

The Honorable Robert S. Lasnik

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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
AT SEATTLE**

SUSAN SOTO PALMER, et al.

Plaintiffs,

v.

STEVEN HOBBS, in his official capacity
as Secretary of State of Washington, and
the STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Defendants,

and

JOSE TREVINO, ISMAEL G. CAMPOS,
and State Representative ALEX YBARRA,

Intervenor-Defendants.

NO. 3:22-cv-5035-RSL

DEFENDANT STATE OF
WASHINGTON’S REPLY IN
SUPPORT OF MOTION FOR
INQUIRY CONCERNING
POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF
INTEREST

NOTE FOR MOTION CALENDAR:
MARCH 3, 2023

The State respectfully submits this reply to the responses filed by the *Garcia* Plaintiff and the *Soto Palmer* Intervenor–Defendants (collectively Respondents) and by the *Soto Palmer* Plaintiffs.¹

I. Reply to Respondents

Respondents raise essentially two sets of arguments. Neither justifies Respondents’ insistence that the respective Courts’ ignore their apparent conflicts of interest.

¹ The State is concurrently filing this identical brief in both actions.

1 Respondents first argue that the State’s motion is procedurally improper and that the
 2 State lacks standing to bring it. *Soto Palmer* Intervenor’s Resp. (Dkt. #156) at 3–8;
 3 *Garcia* Plaintiff’s Resp. (Dkt. #32) at 3–8. *FMC Technologies* and *In re Celcyte*—both cited in
 4 the State’s Motion—provide a complete response. See *Soto Palmer* Dkt. #150 at 6; *Garcia* Dkt.
 5 #29 at 6 (citing *FMC Techs., Inc. v. Edwards*, 420 F. Supp. 2d 1153, 1157 (W.D. Wash. 2006)
 6 and *In re Celcyte Genetic Corp. Sec. Litig.*, C08-47RSL, 2008 WL 5000156, at *1–2 (W.D.
 7 Wash. Nov. 20, 2008)).

8 *FMC Technologies* makes clear that the “Court has a *duty* to examine charges of conflict
 9 of interest.” 420 F. Supp. 2d at 1157 (citing *Trone v. Smith*, 621 F.2d 994, 999 (9th Cir. 1980)
 10 and *U.S. for Use & Benefit of Lord Elec. Co., Inc. v. Titan Pac. Const. Corp.*, 637 F. Supp. 1556,
 11 1560 (W.D. Wash. 1986)) (emphasis added); see also *Trone*, 621 F.2d at 999 (“The primary
 12 responsibility for controlling the conduct of lawyers practicing before the district court rests with
 13 that court.”); *Gas-A-Tron of Ariz. v. Union Oil Co. of Cal.*, 534 F.2d 1322, 1324 (9th Cir. 1976)
 14 (“Whenever an allegation is made that an attorney has violated his . . . ethical responsibility, . . .
 15 [i]t is the duty of the district court to examine the charge, since it is that court which is authorized
 16 to supervise the conduct of the members of its bar.”) (quotation omitted). Given this duty,
 17 Respondents’ assertion that the Courts lack authority to hear a motion for inquiry falls flat.
 18 *Contra Soto Palmer* Intervenor’s Resp. at 3–6; *Garcia* Plaintiffs’ Resp. at 3–6.

19 The Court’s inherent duty to protect its processes and the integrity of proceedings also
 20 does away with Respondents’ standing argument, as both *FMC Technologies* and *Celcyte*
 21 confirm. In *Celcyte*, the Court rejected the argument that “only a current or former client has
 22 standing to challenge an attorney’s representation of another party,” explaining:

23 The court in *FMC Technologies* noted that courts may consider non-client
 24 initiated disqualification challenges based on the courts’ “inherent power to
 25 ‘protect the integrity of their processes.’” [420 F. Supp. 2d] at 1156 (quoting
Colyer v. Smith, 50 F. Supp. 2d 966, 970 (C.D. Cal.1999) . . .

26 In this case, because the motion has merit . . . the Court has a “plain duty to act.”
FMC Technologies, 420 F. Supp. 2d at 1157 (quoting *In re Yarn Processing*

1 *Patent Validity Litig.*, 530 F.2d 83, 89 (5th Cir.1976)). It must act to protect the
 2 integrity of the process and to protect the litigants. Accordingly, the Court
 considers [non-client’s] motion to disqualify[.]

3 *In re Celcyte*, 2008 WL 5000156, at *1–2. Without acknowledging these cases, Respondents
 4 suggest that the typical standing inquiry does not apply here because the State has moved for a
 5 motion for inquiry but “has not moved for disqualification.” *Soto Palmer* Intervenor’s Resp. at
 6 7; *Garcia* Plaintiffs’ Resp. at 7. This is a meaningless distinction. The Court’s authority to
 7 inquire into potential conflicts and consider disqualification stems from its inherent authority to
 8 control its own affairs; this authority does not rest on how the parties style their motions.

9 Respondents’ second set of arguments consists primarily of accusations that the State’s
 10 counsel acted in bad faith and misrepresented the evidence.² *Soto Palmer* Resp. at 3 n.2, 9–12.
 11 Respondents ignore nearly all of the relevant testimony and entirely fail to discuss the Rules of
 12 Professional Conduct discussed in the State’s motion. They also fail to address the new ethical
 13 concern the *Soto Palmer* Plaintiffs have raised since the filing of the State’s motion, namely,
 14 their decision to notice the deposition of *their own client*—Mr. Garcia—on behalf of their other
 15 clients—Intervenors. *See Soto Palmer* Dkt. #153 at 2 (“The unusual nature of Intervenor-
 16 Defendants’ cross-notice of Mr. Garcia’s deposition” raises “questions . . . (e.g., who will defend
 17 Mr. Garcia’s deposition when his counsel is deposing him on behalf of their other clients?)”).

18 Respondents’ only real substantive argument is their claim that there is no conflict
 19 because all of their clients “agree fundamentally that a race-blind map is appropriate.” *Soto*
 20 *Palmer* Intervenor’s Resp. at 10; *Garcia* Plaintiff’s Resp. at 10. But in the same paragraph, they
 21 essentially admit the conflict, stating: “The *Palmer* Intervenor’s believe that the map should not
 22 be redrawn . . . *Garcia* Plaintiff believes that the map must be redrawn.” *Id.* That is precisely the
 23 problem: whatever their agreements on other issues, their litigation goals are fundamentally
 24 opposed. This apparent conflict merits this Court’s inquiry.

25 _____
 26 ² Respondents’ contentions that counsel for the State brought the instant motion for tactical reasons or bad
 faith are devoid of any factual support.

1 **II. Reply to *Soto Palmer* Plaintiffs**

2 *Soto Palmer* Plaintiffs raise the difficult question of how Respondents' apparent conflict
 3 might affect the timing of trial. To reiterate its prior position, the State agrees that delaying trial
 4 for any significant amount of time risks prejudice to Plaintiffs. However, delay could also
 5 prejudice Mr. Garcia because he alleges he will be injured if the 2024 elections are carried out
 6 under the current map. *Soto Palmer* Plaintiffs' request to hold Mr. Garcia's claims in abeyance
 7 do not address this prejudice.³ It also ignores the obvious efficiencies inherent in both sets of
 8 claims being heard together in a single proceeding. Accordingly, should the Court determine that
 9 Mr. Garcia's counsel is disqualified from this case, the State suggests that Mr. Garcia be given
 10 a limited time to find new counsel (e.g., two weeks), after which time the Courts can conduct a
 11 status hearing to determine next steps in these cases.

12
 13 DATED this 1st day of March, 2023

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 16 ROBERT W. FERGUSON
 Attorney General

17 *s/ Andrew R. W. Hughes*

18 ANDREW R.W. HUGHES, WSBA No. 49515

19 ERICA R. FRANKLIN, WSBA No. 43477

20 Assistant Attorneys General

21 800 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000

22 Seattle, WA 98104

23 (206) 464-7744

24 andrew.hughes@atg.wa.gov

25 erica.franklin@atg.wa.gov

26 CRISTINA SEPE, WSBA No. 53609

Deputy Solicitor General

1125 Washington Street SE

PO Box 40100

³ *Soto Palmer* Plaintiffs appear to suggest that any prejudice to Mr. Garcia should be ignored because Mr. Garcia was allegedly part of a plot directed by Commissioner Graves to stymie Plaintiffs' lawsuit. But this insinuation rests on scant evidence, ignores Mr. Graves' contrary testimony (see, e.g., *Soto Palmer* Dkt. #127-3 at 285:7–287:6), and is in any event irrelevant to the instant motion.

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Olympia, WA 98504-0100
(360) 753-6200
cristina.sepe@atg.wa.gov

Attorneys for Defendant State of Washington

I certify that this memorandum contains 1072 words, in compliance with the Local Civil Rules.

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DECLARATION OF SERVICE

I hereby declare that on this day I caused the foregoing document to be electronically filed with the Clerk of the Court using the Court’s CM/ECF System which will serve a copy of this document upon all counsel of record.

DATED this 1st day of March, 2023 at Seattle, Washington

s/ Andrew R.W. Hughes
ANDREW R.W. HUGHES, WSBA No. 49515
Assistant Attorney General

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