IN THE COURT OF APPEAL OF THE S

FOURTH APPELLATE DISTRICT – DIVISION ONE

DARRYL COTTON,

Defendant/Petitioner/Appellant,

v.

THE SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO,

Respondent.

LARRY GERACI, an individual; REBECCA BERRY, an individual; MICHAEL R. WEINSTEIN, an individual; SCOTT TOOTHACRE, an individual; FERRIS & BRITTON APC, a California corporation; GINA M. AUSTIN an individual; AUSTIN LEGAL GROUP APC, a California corporation; JIM BARTELL, an individual; BARTELL & ASSOCIATES, INC., a California corporation; ABHAY SCHWEITZER, an individual and dba TECHNE; AARON MAGAGNA, an individual; THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO, a public entity; M. TRAVIS PHELPS, MICHELLE SOKOLOWSKI, FIROUZEH TIRANDAZI, CHERLYN CAC, as individuals and as employees of THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO,

Real Parties in Interest.

Court of Appeal Case No. _____
(San Diego Superior Court Case No. 37-2017-00010073-CU-BC-CTL)

PETITION FOR WRIT OF MANDATE, SUPERSEDEAS AND/OR OTHER APPROPRIATE RELIEF

IMMEDIATE STAY REQUESTED ON AUGUST 28, 2018

JACOB P. AUSTIN [SBN 290303]
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Attorney for Defendant/Petitioner/Appellant DARRYL COTTON

TO BE FILED IN THE COURT OF APPEAL **APP-008**

COURT OF APPEAL FOURTH **APPELLATE DISTRICT, DIVISION** ONE	COURT OF APPEAL CASE NUMBER:
ATTORNEY OR PARTY WITHOUT ATTORNEY: STATE BAR NUMBER: 290303 NAME: JACOB P. AUSTIN FIRM NAME: The Law Office of Jacob Austin STREET ADDRESS: 1455 Frazee Road, #500 CITY: San Diego STATE: CA ZIP CODE: 92108 TELEPHONE NO.: (619) 357-6850 FAX NO.: (888) 357-8501 E-MAIL ADDRESS: JPA@JacobAustinEsq.com ATTORNEY FOR (*name*): Defendant/Petitioner/Appellant DARRYL COTTON	SUPERIOR COURT CASE NUMBER: 37-2017-00010073-CU-BC-CTL
APPELLANT/ PETITIONER: DARRYL COTTON RESPONDENT/ REAL PARTY IN INTEREST: LARRY GERACI, an individual; REBECCA BERRY, an individual	

CERTIFICATE OF INTERESTED ENTITIES OR PERSONS

(*Check one*): [X] INITIAL CERTIFICATE [ ] SUPPLEMENTAL CERTIFICATE

Notice: Please read rules 8.208 and 8.488 before completing this form. You may use this form for the initial certificate in an appeal when you file your brief or a prebriefing motion, application, or opposition to such a motion or application in the Court of Appeal, and when you file a petition for an extraordinary writ. You may also use this form as a supplemental certificate when you learn of changed or additional information that must be disclosed.

1. This form is being submitted on behalf of the following party (*name*): Appellant/Petitioner DARRYL COTTON

2. a. [ ] There are no interested entities or persons that must be listed in this certificate under rule 8.208.
   b. [X] Interested entities or persons required to be listed under rule 8.208 are as follows:

Full name of interested entity or person	Nature of interest (*Explain*):
(1) Michael R. Weinstein	Attorney representing Real Parties in Interest Geraci and Berry
(2) Scott Toothacre	Attorney representing Real Parties in Interest Geraci and Berry
(3) Ferris & Britton APC, a California corp.	Law firm at which Michael R. Weinstein & Scott Toothacre practice
(4) Gina M. Austin	Former attorney for Geraci & currrent attorney for Aaron Magagna
(5) Austin Legal Group APC, California corp.	Law firm owned/operated by Gina M. Austin

[X] Continued on attachment 2.

The undersigned certifies that the above-listed persons or entities (corporations, partnerships, firms, or any other association, but not including government entities or their agencies) have either (1) an ownership interest of 10 percent or more in the party if it is an entity; or (2) a financial or other interest in the outcome of the proceeding that the justices should consider in determining whether to disqualify themselves, as defined in rule 8.208(e)(2).

Date: August 20, 2018

JACOB P. AUSTIN
(TYPE OR PRINT NAME)

Jacob P. Austin
(SIGNATURE OF APPELLANT OR ATTORNEY)

Form Approved for Optional Use
Judicial Council of California
APP-008 [Rev. January 1, 2017]

CERTIFICATE OF INTERESTED ENTITIES OR PERSONS

Cal. Rules of Court, rules 8.208, 8.488
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CERTIFICATE OF INTERESTED ENTITIES OR PERSONS - continued

ATTACHMENT 2

Name of Interested Entity or Person	Nature of Interest (*Explain)*
(6) Gina M. Austin, an individual	Attorney who formerly represented Geraci, and currently represents Aaron Magagna
(7) Austin Legal Group APC, a California corporation	Law Firm of Attorney Gina Austin which formerly represented Geraci, and currently represents Aaron Magagna
(8) Jim Bartell, an individual	Lobbyist providing services to Larry Geraci re CUP application for Petitioner's real property
(9) Bartell & Associates, Inc.	Lobbying firm providing services to Larry Geraci re pending CUP application for Petitioner's real property
(10) Abhay Schweitzer, an individual	Architect providing design and other services for Larry Geraci re pending CUP application for Petitioner's real property
(11) Abhay Schweitzer dba TECHNE	Fictitious Business Name under which Abhay Schweitzer does business providing design and other services for Larry Geraci re CUP application for Petitioner's real property
(12) Aaron Magagna, an individual	Owner of a recently-submitted CUP application for real property located at 6220 Federal Boulevard, City and County of San Diego, California
(13) M. Travis Phelps, an individual and employee of the City of San Diego	Deputy Attorney for the City of San Diego who represented the City of San Diego in a related case in the San Diego County Superior Court entitled *Cotton v. City of San Diego, et al.,* Case No. 37-2017-00037675-CU-WM-CTL
(14) The City of San Diego	The public entity which is processing the CUP applications for Petitioner's real property and the competing CUP application submitted by Aaron Magagna

CERTIFICATE OF INTERESTED ENTITIES OR PERSONS - continued

(15) Michelle Sokolowski, an individual and employee of the City of San Diego	Deputy Director, City of San Diego Development Services Department, Project Submittal and Management Division who was involved in processing the CUP application for Petitioner's real property
(16) Firouzeh Tirandazi, an individual and employee of the City of San Diego	Former Development Project Manager, City of San Diego Development Services Department who was involved in processing the CUP application for Petitioner's real property
(17) Cherlyn Cac, an individual and employee of the City of San Diego	Development Project Manager, City of San Diego Development Services Department who was involved in processing the CUP application for Petitioner's real property

DECLARATION OF JACOB P. AUSTIN REGARDING REPORTERS' TRANSCRIPTS OF HEARINGS PURSUANT TO CRC 8.486(b)(3)

I, Jacob P. Austin, declare:

1. I am the attorney for Petitioner DARRYL COTTON in both this Appellate Petition and the San Diego Superior Court Case from which this Petition is taken entitled *Larry Geraci v. Darryl Cotton, et al.,* Case No. 37-2017-00010073-CU-BC-CTL ("Lower Court Case").

2. The facts contained herein are true and correct as of my personal knowledge, except those facts which are stated upon information and belief; and, as to those facts, I believe them to be true.

3. This declaration is submitted pursuant to California Rules of Court Rule 8.46(b)(3) to summarize the proceedings in the Lower Court Case relevant to this Petition.

4. For the reasons more fully discussed in this Petition, the litigation in the Lower Court Case has rendered Petitioner virtually indigent, such that he has been forced to sell off more and more of his interest in his real property to finance the litigation and to pay the cost of his basic daily needs.

5. Due to Petitioner's financial condition, he was unable to afford the cost of a court reporter for hearings on law and motion matters.

6. Given the gravity of Petitioner's Motion for Appointment of Receiver ("Receiver Motion") and Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings, I paid the cost for the court reporter, and certified copies of the transcripts of those hearings are included in Petitioner's exhibits at V1 E4 and V3 E21.

7. The hearing on the third law and motion matter directly relevant to the issues raised in this Petition is the April 13, 2018 hearing on Petitioner's Motion to Expunge Notice of Pendency of Action (*Lis Pendens*) ("LP Motion") (V1 E4 and V3 E18) is summarized below.

Petitioner's LP Motion

8. Petitioner's LP Motion was brought on the grounds, *inter alia*, that (a) an email sent to Petitioner by Plaintiff/Real Party in Interest Larry Geraci ("Geraci") (the "Confirmation Email") and other evidence presented in the case was undisputed, uncontroverted and case dispositive in nature because it proved that Petitioner and Geraci had never executed a final, legally-binding agreement for the purchase of Petitioner's real property ("Property"), (b) Geraci had not met, nor could he ever meet, his burden of proof to establish by a preponderance of evidence the probable validity of any claim of an ownership interest in the Property, (c) Geraci's own writings constituted willful and knowing misrepresentations made for the specific purpose of defrauding Petitioner, (d) Geraci's case is meritless, and (e) the lawsuit and *lis pendens* were filed for the specific purpose of coercing Petitioner to settle despite the fact that Geraci's case was meritless.

9. Geraci opposed the motion arguing that the evidence was barred by the statute of frauds and parol evidence rule, and supported his argument with a declaration executed April 9, 2018 alleging, *inter alia*, that he had sent the Confirmation Email *by mistake* – the very first time he raised this "mistake" after having had numerous opportunities during the preceding eleven months since he filed the lawsuit. (*See* V2 E10.)

10. At the April 13, 2018 hearing, I argued that the *lis pendens* should be expunged because Geraci's case, premised on a breach of contract, lacked merit and, therefore, Geraci had no viable claim to the Property. I further argued that neither party had considered the document Geraci disingenuously claimed to be the parties' completely integrated agreement to be a final contract. Months of communications between the parties reflect only that the final contract had not been reduced to writing. And until filing his Complaint, Geraci never treated the document as the parties' contract, nor

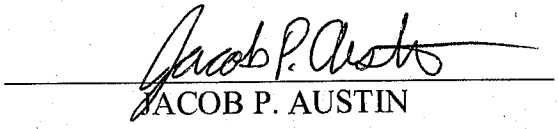
did he even reference it while his attorney, Gina Austin, was writing and sending drafts of a Purchase and Sale Agreement for the Property.

11. I discussed the document referred to in my moving papers as "The Confirmation Email," and neither Judge Wohlfeil nor Geraci's counsel, Michael R. Weinstein, would even engage in that line of discussion.

12. I also made an oral motion at the Court take testimony of a witness at the hearing, my motion was denied on ground that the Court was not permitted to do so, notwithstanding the fact that a motion to expunge a *lis pendens* is one of the few motions when the Court may take testimony at hearing.

13. Following oral argument, the Court denied the LP Motion on the grounds set forth in its April 13, 2018 Minute Order. *See* V1 E3.

I declare under penalty of perjury according to the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct, and that this declaration was executed on August 20, 2018 at San Diego, California.



JACOB P. AUSTIN

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Defendant/Petitioner Darryl Cotton ("Petitioner") respectfully petitions this Court for review of Respondent's orders denying (i) Petitioner's *Ex Parte* Application for Appointment of a Receiver ("Receiver Motion")[1] and (ii) Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings ("MJOP")[2] in San Diego Superior Court Case No. 37-2017-00010073-CU-BC-CTL.[3]

A single question of law – whether or not a three-sentence document is a completely integrated agreement – determines whether this Petition is meritorious and warrants the issuance of a writ. That single question of law is not only ***dispositive*** of both orders of which Petitioner is seeking review, it is also the ***case-dispositive*** issue in the underlying suit.

Prior to the rulings giving rise to this Petition, Petitioner was representing himself *pro se* and, given that he has no legal background, he was not able to adequately defend himself in this action. The two motions giving rise to the orders at issue here were prepared and submitted by counsel for Petitioner ("Counsel"), originally retained to represent Petitioner on a

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[1] V1 E1 p.2.*****

***Exhibit Citation Key: Volume No. "V#," Exhibit No. "E#," Page No(s). "p.#," Line No(s). "ln.#."**

[2] V1 E2 p.4.

[3] Petitioner notes that resolution of this Petition will also effectively adjudicate a related appeal that is premised on the same facts at issue here: Petitioner's Appeal of Judgment After Order Denying Motion for Issuance of Peremptory Writ of Mandate in a related case – Court of Appeal Case No. D073766; San Diego Superior Court Case No. 37-2017-00037675-CU-WM-CTL. *See* V1 E3 p.6-9.

limited scope basis starting April 5, 2018, following which he substituted in to fully represent Petitioner in this action beginning May 4, 2018.

As proven herein, the action filed against Petitioner not only lacks merit but, given plaintiff/real-party-in-interest Larry Geraci's ("Geraci") judicial admissions in his declaration dated April 9, 2018, it is clear this suit should have been dismissed in the early stages of this litigation pursuant to the Parol Evidence Rule ("PER") and that it represents a malicious prosecution action. *See Casa Herrera, Inc. v. Beydoun* (*Casa Herrera*) (2004) 32 Cal.4th 336, 349 ("we hold that terminations based on the parol evidence rule are favorable for malicious prosecution purposes.").

I. INTRODUCTION

A. OVERVIEW

The gravamen of this Petition is incredibly simple: Is a three-sentence document executed on November 2, 2016 (the "November Document") by Geraci and Petitioner a completely integrated agreement for the sale of Petitioner's real property (the "Property") to Geraci?

Geraci filed the underlying suit against Petitioner in **March of 2017** premised exclusively on the allegation that the November Document is a completely integrated agreement. However, Geraci's sworn declaration executed in **April of 2018** admits that on the same day the November Document was executed, *at Petitioner's specific request for written assurance of performance*, Geraci confirmed via email that the November Document is not a "final agreement" for sale of the Property (the "Confirmation Email"). Furthermore, also in his **April 2018** declaration, for the first time since filing suit in **March of 2017**, Geraci alleged that he sent his Confirmation Email by *mistake.*

Of critical import is the fact that Geraci did not raise this "mistake" allegation until Petitioner, represented by Counsel, cited for the first time

controlling case law indisputably establishing that Geraci could not bar the admission of his Confirmation Email pursuant to the PER. *See Riverisland Cold Storage, Inc. v. Fresno-Madera Production Credit Assn.* (*Riverisland*) (2013) 55 Cal.4th 1169, 1182 (quoting *Ferguson v. Koch* (1928) 204 Cal. 342, 347) ("'***[I]t was never intended that the parol evidence rule should be used as a shield to prevent the proof of fraud***.'") (emphasis added).

An immediate stay, coupled with appropriate writ relief, are necessary to stop what has already caused and continues to cause irreparable harm to Petitioner by forcing him to defend himself against a frivolous suit. *See Boy Scouts of America National Foundation v. Superior Court* (2012) 206 Cal.App.4th 428, 438 (writ review of order overruling demurrer was appropriate where resolution of issue in petitioner's favor "would have resulted in a final disposition" as to petitioner).

As proven below, Petitioner's case is as simple as described above. The fact that Petitioner, on these simple and undisputed facts, has been and continues to be coerced into selling his remaining interest in his Property to finance a clearly meritless suit represents a reality of our judicial system: it takes wealth to access justice. In this regard, this case represents a public policy concern as it "reinforce[s] an already too common perception that the quality of justice a litigant can expect is proportional to the financial means at the litigant's disposal." *Neary v. Regents of University of California* (*Neary*) (1992) 3 Cal.4th 273, 287.

B. AN IMMEDIATE STAY SHOULD ISSUE.

"Whether a contract is integrated is a question of law when the evidence of integration is not in dispute." *Founding Members of the Newport Beach Country Club v. Newport Beach Country Club, Inc.* (*Founding Members*) (2003) 109 Cal.App.4th 944, 954; s*ee also* CCP § 1856(d). "***The crucial threshold inquiry, therefore, and one for the court to decide, is***

whether the parties intended their written agreement to be fully integrated. [Citations.]" *See Brandwein v. Butler* (2013) 218 Cal.App.4th 1485, 1510 (emphasis added).

None of the evidence at issue in this action is disputed by either party. This Petition and the underlying suit could even be adjudicated solely on Geraci's Complaint and April 2018 declaration containing judicial admissions that negate the ***dispositive*** material allegation in his Complaint; that the November Document is a final agreement for his purchase of the Property.

Petitioner does not have, nor has he had, the financial resources to meet his basic personal financial obligations, much less to undertake discovery and other measures in preparation for a trial. Additionally, Counsel is almost exclusively a criminal defense attorney and has never undertaken a civil trial or an appeal/petition such as this; he is representing Petitioner outside the scope of their original agreement solely because he believes this action against Petitioner is frivolous and its current procedural posture reflects an egregious miscarriage of justice. Petitioner respectfully requests that this Court please issue an immediate stay while it reviews this Petition. *See Alan S. v. Superior Court* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 238, 241 (granting of extraordinary writ because party's petition presents an important issue regarding access to justice for *pro per* litigants with limited financial resources).

Additionally, pursuant to CCP § 923, this Court has virtually unlimited discretion to make orders to preserve the *status quo* in protection of its own jurisdiction, including issuance of a stay order other than supersedeas. CCP § 923; *People ex rel. San Francisco Bay Conservation & Development Com. v. Emeryville* (1968) 69 Cal.2d 533, 538-539. Once this Court understands the simplicity of this case, it becomes self-evident that Geraci is motivated to limit his liability to Petitioner. As argued in the

Receiver Motion (and below), the steps being taken by Geraci, if allowed to continue, will deprive this Court of its jurisdiction and its ability to vindicate Petitioner's rights at a later point in time. Geraci is taking steps to sabotage the main subject matter of the dispute in this action: an application for a Conditional Use Permit (the "CUP") for a Marijuana Outlet at the Property currently being processed by the City of San Diego (the "City"). In protection of its jurisdiction, this Court should immediately issue a stay and appoint a receiver to manage the CUP application process pending final resolution of this action. CCP § 923 ("The provisions of this chapter shall not limit the power of a reviewing court… ***to make any order*** appropriate to preserve the *status quo*, the effectiveness of the judgment subsequently to be entered, or otherwise in aid of its jurisdiction.") (emphasis added).

C. WHY WRIT RELIEF SHOULD BE GRANTED.

The Court should grant this Petition for the following reasons:

First, the underlying public policy issue here is of widespread interest. *Brandt v. Superior Court* (1985) 37 Cal.3d 813, 816. This action represents an abuse of the judiciary as Respondent is being used as an instrument to effectuate a miscarriage of justice.

Second, each of Respondent's orders is clearly erroneous as a matter of law and substantially prejudices Petitioner's case. *Babb v. Superior Court* (*Babb*) (1971) 3 Cal.3d 841, 851. As proven below, the facts are undisputed, incontrovertible, and inextricably lead to the conclusion that Respondent has erred in finding the November Document to be a completely integrated agreement.

Third, Petitioner lacks adequate means, such as a direct appeal, by which to attain relief. *See Fair Employment & Housing Com. v. Superior Court* (*Fair Employment & Housing*) (2004) 115 Cal.App.4th 629, 633 ("Where there is no direct appeal from a trial court's adverse ruling, and the

aggrieved party would be compelled to go through a trial and appeal from a final judgment, a petition for writ of mandate is allowed. Such a situation arises where the trial court has improperly overruled a demurrer."). Respondent's order denying Petitioner's MJOP is non-appealable. And, although the denial of the Receiver Motion is appealable (for which Petitioner filed an Amended Notice of Appeal on July 26, 2018),[4] Petitioner's extraordinary circumstances warrant extraordinary relief. *Hogya v. Superior Court* (1977) 75 Cal.App.3d 122, 128.

Notwithstanding Petitioner's blue-collar background and his lack of legal education, on such undisputed facts, Respondent should have adjudicated this matter on its own when presented with Petitioner's arguments (even if such arguments were presented in a legally unsophisticated manner by a *pro se* litigant). This case's continued existence is a miscarriage of justice and resolution via the standard appeal process – given Respondent's rulings and the fact that the sole issue of contract integration has been fully briefed – is inadequate and highly prejudicial as the ***threshold*** issue of contract integration is ***case-dispositive*** and negates the need for discovery and a trial. Pursuant to *Mon Chong Loong Trading Corp. v. Superior Court* (2013) 218 Cal.App.4th 87, 92, "where doing so would serve the interests of justice and judicial economy, an appellate court may use its discretion to construe an appeal as a petition for writ of mandate."

Fourth, Petitioner will suffer harm and prejudice in a manner that cannot be corrected on appeal. *Valley Bank of Nev. v. Superior Court* (1975) 15 Cal.3d 652. The basis of Petitioner's Receiver Motion was evidence that Geraci is taking steps to unlawfully sabotage the City's approval of the CUP application for the Property. As more fully described below, by sabotaging

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[4] V1 E5 p.17.

approval of the CUP application, Geraci will be able to greatly diminish his special and consequential damages due to Petitioner. ***At this point in time, the real driver behind the litigation is not Geraci's good faith belief in the merits of his case; rather, it is to prejudice Petitioner by unnecessarily prolonging this litigation while unlawfully taking extra-judicial actions to limit his liability to Petitioner arising from his breach of the contract***. Specifically, Geraci is using the political influence of his hired lobbyist, Jim Bartell ("Bartell"), to attain approval of a CUP application for an adjacent property (the "Competing CUP") (V2 E9 p.593, ln.11-19; p.391 (Notice of Application for Conditional Use Permit for Marijuana Outlet dated April 5, 2018)) in order to preclude issuance of a CUP for Petitioner's Property, thereby enabling him to limit his liability to Petitioner. If approved, the Competing CUP application would bar issuance of the CUP for the Property because the two properties are located within 1,000 feet of one another. RJN 9 p.116 at §(a)(1) (§141.0504(a)(6), City of San Diego Ordinance No. O-20793, passed February 22, 2017).

New evidence recently discovered by Petitioner reveals that the Competing CUP application was submitted by an individual named Aaron Magagna ("Magagna") who is believed to be an agent of Geraci. This evidence includes but is not limited to the fact that Magagna is represented by both Gina Austin (Geraci's attorney) and Matthew Shapiro ("Shapiro"), who works extensively with Gina Austin and Bartell. V2 E9 p.593, ln.20-27.[5]

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[5] Petitioner notes that, on or about March 12, 2018, Counsel entered Respondent's predominantly vacant courtroom during a recess and observed Shapiro in plain clothes sitting one seat away from Petitioner and his

Materially, the evidence supporting the allegations against Bartell, purportedly a reputable individual with a history of extensive civil service (he is a former chief of staff for a U.S. Congressman), is third-party testimony from a mutual client ***of both*** Bartell and Shapiro. Their client, Ms. Corina Young, had a meeting with Bartell and Shapiro to discuss investment opportunities in Marijuana Outlets. At that meeting, Bartell stated he was getting the CUP application on Petitioner's Property denied because "everyone hates Darryl." V2 E9 p.593, ln.11-16. This comment by Bartell was made in or around December of 2017. Bartell is a political lobbyist hired ***by Geraci*** to get the CUP on Petitioner's Property approved. If Geraci's case was meritorious, Bartell would be using his influence to get the CUP on the Property approved, not to have it denied.

Finally, Geraci has ceased processing the CUP for the Property, whereas the Competing CUP is moving forward through the review process at unprecedented breakneck speed such that it is likely to be approved prior to the CUP application for the Property (despite the CUP application for the

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litigation investor while they were discussing Petitioner's case. When Counsel asked Shapiro why he was there, he replied that he was observing Respondent in preparation for an upcoming hearing before Respondent in another case. After discovering that Magagna had submitted the Competing CUP and was a client of Shapiro, Counsel emailed Shapiro on May 27, 2018 expressing his concern about a number of issues, including Shapiro's possible eavesdropping on the private conversations of Petitioner and his litigation investor in court in March 2018. In response, Shapiro admitted that he had lied to Counsel; the true reason he went to court that day was to "[scope] out" the hearing on Petitioner's case, but seating himself near Petitioner was "truly a coincidence." V2 E9 p.361, ln. 11-12; V2 E9 p.363-370.

Property having been submitted approximately 17 months before the Competing CUP), thereby substantially limiting Geraci's liability to Petitioner, the scope of which will be greater if the CUP application for the Property is approved.

As further described below, this is the Catch-22 in which Geraci and his agents find themselves: they must pretend they believe the November Document is a completely integrated agreement, necessarily requiring them to pursue approval of the CUP for the Property. In reality, however, they do not want the CUP for the Property to be approved because, by doing so, their financial liability to Petitioner will exponentially increase if this case is adjudicated on the merits.

D. ISSUE PRESENTED.

There is one single question that addresses whether Respondent has abused its discretion in denying Petitioner's Receiver Motion, his MJOP and whether this Petition qualifies for extraordinary writ relief: Is the November Document a completely integrated agreement for the sale of Petitioner's Property to Geraci?

E. COUNSEL'S REQUEST.

Should this Court deny this Petition, Counsel respectfully requests, on behalf of his client and himself, that it please provide its reasoning. The urgent basis of this request is that, since the inception of this action on March 21, 2017, Respondent has ***never once*** provided its reasoning for repeatedly finding the November Document to be a completely integrated agreement. It has failed to provide such reasoning despite repeated written

and oral requests by Petitioner[6] and Counsel.[7] Petitioner's belief, supported by Counsel's professional opinion (and whose ethical obligations require him to be truthful with his client), is that there is complete lack of any factual or legal support for Geraci's Complaint and Respondent's rulings. This belief by Petitioner – coupled with the fact that Respondent has stated from the bench that it is personally acquainted with opposing counsel and "does not believe they would act unethically"[8] by bringing forth a meritless case – has led Petitioner to believe that Respondent is actively conspiring against him with Geraci and opposing counsel.

On March 8, 2018, Petitioner underwent an Independent Psychiatric Assessment ("IPA") by Dr. Marcus Ploesser who works as a psychiatrist for the Department of Corrections for the State of California (in addition to his own private practice). Relevantly, his declaration summarizing his findings from the IPA states the following:

> Furthermore, [Petitioner]'s description of his nightmares include vivid scenes of violence towards the attorneys for plaintiff that he believes are not acting in a professional manner. [Petitioner] believes that the attorneys representing plaintiff are "in it together" with the plaintiff to use the lawsuit to "defraud" him of

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[6] *See*, *e.g.*, V1 E6 p.22, ln.21 – .23, ln.1 ("***I BEG the Court at the hearing to please articulate to me (i) which facts in the record and (ii) on what legal authority it was persuaded that I am not going to prevail on the merits on my cause of action for breach of contract."***) (emphasis in original).

[7] *See, e.g.,* V3 E21 p.1229-1234.

[8] V1 E8 p.254, ln.6-10.

> his property. This point is one of the main foci of his expressed mental distress.
>
> [Petitioner]'s distress due to his perception of a conspiracy against him by attorneys is amplified by what he believes is the Court's disregard for the evidence and arguments he has presented. He states he has never been provided the reasoning for the denial of any relief he sought. ***[Petitioner] expressed that at certain points during the course of the litigation he believed the trial court judge was part of the perceived conspiracy against him.***

V1 E8 p.336, ln.6-21 (emphasis added).

Thus, in the interest of justice and for the mental well-being of Petitioner, Counsel and Petitioner respectfully request that this Court please not issue a summary denial should it find that, notwithstanding the Confirmation Email (and other parol evidence), the November Document ***is*** a completely integrated agreement.

F. AUTHENTICITY OF EXHIBITS.

All exhibits accompanying this Petition are true and correct copies of the original documents on file with the trial court. Such exhibits are incorporated by this reference as though fully set forth herein. The exhibits are paginated consecutively, and page references in this Petition are to the consecutive pagination.

II.

MATERIAL FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND.

A. NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE PROPERTY.

In the Summer of 2016, Geraci was one of several parties who contacted Petitioner seeking to purchase the Property to apply for a CUP and operate a Marijuana Outlet at the Property (the "Business").[9] During these negotiations, Geraci represented that (i) he was a California licensed Real Estate Agent;[10] (ii) he was an Enrolled Agent with the IRS;[11] (iii) he was the Owner and Manager of Tax and Financial Center, Inc. (a sophisticated accounting and financial advisory services firm);[12] (iv) preliminary due diligence on the Property by his experts had revealed a zoning issue which, unless *first* resolved, would prevent the City from even *accepting* a CUP application on the Property (the "Zoning Issue"); (v) through his "professional relationships" and hired lobbyists, he was in a unique position to have the Zoning Issue resolved; (vi) he was highly qualified to operate the Business because he owned and operated multiple cannabis dispensaries in the City;[13] (vii) stated that he could not put the CUP in his name because of the fact that he was an Enrolled Agent with the IRS and the federal

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[9] *See, e.g.,* V2 E9 p.381, ln.11-14.

[10] *Id.* at ln.15-16 (Petitioner's Declaration); p.582 (Accurint Professional Background Report).

[11] *Id.*

[12] V2 E9 p.381, ln.16-17 (Petitioner's Declaration); p.573 at ¶2 (Accurint Professional Background Report).

[13] V2 E9 ln.21-22.

government takes a negative stance against marijuana;[14] and (viii) therefore, Geraci suggested his office manager, Rebecca Berry ("Berry"), was an individual who could be trusted to be the applicant on the CUP application because, *inter alia*, she helped manage his other marijuana dispensaries.[15]

On or around October 31, 2016, Geraci asked Petitioner to execute Form DS-318 (Ownership Disclosure Statement) – a required component of all CUP applications. Geraci told Petitioner that he needed the executed Ownership Disclosure Statement to show third-party experts that he had access to the Property in connection with his planning and lobbying efforts toward resolution of the Zoning Issue. The Ownership Disclosure Statement

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[14] V2 E9 p.582, ¶3.

[15] Petitioner notes that Geraci has been sanctioned in at least three other matters for owning/managing illegal marijuana dispensaries in San Diego, California: *City of San Diego v. The Tree Club Cooperative* Case No. 37-2014-00020897-CU-MC-CTL, *City of San Diego v. CCSquared Wellness Cooperative* Case No. 37-2015-00004430-CU-MC-CTL and, *City of San Diego v. LMJ 35th Street Property LP*, *et al.,* Case No. 37-2015-000000972. *See* RJNs 1-6, p.1-40. Furthermore, Bus. & Prof. Code § 26057(b)(7) provides that "[t]he licensing authority may deny the application for licensure or renewal of a state license if… [t]he applicant, or any of its officers, directors, or owners, has been sanctioned by a licensing authority or a city, county, or city and county for unauthorized commercial cannabis activities, has had a license suspended or revoked under this division in the three years immediately preceding the date the application is filed with the licensing authority." Petitioner believes that the true reason Geraci suggested Berry as his agent was to circumvent applicable disclosure laws.

identifies Berry as the "Tenant/Lessee" of the Property.[16] Petitioner has never met Berry and has never entered into any form of contract with Berry. Additionally, on October 31, 2016, and unbeknownst to Petitioner, Berry (i) executed Form DS-190 (Affidavit for Medical Marijuana Consumer Cooperatives for Conditional Use Permit (CUP)), stating she is the "Owner" of the Property, [17] and (ii) submitted the current CUP application for the Property to the City without Petitioner's knowledge or consent[18].

Notably, the CUP application required Berry to disclose all parties with an interest in the CUP. In relevant part, the CUP application form states: "Please list below the owner(s) and tenant(s) (if applicable) of the above referenced property. The list **must** include the names and addresses of **all** persons who have an interest in the property, recorded or otherwise, and state the type of property interest (*e.g.*, tenants who will benefit from the permit, all individuals who own the property)."[19]

Thus, Berry, acting as Geraci's agent, knowingly omitted his name as an individual who had an interest in the Property and CUP application, and stated that *she* was the owner of the Property in violation of applicable disclosure laws and requirements. These facts, when coupled with the evidence that Geraci was previously sanctioned on several occasions for operating illegal marijuana dispensaries, makes it clear that he has used his employee/agent as his proxy to acquire a prohibited interest in a Marijuana Outlet. *See* RJNs 1-6, p.1-40.

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[16] V2 E9, p.382, ln.14-18; p.558.

[17] V2 E9 p.559.

[18] V2 E9 p.386, ln.25 – p.397, ln.5.

[19] V2 E9 558 (emphasis added).

B. THE JOINT-VENTURE AGREEMENT IS FORMED.

On the morning of November 2, 2016, Petitioner was still in negotiations with various parties for the Property.[20] Later that day, Petitioner and Geraci entered into an oral joint-venture agreement (the "JVA") pursuant to which, *inter alia,* (i) Petitioner would sell his Property to Geraci; and (ii) Geraci would finance the acquisition of the CUP with the City and development of the Business at the Property. The JVA had a condition precedent: if the CUP was ***approved***, then Geraci would, *inter alia,* provide Petitioner (i) a total purchase price of $800,000 for the Property; (ii) a 10% equity position in the Business; and (iii) the greater of $10,000 or 10% of the net profits of the Business on a monthly basis. If the CUP was ***denied***, Petitioner would keep both his Property *and* the agreed-upon $50,000 non-refundable deposit ("NRD") and the transaction would not close.[21] In other words, the approval and issuance of the CUP at the Property was a condition precedent for closing on the sale of the Property.

At that meeting, Geraci provided $10,000 in cash toward the agreed-upon $50,000 NRD. Geraci then had Petitioner execute a three-sentence document to memorialize his receipt thereof – the November Document. Geraci then promised, *inter alia,* (i) to have his attorney, Gina Austin, *promptly* reduce the JVA to writing and (ii) to not submit the CUP application to the City until he paid the balance of the NRD to Petitioner.[22] Later that same day, November 2, 2016, the following communications took place between Geraci and Petitioner:

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[20] V2 E9 p.382, ln.10-13; p.428-486.

[21] *Id.* at p.382, ln.19 – p.383, ln.2.

[22] *Id*. at p.383, ln.8-14.

At 3:11 p.m., Geraci emailed Petitioner a copy of the November Document which states:

> [Petitioner] has agreed to sell the property located at 6176 Federal Blvd. CA for a sum of $800,000 to Larry Geraci or assignee on the approval of a Marijuana Dispensary. (CUP for a dispensary) [¶] Ten Thousand dollars (cash) has been given in good faith earnest money to be applied to the sales price of $800,000 and to remain in effect until license is approved. [Petitioner] has agreed to not enter into any other contacts *[sic]* on this property.

V2 E9 p.492-495.

At 6:55 p.m., Petitioner replied:

> Thank you for meeting today. Since we executed the Purchase Agreement in your office for the sale price of the property I just noticed the ***10% equity position*** in the dispensary was not language added into that document. I just want to make sure that we're ***not*** missing that language in any ***final agreement*** as it is a factored element in my decision to sell the property. ***I'll be fine if you would simply acknowledge that here in a reply***.

Id. at p.497 (emphasis added).

At 9:13 p.m., Geraci replied: "***No no problem at all***" (*i.e.*, the Confirmation Email). *Id*. (emphasis added).

Thus, because Petitioner recognized the November Document read like both a receipt and a contract, yet contained only some of the terms of the

final agreement, he requested and received from Geraci written assurance of performance (*i.e.*, that the "final agreement" would contain his "10% equity position"). Having received Geraci's Confirmation Email, Petitioner proceeded in good faith believing Geraci's representations that Gina Austin would reduce the JVA to writing and Geraci would honor their agreement.

C. GERACI BREACHES THE JVA AND ATTEMPTS TO DEPRIVE PETITIONER OF HIS BARGAINED-FOR EQUITY POSITION IN THE BUSINESS.

For approximately five months after the November Document was executed, the parties exchanged numerous emails, texts and calls regarding various issues related to the Zoning Issue, CUP application, drafts of the JVA for the sale of the Property and Petitioner's equity position in the Business. During that time however, Geraci continuously failed to accurately reduce the JVA to writing, pay the balance of the NRD, and provide substantive updates regarding his progress in resolving the alleged Zoning Issue – all leading to Petitioner's belief that Geraci was attempting to deprive him of his 10% equity position in the Business.

Attached as "Exhibit 5" to Petitioner's Declaration in support of his Receiver Motion are copies of ***all*** 15 of the email communications that ever took place between Petitioner and Geraci until the filing of the underlying suit spanning the period from October 24, 2016 to March 21, 2017 (the "Email Communications"). V2 E9 p.488-555.

Attached as "Exhibit 2" to Petitioner's Declaration in support of his Receiver Motion is a copy of ***all*** text messages (totaling approximately 550) that ever took place between Petitioner and Geraci and which span the period of July 21, 2016 to May 8, 2017 (the "Text Communications"). *Id.* at p.393-421.

These Text and Email Communications have been provided to Respondent in numerous filings and Geraci has never disputed their authenticity. *See*, *e.g.,* V2 E9 p.343-421 and V1 E8 p.256-328.

All of the Email and the Text Communications directly prove or unilaterally support the conclusion that (i) the November Document is not a completely integrated agreement; and (ii) the parties were working to reduce the JVA into two agreements before the relationship became hostile – one agreement to provide for the sale of the Property and a second "Side Agreement" to provide for Respondent's 10% equity position in the Business.

Notable communications include the following:

On February 27, 2017, Geraci emailed Petitioner: "Attached is the draft purchase of the property for 400k. The additional contract for the 400k should be in today and I will forward it to you as well."[23] The attached document is titled: "AGREEMENT OF PURCHASE AND SALE OF REAL PROPERTY" (the "Draft Purchase Agreement").[24]

On March 2, 2017, Geraci emailed Petitioner a draft agreement entitled "SIDE AGREEMENT" that was supposed to provide for*, inter alia*, Petitioner's 10% equity position (the "First Draft Side Agreement").[25] The next day, March 3, 2017, Petitioner replied:

> Larry, [¶] I read the Side Agreement in your attachment and I see that no reference is made to the ***10% equity position*** as per my Inda-Gro

[23] V2 E9 p.501-502.

[24] *Id.* at p.503-528.

[25] *Id.* at p.529-536.

> GERL Services Agreement (see attached) in the new store. In fact para 3.11 [*stating we are not partners*] looks to avoid our agreement completely. It looks like counsel did not get a copy of that document. Can you explain?[26]

Petitioner followed up with Geraci later that day, seeking specific confirmation that Geraci had received the email and understood his concern: the draft did not reflect they *were partners* in the Business.

Petitioner texted: "***Did you get my email?***"[27]

Geraci replied one minute later, "***Yes I did I'm having her rewrite it now[.] As soon as I get it I will forward it to you***" (the "Partnership Confirmation Text").[28] Thus, in his response to Petitioner's concern that they were not partners, Geraci did not deny the accusation, but confirmed that his attorney would address that concern.

On March 6, 2017, Petitioner let Geraci know he would be attending a local cannabis event at which Gina Austin would be the keynote speaker. Geraci texted Petitioner he could speak with Gina Austin directly at the event regarding revisions to the agreements: "***Gina Austin is there she has a red jacket on if you want to have a conversation with her.***"[29] Petitioner was not able to make the event, but Joe Hurtado ("Hurtado") – a transaction adviser whom Petitioner had engaged on a contingent basis to help him sell the

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[26] V2 E9 p.537 (emphasis added).

[27] V2 E2 p.421 (emphasis added).

[28] *Id.* (emphasis added).

[29] *Id.* (emphasis added).

Property to a new buyer if Geraci breached the agreement – did attend.[30] Hurtado spoke with Gina Austin, letting her know that Petitioner would not be attending and that he was concerned because the First Draft Purchase Agreement Petitioner had received did not contain a provision regarding Petitioner's 10% equity interest in the Business.[31] Gina Austin confirmed she was working on reducing the JVA to writing.[32]

The next day, on March 7, 2017, Geraci emailed Petitioner a revised Side Agreement ("Second Draft Side Agreement") drafted by Gina Austin:[33] In that email Geraci wrote:

> Hi Darryl, I have not reviewed this yet but wanted you to look at it and give me your thoughts. Talking to Matt, the 10k a month might be difficult to hit until the sixth month . . . can we do 5k, and on the seventh month start 10k?

Id. at p.541-542 (the "March Request Email").

The March Request Email clearly and plainly reflects that Geraci had an *established obligation* of $10,000 and he is seeking a concession *from* Petitioner – specifically, a reduction of $5,000 per month for six months while the Business ramped-up.

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[30] V2 E9 p.385, ln.6-13.

[31] *Id.* at p.591 ln.8-18.

[32] *Id*. at ln.19-21.

[33] V1 E8 p.329 (screen shot of metadata of the Second Draft Side Agreement showing that Gina Austin is the author of the document and that it was created on March 6, 2017).

The Second Draft Side Agreement provided for Petitioner to receive 10% of the net revenues of the Business, but did not provide for the 10% equity position as agreed to in the JVA. V2 E9 p.543-546.

On March 14, 2017, having grown deeply suspicious of Geraci's continuous failure to accurately reduce the JVA to writing, Petitioner contacted the City and discovered that Geraci had already submitted a CUP application for the Property. V2 E9 p.386, ln.25 – p.387, ln.11; p.557-561.

On March 16, 2017, Petitioner emailed Geraci:

> [W]e started these negotiations 4 months ago and the drafts and our communications have not reflected what we agreed upon and are still far from reflecting our original agreement. Here is my proposal, please have your attorney Gina revise the Purchase Agreement and Side Agreement to incorporate all the terms we have agreed upon so that we can execute final versions and get this closed. [¶] I really want to finalize this as soon as possible – ***I found out today that a CUP application for my property was submitted in October, which I am assuming is from someone connected to you***. Although, I note that you told me that the $40,000 deposit balance would be paid once the CUP was submitted and that you were waiting on certain zoning issues to be resolved. Which is not the case. [¶] Please confirm by Monday 12:00 PM whether we are on the same page and you plan to continue with our agreement. Or, if not, so I can return your $10,000 of the $50,000 required

> deposit. If, hopefully, we can work through this, please confirm that revised final drafts that incorporate the terms above will be provided by Wednesday at 12:00 PM....

V2 E9 p.547-548 (emphasis added).

The next day, Geraci texted Petitioner: "***Can we meet tomorrow [?]***" *Id.* at p.416 (emphasis added).

Petitioner replied in relevant part via email:

> Larry, I received your text asking to meet in person tomorrow. I would prefer that until we have final agreements, that we converse exclusively via email.... ***You lied to me***, I found out yesterday from the City of San Diego that you submitted a CUP application on October 31, 2016 BEFORE we even signed our agreement on the 2nd of November. There is no situation where an oral agreement will convince me that you are dealing with me in good faith and will honor our agreement. <u>We need a final written, legal, binding agreement. Please confirm, as requested… that you are honoring our agreement and will have final drafts</u> … by Wednesday at 12:00 PM.

V2 E9 p.549 (emphasis added).

Thereafter, Geraci repeatedly refused to provide Petitioner assurance of performance (*i.e.*, that he would reduce the JVA to writing). V3 E13

p.887-890. Thus, Petitioner terminated the JVA with Geraci[34] and sold the Property to a third-party on March 21, 2017 (the "Third-Party Sale"). *Id.* at p.895-907.

D. GERACI FILES A COMPLAINT ALLEGING THE NOVEMBER DOCUMENT IS THE "FINAL AGREEMENT."

On March 22, 2017, the day after Petitioner terminated the JVA with Geraci, counsel for Geraci, Michael R. Weinstein ("Weinstein"), emailed Petitioner the Complaint, premised solely on the allegation that the November Document is a completely integrated agreement for the Property. V2 E12 p.644, ln.12-17. Geraci's Complaint alleges:

> (i) On November 2, 2016, [Geraci] and [Petitioner] entered into a written agreement for the purchase and sale of the [Property] on the terms and conditions stated therein…. [and]
>
> (ii) [Petitioner] has anticipatorily breached the contract by stating that he will not perform the written agreement according to its terms. Among other things, [Petitioner] has stated that, contrary to the written terms, the parties agreed to a down payment… of $50,000… [and] he is entitled to a 10% ownership interest in the [Property.]

V2 E11 p.625, ln.15-17; p.626, ln.6-11.

Geraci's allegation in his Complaint that the November Document is the final agreement for the Property is directly and completely contradicted by his Confirmation Email sent within hours of the execution of the

[34] V3 E13 p.885.

November Document, as well as by his Email and Text Communications which followed.[35]

E. PETITIONER'S *EX PARTE* APPLICATION AND COUNSEL'S ETHICAL DILEMMA.

On April 4, 2018, Counsel filed an *Ex Parte* Application for Order (1) Shortening Time on [Petitioner]'s Motion to Expunge Notice of Pendency of Action (*Lis Pendens*); and (2) to Compel the Attendance and Testimony of Larry Geraci (the "LP Motion"). V3 E13. As set forth in his supporting declaration and in the moving papers, Counsel declared under penalty of perjury the following:

> In preparation for representing [Petitioner] on his Motion to Expunge the Notice of Action I have, *inter alia*, reviewed (i) every filing in both of [Petitioner]'s actions with Mr. Geraci (Case No. 37-2017-00010073-CU-BC-CTL) and the City of San Diego (37-2017-00037675-CU-WM-CTL); (ii) every document produced to and from [Petitioner] via discovery; (iii) every single email to and from [Petitioner]'s professional and personal emai1 accounts between October 1, 2016 and March 31, 2017; and (iv) interviewed over 17 individuals who were in constant written communications and/or working with [Petitioner] on a daily basis during the same time

[35] Petitioner filed a Second Amended Cross-Complaint alleging, *inter alia,* that the November Document is not the final agreement between the parties. V2 E12 p.635-p.659.

> period noted and which gave rise to the events leading and related to this action.

V3 E13 p.676, ln.10-17.

This statement was presented to Respondent in a section called "Counsel's Ethical Dilemma." V3 E13 p.667, ln.1 – p.671, ln.5. Simply stated, Counsel was representing Petitioner at that point in time on a limited basis, solely for Petitioner's LP Motion, and his review of the record revealed that there was no factual or legal basis to justify any of Respondent's rulings finding – either directly and/or impliedly – that the November Document is a completely integrated agreement for the sale of the Property. Additionally, Counsel's review of the case record revealed that, at a hearing on a motion by Geraci to compel discovery on January 25, 2018, Respondent began the hearing by stating that he was personally acquainted with opposing counsel and that he did not believe they would act unethically by bringing forth a meritless suit.[36]

As stated in the moving papers for the LP Motion, "…Counsel respectfully notes that <u>if</u> [Respondent] is correct in his conclusion regarding the lack of probable cause in this case, and based on his [review of the evidence noted above], then it can ***appear*** that this Court is biased against [Petitioner]. Thus, restated, Counsel's Ethical Dilemma is that he *believes* [Respondent's] maintenance of this action is not reasonable in light of the evidence which has been presented; but he neither believes [Respondent] to be biased against [Petitioner] nor that it would allow its alleged relationship with counsel for Geraci, even if true, to affect its impartiality." V3 E13 p.669, ln.14-19 (emphasis in original).

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[36] V1 E8 p.254, ln.6-10.

F. THE MOTION TO EXPUNGE THE *LIS PENDENS* ON PETITIONER'S PROPERTY.

For over a year prior to the LP Motion, Geraci argued that the PER bars his written promise to provide Petitioner a "10% equity position" in the Business (*i.e.,* the Confirmation Email) and other parol evidence. *See, e.g.*, V3 E15 p.1084-1103. In Petitioner's April 4, 2018 LP Motion, he cited – for the first time in the action – the seminal cases of *Tenzer v. Superscope, Inc*. (*Tenzer*) (1985) 39 Ca1.3d 18 and *Riverisland, supra,* 55 Cal.4th 1169 that indisputably preclude Geraci from using the PER and/or the SOF "as a shield to prevent proof of [his own] fraud." V1 E8 p.247 ln.9-21

In his opposition to the LP Motion citing *Tenzer* and *Riverisland*, Geraci provided a declaration executed on April 9, 2018 admitting that he sent the Confirmation Email promising to provide Petitioner a "10% equity position" in the Business, but alleging that (i) he sent the Confirmation Email by *mistake* because he meant to respond *only* to the first sentence of Petitioner's email thanking him for meeting earlier that day and *not* to the second, third or fourth sentences requesting written confirmation of Petitioner's equity position; and (ii) on November 3, 2016, he called Petitioner who ***orally agreed*** that the November Document is a completely integrated agreement and that he was not entitled to an equity position in the Business (the "Oral Disavowment"). V2 E10 p.617, ln.21–p.618, ln.16.

This purported Oral Disavowment by Petitioner was raised by Geraci for the first time in his April 2018 declaration. In support of this allegation, Geraci provided his redacted cell phone record showing his call to Petitioner on November 3, 2016 at **12:40 p.m**. (V3 E16 p.1113), ostensibly to support his contention that he realized his mistake early the next day and called Petitioner to fix his mistake. However, the redacted portion of Geraci's phone record includes what was either a less than one minute call or a missed incoming call from Petitioner at **12:38 p.m**. reflecting that Geraci was simply

returning Petitioner's call two minutes later at 12:40 p.m. *See* RJN 7 at p.60. Additionally, the phone records reflect that Petitioner and Geraci spoke several times the preceding day, that day, and numerous times thereafter. *Id.* at p.60-82.

Geraci's position is that the record of his three-minute call to Petitioner on November 3, 2017 is "substantial evidence" that Petitioner did, in fact, orally disavow his equity position in the Business. However, when that individual cell phone call is viewed against the entire record, the fact that Petitioner called Geraci *first* that day and the parties were in constant communications during that period of time, it becomes clear that Geraci's *selective* presentation of the evidence of a single cell phone call on that particular day is a clear misrepresentation. Geraci presented Respondent with a highly redacted copy of his phone records in order to give that exact misrepresentation.

Further, in his opposition to the LP Motion, Geraci argued that the draft agreements – the Draft Purchase Agreement, the First Draft Side Agreement, and the Second Draft Side Agreement – forwarded to Petitioner after November 2, 2016 were attempts to renegotiate the deal to include employment for Petitioner. V2 E10 p.617, ln.21–p.618, ln.25. Respondent subsequently denied the LP Motion without addressing the Confirmation Email and premised its ruling on two factually incorrect statements.

First, Respondent's order incorrectly states that the draft agreements provided by Petitioner "appear to be unsuccessful attempts to negotiate changes to the original agreement." V3 E18 p.1149, ¶3. Respondent does not state what language in any of the draft agreements offers support for such a conclusion. The recitals to the draft agreements plainly and clearly reflect that the parties had not yet executed a purchase agreement for the sale of the Property. Furthermore, none of the drafts contain a provision for, or even mention, potential employment of Petitioner of any kind by Geraci. V2 E9

p.503-528, 531-536. The failed "negotiation" statement by Respondent, on which it premised its ruling, is completely devoid of any factual support and clearly contradicted by the plain language in the drafts.

Second, Respondent's order states "the documents [Petitioner] offers in support of his Motion were created ***after*** November 2, 2016…." V3 E18 p.1149, ¶3 (emphasis added). This statement is factually and obviously incorrect. The timestamp on the Confirmation Email proves it was created on the very same day as the November Document, within hours of its execution, and in reply to the same email in which Geraci first sent Petitioner a scanned copy of the November Document. V2 E9 p.492-497.

To be incredibly clear on this point: Respondent's order, on its face, makes it clear that after a year presiding in this action, on the ***threshold*** and ***case-dispositive*** issue, Respondent is not aware that the single most critical piece of evidence – proving Geraci's lawsuit is frivolous – was created within hours of and on the SAME DAY as the November Document.

G. THE MOTION FOR JUDGMENT ON THE PLEADINGS ("MJOP").

Notwithstanding Respondent's order denying the LP Motion on clearly factually incorrect grounds, Counsel, believing Respondent did not find Petitioner credible, hoped to get through to Respondent with simple and undisputed facts. Thus, Counsel prepared and submitted Petitioner's MJOP[37] that focused solely on the question of contract integration. V3 E19 p.1160,

[37] Counsel notes that he became attorney of record on May 4, 2018 and the deadline to submit a motion for summary judgment was on April 29, 2018. Thus, he had no time to prepare the motion for summary judgment and the only vehicle left to him to summarily end the meritless litigation was via an MJOP.

ln.21-22 ("The sole and dispositive issue in this MJOP is whether the November Document is a completely integrated agreement.").

Respondent issued its tentative ruling denying the MJOP without addressing or providing its substantive reasoning for doing so. V3 E19 p.1227. Counsel also believed he may have lost credibility with Respondent for having referenced Petitioner's allegations of extra-judicial actions by Geraci attempting to force Petitioner to settle. Thus, Counsel asked a colleague to second chair the oral hearing on the MJOP. As the transcript clearly reflects, the ONLY issue on which Counsel and co-chair requested Respondent to focus was the issue of contract integration. Respondent repeatedly refused three separate requests to address the issue:

> **THE COURT**: Good morning to each of you two. Interesting motion, particularly combined with your request for judicial notice. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?
>
> **MR. AUSTIN:** Well, I would like an explanation. So Mr. Geraci, the plaintiff in this case, he submitted the declaration admitting essentially that –
>
> **THE COURT**: It's the "essentially" part that I don't agree with. You make those same comments in your paper. There's four separate causes of action…
>
> **THE COURT**: The court wasn't persuaded that even if I were grant the request to take judicial notice of a declaration granted of a party opponent, it's still not dispositive of the entire complaint. And that's what your motion is directed to, isn't it.

MR. AUSTIN: Well --

THE COURT: -- in it's entirety? *[sic]*

MR. AUSTIN: Because all four causes of action are premised on a breach of contract, so if there's not an integrated contract, according to plaintiff himself, I feel that all four causes of actions fail.

THE COURT: Not so sure if I agree with that entire analysis.

Anything else, counsel?

MR. AUSTIN: Well, I was just wondering if you could explain to me, if you believe as a matter of law, the three-sentence contracts that plaintiff claims is an integrated contract. If you believe that to actually be a fully integrated contract.

THE COURT: You know, we've been down this road so many times, counsel. I've explained and reexplained the court's interpretation of your position. I don't know what more to say.

CO COUNSEL: Your Honor, if I may, I'm co counsel on behalf of [Petitioner].

Your Honor, the <u>only</u> thing we really want clarification in the matter whether or not the court deems the contract an integrated contract or not.

> **THE COURT:** Again, we've addressed that in multiple motions. I'm not going to go back over it again at this point in time.
>
> Anything else, counsel?
>
> **CO COUNSEL**: That's it.

V1 E4 p.12, ln.5–p.13, ln.26 (emphasis added).

The record in this matter is clear: Respondent has ***never*** provided its reasoning for repeatedly finding that the November Document is a completely integrated agreement. Respondent's statement that it already has addressed the issue is factually false. Respondent, via the summary granting or denying of motions based on the merits of the underlying case, has implicitly found that the November Document is a completely integrated agreement; but, again, it has ***never*** provided its reasoning for deciding so. And, given Respondent's order denying the LP Motion based upon factual findings clearly contradicted by undisputed evidence, it is clear Respondent does not even understand the import of the Confirmation Email or the prejudice Respondent's lack of understanding is causing Petitioner.

H. STATEMENT OF DISQUALIFICATION AND COMPLAINTS TO THE CALIFORNIA STATE BAR ETHICS COMMITTEE.

Given Respondent's admission that it is personally familiar with opposing counsel and it does not believe they are capable of acting unethically, coupled with unsupported factual findings, false statements contained in Respondent's orders and at oral hearings, and its repeated refusal to address the ***threshold*** and ***case-dispositive*** question of contract integration, Counsel will be filing a Verified Statement of Disqualification pursuant to CCP § 170.1(a)(6)(iii) and CCP § 170.1(a)(6)(B) requesting the Respondent judge to recuse himself. The request is premised primarily on

the grounds that a "person aware of the facts might reasonably entertain a doubt that the judge would be able to be impartial."

Additionally, Petitioner (not through Counsel) will be filing a complaint with the State Bar of California against all other attorneys in this matter regarding their filing, maintaining, and/or ratifying a frivolous lawsuit. Petitioner's complaint will contain Counsel's Verified Statement of Disqualification and this Petition.

III. STANDARD OF REVIEW.

"The Code of Civil Procedure provides that mandate 'may be issued … to compel the performance of an act which the law specially enjoins' (§ 1085) where 'there is not a plain, speedy, and adequate remedy, in the ordinary course of law.' (§ 1086.) Although it is well established that mandamus cannot be issued to control a court's discretion, in unusual circumstances the writ will lie where, under the facts, that discretion can be exercised in only one way. [Citation]." *Babb, supra,* 3 Cal.3d at 850-851.

"'Whether a contract is integrated is a question of law when the evidence of integration is not in dispute.' [Citations.]" *Kanno v. Marwit Capital Partners II, L.P.* (*Kanno*) (2017) 18 Cal.App.5th 987, 1001.

IV. ARGUMENT

A. RESPONDENT HAS ABUSED ITS DISCRETION IN REPEATEDLY FINDING THAT THE NOVEMBER DOCUMENT IS A COMPLETELY INTEGRATED AGREEMENT.

"An agreement is not ambiguous merely because the parties (**or judges**) disagree about its meaning. Taken in context, words still matter. As Justice Baxter pointed out, written agreements whose language appears clear in the context of the parties' dispute are not open to claims of latent

ambiguity. *Abers v. Rounsavell* (2010) 189 Cal.App.4th 348, 356 (internal citations omitted) (emphasis added).

The PER operates to exclude evidence of a prior agreement or a contemporaneous oral agreement that contradicts terms in a writing that is intended by the parties to be a final expression of their agreement with respect to those terms. CCP § 1856(a). Parties may intend for the writing to finally and completely express only certain terms of their agreement, rather than the entire agreement. If only part of the agreement is integrated, the PER applies only to that part. *Founding Members, supra,* 109 Cal. App. 4th at 953. Unless a written agreement is intended to be "a complete and exclusive statement of the terms of the agreement," the terms of that agreement "may be explained or supplemented by evidence of consistent additional terms." CCP § 1856(b). Generally, the application of the PER to determine whether a contract is a complete integration involves a two-step analysis:[38]

1. Step One: Did the Parties ***intend*** the writing to be a complete or partial integration?

The Fourth District Appellate Court's ("4th DCA") December 22, 2017 opinion in *Kanno* is conceptually identical to Petitioner's case and the analysis described therein to determine whether the parties ***intended*** the writings at issue to be complete or partial integrations is directly and fully controlling here. In *Kanno*, plaintiff sued defendants for breach of oral contract, specific performance, and promise without intent to perform in connection with a transaction that was documented by three writings, each

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[38] *See Gerdlund v. Elec. Dispensers Int'l* (1987) 190 Cal.App.3d 263, 270; *Banco Do Brasil, S.A. v. Latian, Inc.* (1991) 234 Cal.App.3d 973, 1001; *Kanno*, *supra*, at 1007.

of which had an extensive integration clause. A jury found in favor of plaintiff and the trial court held that the PER did not bar plaintiff's oral agreement and the evidence supported a finding that the parties intended the oral agreement to be part of their agreement. On appeal, as described in appellant's opening paragraph:

> The question presented by this appeal is whether a complex written $23.5 million transaction to purchase all of the assets of plaintiff's company-negotiated by Sheppard Mullin for plaintiff and Paul Hastings for defendants and including multiple separate integrated agreements comprising two binders of materials - can be anything other than a fully integrated agreement.[39]

The 4th DCA affirmed the judgment, finding the oral agreement was not made unenforceable by the PER. In analyzing the PER and whether the documents were completely integrated, the factors considered by the *Kanno* court included: (i) the language and completeness of the written agreement; (ii) whether it contains an integration clause; (iii) the terms of the alleged oral agreement and whether it might contradict those in the writing; (iv) whether the oral agreement might naturally be made as a separate agreement or, in other words, if the oral agreement were true, would it certainly have been included in the written instrument; (v) would evidence of the oral agreement mislead the trier of fact; and (vi) the circumstances at the time of the writing. *Kanno, supra,* 18 Cal.App.5th at 1007. Additionally, (vii) the terms of a

[39] *Kanno v. Marwit Capital*, 2016 CA App. Ct. Briefs LEXIS 857.

writing "may be explained or supplemented by course of dealing or usage of trade or by course of performance." CCP § 1856(c).

Application of these seven factors here leads to only one reasonable and incontrovertible conclusion: the November Document was not ***intended*** to be a completely integrated agreement:

a. The November Document does not appear to be a final agreement.

"We start by asking whether the [November Document] appears on its face to be a final expression of the parties' agreement with respect to the terms included in that agreement. [Citation.]" *Id.* at 1007. In reviewing the November Document, it is readily apparent that it is not – it is three sentences long and is missing many essential terms when compared to even a standard real estate purchase agreement, much less one that has a complicated condition precedent requiring approval of a CUP by the City for a business in the emerging and highly regulated marijuana industry. It also has basic grammar and spelling mistakes (*e.g.*, "contacts" instead of "contracts"). Unlike the writings in *Kanno,* the November Document is <u>not</u> "lengthy, formal, [or] detailed[.]" *Id*.

Given its short length, its lack of formality, its simplicity given the complicated subject matter it was intended to cover and its grammar and spelling mistakes, these factors weigh in favor of a finding that the November Document does not meet the criteria to be a completely integrated agreement.

b. The November Document does not contain an integration clause.

The presence of an integration clause is given great weight on the issue of integration and it is "very persuasive, if not controlling, on the issue." *Masterson v. Sine* (1968) 68 Cal.2d 222, 225. Conversely, the lack of an integration clause, as here, is evidence the writing is not completely

integrated. *Esbensen v. Userware Internat., Inc.* (1992) 11 Cal.App.4th 631, 638. Thus, this factor weighs in favor of a finding the November Document is not completely integrated.

c. The terms of the oral JVA do not contradict the November Document.

In determining whether a writing was intended as a final expression of the parties' agreement, "collateral oral agreements" that contradict the writing cannot be considered. *Banco Do Brasil, supra*, at 1002-1003. The fact that the November Document does not state it will provide for Petitioner's equity position does not mean its *silence* on the subject is a contradiction as Geraci argues. As the seminal case of *Masterson* makes clear, silence on a term allows the introduction of extrinsic evidence to show the parties intent on that matter. *Masterson, supra,* at 228-231.

d. The oral agreement – the JVA – would not have been included in the November Document that was meant to be a receipt.

Where a "collateral" oral agreement is alleged, the court must determine whether the subject matter is such that it would "certainly" have been included in the written agreement had it actually been agreed upon; or would "naturally" have been made as a separate agreement. *Id.* at 227. Here, the terms of the JVA as alleged by Petitioner are consistent with the November Document and the Confirmation Email, both of which provide direct, undisputed evidence that the November Document was meant to be a receipt by Petitioner of $10,000 to be applied toward the total agreed-upon $50,000 NRD. As the November Document was meant to be a *receipt*, it is *natural* that it would not have all the material terms reached in the JVA.

Furthermore, it is *natural* that the November Document was created and notarized as part of the JVA as Geraci provided Petitioner the $10,000

in CASH. No reasonable party would provide such a material amount in cash without ensuring adequate proof of its receipt.

Thus, this factor also weighs against a finding that the November Document is a completely integrated agreement.

e. A fact finder would not be misled by the admission of the Confirmation Email and other parol evidence.

Evidence of a collateral oral agreement should be excluded if it is likely to mislead the fact finder. *Id*. The court properly exercises its discretion by weighing the probative value of the extrinsic evidence against the possibility it may mislead the jury. *See* Evid. Code § 352; *Brawthen v. H & R Block, Inc.* (1972) 28 Cal.App.3d 131, 137-138 ("[*Masterson*] points out that evidence of the 'oral collateral agreements should be excluded only when the fact finder is likely to be misled....' ***This permits a limited weighing of the evidence by the trial court for the purpose of keeping 'incredible' evidence from the jury***.") (emphasis added). The undisputed Text and Email Communications are clear and not "incredible." Simply stated, the evidence would not mislead the fact finder and actually clearly establish what took place – the parties were still reducing the JVA to writing when the relationship soured because Petitioner confronted Geraci about having submitted the CUP application on the Property without finalizing the agreement or providing the remainder of the NRD.

f. Geraci's course of performance and conduct explains the meaning of the November Document – it was meant to be a receipt.

"The law imputes to a person the intention corresponding to the reasonable meaning of his language, acts, and conduct." *H. S. Crocker Co. v. McFaddin* (1957) 148 Cal.App.2d 639, 643. With the exception of the days leading up to the filing of the underlying suit by Geraci, Geraci's language, actions, and conduct all reflected that ***he*** believed that he and Petitioner and

were joint-venturers: (i) in response to Petitioner's March Request Email, Geraci sent the Partnership Confirmation Text; (ii) in response to Petitioner's comments stating the drafts Geraci forwarded did not contain his equity position, Geraci forwarded revised drafts that did provide for Petitioner to receive a portion of the net profits (albeit, not an equity position); (iii) at the same time, Geraci continued to have the CUP application for the Property processed, which, per his own Complaint, would require months – if not years – and significant capital investment. V2 E11 p.625, ln.22 – p.626, ln.1.

In addition, Geraci's March Request Email is as damning as the Confirmation Email – Geraci is asking ***of*** Petitioner a concession from his ***established obligation*** to pay $10,000 a month. V2 E9 p.541-542. Geraci's own language offers clear additional evidence that there was an agreed-upon collateral oral agreement not included in the November Document: payments of $10,000 a month.

"A party's conduct occurring between the execution of the contract and a dispute about the meaning of the contract's terms may reveal what the parties understood and intended those terms to mean." *Banning Ranch Conservancy v. Superior Court* (2011) 193 Cal.App.4th 903, 915 (citations and quotations omitted). It was not until Petitioner repeatedly requested that Geraci provide final drafts of the JVA reflecting his equity position that there is any evidence of discord between Petitioner and Geraci. And it was not until Petitioner was served with Geraci's Complaint that Petitioner became aware that Geraci intended to misrepresent the November Document as a completely integrated agreement for the sale of the Property. Most notably, all of the undisputed Email and Text Communications exchanged between the parties throughout this period clearly reflect that the parties considered themselves joint-venturers.

"When a person makes a statement … under circumstances that would normally call for a response if the statement were untrue, the statement

is admissible for the limited purpose of showing the party's reaction to it. His silence, evasion, or equivocation may be considered as a tacit admission of the statements made in his presence." *In re Neilson* (1962) 57 Cal.2d 733, 746. If Geraci intended the November Document to be the "final agreement" as he now alleges, then he should have challenged or repudiated the Text and Email Communications reflecting that he was a joint-venturer with Petitioner. As the law understands, a failure to repudiate material allegations is a tacit admission of them. *See* Evid. Code § 1221. This is not merely a legal concept codified by law, it is also a self-evident truth that is understood by any reasonable individual. *See Keller v. Key System Transit Lines* (1954) 129 Cal.App.2d 593, 596 ("The basis of the rule on admissions made in response to accusations is the fact that human experience has shown that generally it is natural to deny an accusation if a party considers himself innocent of negligence or wrongdoing.").

For the reasons set forth above, this factor supports the conclusion that the November Document is not the "final agreement" for the Property.

g. The circumstances at the time of writing clearly prove the parties did not intend the November Document to be a completely integrated agreement.

A critical point noted by the *Kanno* court in reaching its decision was the following oral exchange: "[plaintiff] insisted that [defendant] 'promise this to me.' [Defendant] paused and then said, '***[o]kay, [plaintiff], I promise***.'" *Kanno, supra*, at 1009 (emphasis added). Relying heavily on that exchange, the *Kanno* court found that "[t]he evidence supports a finding that the parties intended the terms of the [oral agreement] to be part of their [written] agreement." *Id*. Here, exactly as in *Kanno*, Petitioner emailed Geraci asking him to specifically confirm in writing (*i.e.*, promise) that a "final agreement" would contain his "10% equity position" and Plaintiff clearly and unambiguously did so: "***No no problem at all***." V2 E9 p.497.

Step One Conclusion

In sum, all seven factors lead to one irrefutable conclusion: the November Document was ***not intended*** to be a completely integrated agreement for the Property.

2. Step Two: If there is an integration, is the parol evidence being offered consistent with the writing, either: (i) to explain or interpret the agreement by proving a meaning to which the language of the writing is reasonably susceptible; or (ii) to show a collateral oral agreement that was "naturally" made as a separate agreement?

We have established that the November Document is *not* a completely integrated agreement; however, the November Document and the Confirmation Email are both evidence of the JVA – the "final agreement," of which one of the final integrated terms is Petitioner's "10% equity position" in the Business. "An integration may be partial rather than complete: The parties may intend that a writing finally and completely express only certain terms of their agreement rather than the agreement in its entirety. If the agreement is partially integrated, the parol evidence rule applies to the integrated part." *Founding Members, supra,* 109 Cal.App.4th at 953 (citations omitted). Thus, the Confirmation Email and other parol evidence described above are *consistent* with the integrated terms under both Step Two factors:

First, the parol evidence – the Confirmation Email which by itself is ***dispositive*** – helps explain and interpret the November Document for what it was intended to be: a memorialization of Petitioner's receipt of $10,000 *in cash* and not the "final agreement."

Second, the parol evidence is evidence of a *collateral oral agreement* – the JVA. Again, the parol evidence clearly establishes the parties reached an agreement which was a joint-venture. At Petitioner's specific request for assurance of performance, Geraci confirmed the same day via email that a

"final agreement" would contain a "10% equity position." Months later, at Petitioner's objection to the draft agreement written by Attorney Gina Austin and forwarded by Geraci stating they were *not* partners, Geraci replied stating that he was having his attorney revise the documents and the next day Petitioner received the Second Draft Side Agreement; an updated draft that provided for him to receive 10% of the *net profits*. "A joint venture or partnership may be formed orally [citations], or 'assumed to have been organized from a reasonable deduction from the acts and declarations of the parties.' [Citation.]" *Weiner v. Fleischman* (1991) 54 Cal.3d 476, 482-483. The only reasonable deduction to be reached here, based on the undisputed communications and actions by and between the parties, is that they both considered themselves joint-venturers.

Step Two Conclusion

Thus, for the reasons set forth above, pursuant to the PER, the parol evidence is proof that the November Document is not a completely integrated agreement and is actually a receipt executed on the day the parties reached the oral agreement – the JVA.

3. The Oral Disavowment is barred by the PER.

"A short and vernacular explanation of the parol evidence rule would be that a party to a written contract cannot be permitted to urge that a contract means something which its terms simply cannot mean." *Ri-Joyce, Inc. v. New Motor Vehicle Bd.* (1992) 2 Cal.App.4th 445, 452. Geraci's Oral Disavowment – that Petitioner orally agreed over the phone to forego the equity position Geraci had promised him in the JVA and confirmed in writing in the Confirmation Email – is barred by the PER. Geraci "cannot be permitted to urge that a contract means something which its terms simply cannot mean." *Id*.

4. The Oral Disavowment is also barred by the SOF.

Geraci was a licensed real estate agent for over 25 years at the time of the execution of the November Document. *See* fn. 10. He cannot, as a matter of law, justify any detrimental reliance for failing to reduce to writing the alleged oral statements made by Petitioner on November 3, 2016. *See Phillippe v. Shapell Indus.* (1987) 43 Cal.3d 1247, 1264.

B. RESPONDENT ABUSED ITS DISCRETION IN DENYING PETITIONER'S REQUEST FOR JUDICIAL NOTICE OF GERACI'S DECLARATION RESULTING IN SEVERE PREJUDICE TO PETITIONER.

On July 13, 2018 Respondent refused to take judicial notice of Geraci's declaration on Petitioner's MJOP. V1 E2 p.004, ¶2. Pursuant to Evid. Code § 453, a trial court must take judicial notice of the matters specified in Evid. Code § 452 if a party requests it to do so and does each of the following: (i) gives each adverse party sufficient notice of the request, through the pleadings or otherwise, to enable him or her to prepare to meet the request (Evid. Code § 453(a)); and (ii) furnishes the court with sufficient information to enable it to take judicial notice of the matter (Evid. Code § 453(b)). *See Four Star Electric, Inc. v. F & H Construction* (1992) 7 Cal.App.4th 1375, 1379.

Petitioner met the requirements set forth in Evid. Code § 453; thus, Respondent was required to take judicial notice of Plaintiff's statements in his declaration *even if they nullify material allegations in Geraci's Complaint*. *See Rauber v. Herman* (1991) 229 Cal.App.3d 942, 946 ("Where an allegation [in a party's Complaint] is contrary to law or to a fact of which the court may take judicial notice, ***it is*** to be treated as a ***nullity***.") (emphasis added).

Respondent did not provide its reasoning for failing to deny the request for judicial notice of Geraci's declaration, pursuant to Evid. Code

§ 453, thereby defeating the basis of the MJOP and severely prejudicing Petitioner. Respondent is ***forcing*** Petitioner to undertake the costly burden of discovery and to prepare for trial in a demonstrably meritless suit.

C. RESPONDENT ABUSED ITS DISCRETION IN DENYING PETITIONER'S *EX PARTE* APPLICATION FOR APPOINTMENT OF A RECEIVER.

"If jointly-owned property is in danger of being lost or destroyed or misappropriated, Respondent may appoint a receiver to protect a party's interest in the property, and such an appointment will be upheld on appeal. [CCP] § 564." *Rosenthal v. Rosenthal* (1966) 240 Cal.App.2d 927, 933. On appeal, as articulated in *Moore v. Oberg* (1943) 61 Cal.App.2d 216, 220, "[t]he ultimate fact to be found [is] whether the protection of the interest of plaintiff require[s] the appointment of a receiver." The moving party must make a showing by a "preponderance of the evidence." *Id*. at 220-221.

Petitioner has more than met his burden. As proven above, the November Document is not a completely integrated agreement. Thus, the sole basis of Geraci's Complaint fails. Geraci's own actions and the communications between himself and Petitioner for more than five months prior to the filing of his lawsuit reveal this case for what it is: <u>frivolous</u>. That Geraci – and, notably, his counsel – continue to prosecute this action is simply because Geraci desires to mitigate his financial liability to Petitioner.

Geraci is liable for*, inter alia*, the $10,000 monthly payments he promised Petitioner, which was an identical term bargained for by Petitioner in the Third-Party Sale. V1 E8 p.246 ln.6-10. However, Petitioner was forced to sell those monthly payments to finance this litigation. *Id.* at ln.12-14. Since the life of the CUP is ten years, Geraci's total liability on this issue is $1,200,000 at a minimum.. RJN 9 at p.143 §(i) and p.144 §(n)(1). However, Geraci will ***only*** become liable ***if*** the CUP is approved – pursuant to the condition precedent in the JVA and the terms of the Third-Party Sale.

And, again, Geraci has sole and exclusive control of the CUP application through his employee/agent, Rebecca Berry. In other words, Geraci controls the CUP application.

Given the above analysis, if Geraci loses this action because it is adjudicated on the merits, he will be liable for Petitioner's damages; the amount of which will be determined by the City's approval or denial of the CUP – again, an outcome which is solely within Geraci's control. This is absurd. And countenanced by Respondent.

In light of the foregoing, the fact that Geraci ***and*** his attorneys continue to maintain a suit lacking probable cause begs a simple question: Why would they continue to devote time, capital and resources to obtain approval of the CUP for the benefit of the Third-Party Sale? They would not; they are merely ***pretending*** to do so because they filed suit alleging their cause of action for breach of contract was meritorious. However, they actually intended to prevail by leveraging and increasing the pressure exerted on Petitioner by the litigation process knowing that he lacked the financial resources to hire an attorney. If they ***appear*** to have ceased prosecuting the CUP on the Property, that is an indirect admission that they know they brought forth a meritless suit. They are caught in a Catch-22; having to spend money to ***appear*** as though they want to have the CUP approved, but knowing that if they actually get the CUP approved and this case is adjudicated on the merits, they are just increasing the amounts of special and consequential damages they will owe Petitioner.

Further, as to the attorneys involved, it is self-evident that they would rather appear to be incompetent – and argue to the bitter end that the PER bars the Confirmation Email – than admit they were complicit in a criminal conspiracy to deprive Petitioner of his Property via a malicious prosecution action.

In support of his Receiver Motion, Petitioner provided, *inter alia*, an email dated June 1, 2018 from the City stating that Geraci had done nothing to advance the CUP application for nearly ***six months***. *See* V2 E9 p.587 ("On April 20, 2018, I had sent a letter to the project's point of contact for project inactivity and would be closing the project, due to inactivity for 90 days."). Geraci is failing to prosecute the CUP on the Property so the Competing CUP application can be approved which would result in the denial of the CUP for the Property. The evidence from the City is sufficient to have justified the appointment of a receiver. *S*ee *Brush v. Apartment & Hotel Financing Corp.* (1927) 82 Cal.App. 723, 725 (An allegation that real property is deteriorating and will continue to do so and will by the time of trial, be practically worthless because of pleaded conditions is sufficient to justify the appointment of a receiver).

Additionally, Petitioner provided the declaration of Hurtado that includes evidence that Geraci's political lobbyist – Bartell – is using his political influence with the City to have the CUP on Petitioner's Property denied and the Competing CUP submitted by Magagna approved. V2 E9 p.352, ln.6-9; *see* V2 E9 p.593, ln.11-27 (Hurtado Declaration). While these statements cannot be recognized as undisputed facts on an *ex parte* application for a receiver, in light of the fact that the case against Petitioner is meritless, Hurtado's declaration was sufficient to have required the appointment of a receiver. *See Armbrust v. Armbrust* (1946) 75 Cal.App.2d 272, 274.

At the June 14, 2018 hearing on Petitioner's Receiver Motion, counsel Andrew Flores, for Petitioner, directed Respondent to ***both*** the Competing CUP and the City's email stating that there had been no activity on the CUP application for the Property for nearly six months. V3 E21 p.1232, ln.6-20. Counsel explained to Respondent that, because the City Ordinance governing CUPs for Marijuana Outlets prohibits issuance of multiple CUPs within

1,000 feet of each other, if the Competing CUP was granted, by law it would bar issuance of the CUP for Petitioner's Property because the real property which is the subject of the Competing CUP is located less than 1,000 feet from the Property. *Id.* Counsel clearly described a race to get the Competing CUP approved and Geraci's inaction in processing the CUP application for the Property as proven ***by the City***. Respondent, without providing its reasoning, stated that it was "not persuaded [Petitioner] carried [his] burden that would warrant good cause…." V3 E21 p.1232. ln.27 – 1233, ln.2.

D. RESPONDENT ABUSED ITS DISCRETION IN DENYING PETITIONER'S MJOP.

"[An MJOP] is the equivalent of a general demurrer. This motion tests whether the allegations of the pleading under attack support the pleader's cause if they are true…. In order for judicial notice to support a motion for judgment on the pleadings by negating an express allegation of the pleading, the notice must be of something that cannot reasonably be controverted. The same is true of evidentiary admissions or concessions…. Judicial notice may conclusively defeat the pleading as where it establishes res judicata or collateral estoppel. ***The pleader's own concession may have this same conclusive effect***…. In these limited situations, the court, in ruling on a [MJOP], properly looks beyond the pleadings. But it does so only because the party whose pleading is attached will as a matter of law, or law's equivalent of judicial notice of a fact not reasonably subject to contradiction, fail in the litigation." *Columbia Casualty Co. v. Northwestern Nat. Ins. Co.* (*Columbia*) (1991) 231 Cal.App.3d at 468-469 (citations and quotations omitted) (emphasis added).

"A judicial admission is a party's unequivocal concession of the truth of a matter and removes the matter as an issue in the case. [Citations.]" *Gelfo v. Lockheed Martin Corp.* (*Gelfo*) (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 34, 48. "[A]

court may take judicial notice of a party's admissions or concessions, but only in cases where the admission 'can not reasonably be controverted,' such as in answers to interrogatories or requests for admission, or in affidavits and **declarations** filed on the party's behalf. [Citation.]" *Arce v. Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc.* (2010) 181 Cal.App.4th 471, 485 (emphasis added).

Geraci's declaration is a judicial admission that he sent the Confirmation Email confirming the November Document is "not" a "final agreement" on ***November 2, 2016***. Realizing he can neither dispute the authenticity of the email nor bar its admission, Geraci then opposes the legal effect of the Confirmation Email on his case with his Oral Disavowment allegation – that he sent the Confirmation Email by *mistake* and that Petitioner orally agreed the November Document is the final agreement for the sale of his Property. Geraci raises this self-serving Oral Disavowment allegation for the first time in his declaration executed ***April 9, 2018***, which is the only direct evidence Geraci puts forth to support this allegation. And, again, he did so in opposition to Petitioner's LP Motion citing *Riverisland* and *Tenzer* that established that Geraci would not be able to bar the admission of his Confirmation Email – the proof of his fraud; which, prior to then, had been the vanguard of his legal arguments in all motions before Respondent.

In *King v. Andersen* (1966) 242 Cal.App.2d 606, the plaintiff in an assault case admitted at deposition that defendant used "no force." *Id*. at 609. When defendant moved for summary judgment based on plaintiff's deposition concession, plaintiff submitted an affidavit in support of his opposition saying, in fact, defendant had applied unnecessary force. *Id*. at 610. Plaintiff disputed the meaning attributed to his deposition testimony by defendant and argued that the dispute must be submitted to the jury. *Id*. at 609-610. Respondent disagreed and dismissed the case. The Court of Appeal affirmed. *Id*. at 610. Plaintiff could not manufacture a dispute of fact by

submitting additional affidavits. "Where, as here, however, there is a clear and unequivocal admission by the plaintiff, himself, in his deposition . . . we are forced to conclude there is no *substantial evidence* of the existence of a triable issue of fact." *Id.* (emphasis in original).

Here, Geraci is attempting to do the very same thing as the plaintiff in *King*. He sent a clear and unequivocal admission that the November Document is not a final agreement on **November 2, 2016**. The procedural history of this action shows that Geraci was relying on the PER/SOF to bar the admission of the Confirmation Email. When confronted with *Riverisland* and *Tenzer* in **April of 2018**, he submits a declaration saying he sent the Confirmation Email by mistake. In support of this contention, Geraci alleges that Petitioner orally agreed the November Document is a final agreement and, therefore, such dispute should be submitted to the jury. Identical to *King*, ***Geraci's self-serving declaration should not be considered substantial evidence and he should not be allowed to blatantly fabricate a material factual dispute to continue to prosecute a frivolous action***. As noted above, he ceased prosecuting the CUP on the Property and the evidence reveals that Bartell, Geraci's agent, is using his influence with the City to have the CUP on the Property denied. In light of the fact that Geraci should lose this action on the merits, it is reasonable that Geraci is taking actions to limit his liability – that is, using his agents to sabotage the CUP for the Property and obtain approval of the Competing CUP.

In *Joslin*, the 4th DCA held that courts may take judicial notice of a fact and use it to dismiss a case "where there is not or cannot be a factual dispute concerning that which is sought to be judicially noticed." *Joslin v. H.A.S Ins. Brokerage* (1986) 184 Cal.App.3d 369, 375. Consistent with summary judgment jurisprudence, *Joslin* held that a party cannot escape dismissal simply by offering an "explanation" of its admission and that explanations that are "inherently incredible" may simply be disregarded. *Id.*

at 376. Geraci's Oral Disavowment allegation falls squarely into this category. Thus, it is forestalled by *Joslin* as it is an "explanation" that is "inherently incredible" and should be disregarded.

To be absolutely clear on this point, when Respondent denied Petitioner's MJOP, it implicitly found the following factual allegations by Geraci to NOT be "inherently incredible." To put it more succinctly, ***this is Geraci's position and Respondent finds the following to be credible:***

(i) *Within hours* of the parties finalizing their agreement on November 2, 2016, Petitioner sent an email to Geraci *pretending* that the terms of the JVA had been reached and in which Petitioner was *already* promised a very specific "10% equity position;" (ii) Geraci *mistakenly* confirmed in writing, at Petitioner's specific request for written confirmation, Petitioner's *pretend* equity position *within hours* of the November Document being executed; (iii) Geraci, a licensed Real Estate Agent (at the time) for over 25 years, *never* sought in *any* manner to document the fact that he mistakenly sent the Confirmation Email despite knowing its legal import under the Statute of Frauds; (iv) Geraci realized, *over a year after filing suit*, that he should raise the Oral Disavowment; and (v) that Geraci did so, *coincidentally*, in response to Petitioner's motion citing, for the first time, the holdings of *Riverisland* and *Tenzer* which prevent Geraci from using the PER as a shield to bar parol evidence that is proof of his own fraud.

In *Rivera v. S. Pac. Transp. Co. (Rivera)* (1990) 217 Cal.App.3d 294, 297-299, the court granted summary judgment based on plaintiff's deposition testimony that a train was moving when he tried to enter. The court rejected plaintiff's attempt to explain his testimony that the train was moving before and after he entered, but was still at the precise moment he got on. *Id*. "When the defendant can establish an absolute defense from the plaintiff's admissions, the credibility of the admissions are valued so highly that the controverting affidavits may be disregarded as irrelevant, inadmissible or

evasive." *Id*. at 299-300 (internal quotations and citations omitted). Similarly, here, Geraci's judicial admission that he sent the Confirmation Email – which he was forced to provide in light of *Riverisland* and *Tenzer* – proves the November Document is not a completely integrated agreement for the sale of the Property. Therefore, the Confirmation Email is an "absolute defense" to Geraci's Complaint. *Id*. Pursuant to *Rivera*, Geraci's Oral Disavowment seeking to explain away Petitioner's "absolute defense" as a "mistake" should "be disregarded as…inadmissible[.]" *Id*.

The court in *Columbia* discussed the appropriateness of judicial notice "to support a motion for judgment on the pleadings by negating an express allegation of the pleading [when] the notice [is] something that cannot ***reasonably be controverted***." *Id.* at 468 (emphasis added). At issue in *Columbia* was the trial court's granting of an MJOP based on "reliance on the terminology of an incorporated complex contract" that contradicted the pleading at issue. The court reversed, noting that "parol evidence may lead to an interpretation of the contract consistent with the pleading's express allegation." *Id.* at 470. The critical point here from the *Columbia* opinion is whether the "fact" sought to be judicially noticed "cannot reasonably be controverted." *Id*. at 468.

Here, Geraci's judicial admission, that on **November 2, 2016** he confirmed in writing that the November Document is not a completely integrated agreement, "cannot reasonably be controverted" by his own self-serving declaration raising the Oral Disavowment allegation for the first time on **April 9, 2018**. *Id.*

In summary, pursuant to well-established case law – *Joslin*, *Gelfo*, *King*, *Rivera*, *Columbia* - disposing of a case prior to trial by means of a MJOP is appropriate "where the pleader's own concession" means that *on the merits* its "cause is inevitably destined to fail." *Id.* at 469. Such is the case here. The only reason Geraci continues prosecuting this action is to further

his goal to exponentially limit his damages (and those of his agents) to Petitioner by sabotaging the approval of the CUP for the Property.

V. MAIN CONCLUSION

Geraci's litigation strategy can be summarized as follows: the November Document is a completely integrated agreement and the PER bars his Confirmation Email as evidence to contradict the terms set forth therein. However, should Respondent allow the admission of his Confirmation Email, then his Oral Disavowment allegation – that Petitioner agreed the November Document is a completely integrated agreement – will exculpate him from liability because he sent the Confirmation Email by *mistake* and he corrected that mistake *orally* over the phone the next day. In other words, if he can't prevent admission of evidence created on November 2, 2016 ***proving*** his fraud, then he will use his NEW evidence – his self-serving declaration created on April 9, 2018 - to ***disprove*** his fraud. This is absurd.

In *American Internat. Group, Inc. v. Superior Court* (1991) 234 Cal.App.3d 749, 755, the appellate court issued a writ on a petition from a denial of judgment on pleadings where the issue, as here, was purely legal on undisputed facts and of significant legal import. Discussed thoroughly above, and simply self-evident, Petitioner is the victim of a malicious prosecution action that has evolved into a civil a conspiracy orchestrated by numerous individuals seeking to mitigate their damages. If Petitioner had been represented by competent counsel and/or Petitioner had not discredited himself with Respondent (with allegations of threats by Geraci against him seeking to intimidate him into settling), this matter should have been adjudicated in Petitioner's favor in the preliminary stages of this action.

Petitioner's inability to access justice on these facts represents a severe public policy issue; it will already stand as precedent and encourage wealthy individuals to seek to use the judiciary as an instrument to effectuate a

miscarriage of justice against parties who cannot afford legal counsel to defend themselves against meritless cases. *See Neary, supra,* 3 Cal.4th at 287 ("***the quality of justice a litigant can expect is proportional to the financial means at the litigant's disposal***.") (emphasis added).

In light of the foregoing facts, and the underlying public policy concerns at issue here, Petitioner respectfully requests that this Court immediately issue a writ providing Petitioner the critically needed relief set forth below.

VI. PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Petitioner prays that this Court:

1. Grant an immediate stay of the underlying proceeding pending resolution of this Petition;
2. Issue a peremptory Writ of Mandate and/or Writ of Prohibition directing Respondent to:
    a. Vacate its Minute Order dated June 14, 2018 denying Receiver Motion;
    b. Appoint a receiver with the requisite authority and ability to supervise and pursue the City's approval of the CUP application;
    c. Vacate its Minute Order dated July 13, 2018 denying Petitioner's MJOP;
    d. Grant Petitioner's MJOP; and
    e. Order Geraci to pay the remaining costs required to immediately have the CUP application for the Property completed;

3. Award Petitioner his costs, pursuant to Rule 8.493 of the California Rules of Court and any other applicable statutes and/or rules; and

4. Grant such other relief as may be just and proper.

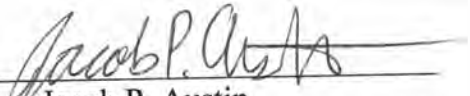
DATED: August 27, 2018 LAW OFFICE OF JACOB AUSTIN

By _____
Jacob P. Austin
Attorney for Petitioner DARRYL COTTON

WORD COUNT CERTIFICATION

This brief contains 13-point font in Times New Roman typeface, and contains 13,614 (permissibly) words as counted by Microsoft Word 2016, the word processing software used to generate this brief.

DATED: August 27, 2018 LAW OFFICE OF JACOB AUSTIN

By 
Jacob P. Austin
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