	
8	5.8	Award such other relief as the Court may deem just and proper.	
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10	DATI	ED this 2nd day of June 2022.	
11			
12	ROBERT W. FERGUSON		
13	Attorney General		
14	and the second s		
15		EMILY C. NELSON, WSBA # 48440 ALFREDO GONZÁLEZ BENÍTEZ, WSBA #54364	
16		Assistant Attorneys General	
17		Office of the Attorney General 800 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000	
18		Seattle, WA 98104-3188 Phone: (206) 464-7744	
19		Fax: (206) 464-6457	
20		emily.nelson@atg.wa.gov alfredo.gonzalezbenitez@atg.wa.gov	
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