Case No. M22230001

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10	RENTAL HOUSE	NG CC	OMMITTEE
11	FOR THE CITY OF	MOU	NTAIN VIEW
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13	Elie Sfeir and Deena Donia,) (Case No. M22230001
14	Petitioners,)	
15		ý '	RESPONDENT SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF
16	v.) S	POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION AND IN
17	V.G. Investments, a California) S	SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION
18	Limited Partnership, dba Santiago Villa,)))	BECISION
19	Respondent.))]	Hearing Date: August 21, 2023
20	1) [Fime: 7:00 P.M. Location: Zoom Hearing
21 22]	Hearing Officer: The Honorable E. Alexandra DeLateur
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I. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

The owner of Santiago Villa Mobilehome Park supports the hearing officer's decision and the Rental Housing Committee's tentative decision, to the extent they are in the owner's favor. However, the owner is filing this brief to address all of the grounds for rejecting the tenants' Petition, some of which were not addressed by either the hearing officer or the tenative decision.

These proceedings arise out of a lease entered into during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when <u>no</u> rent control existed for mobilehome parks in the City of Mountain View. As a result of the pandemic, residential landlords throughout the United States were required by law to close many of their amenities, including clubhouses, swimming pools, spas, game rooms and gymnasiums. As a further result of the pandemic, the state of California severely restricted a landlord's right to evict tenants, while at the same time allowing tenants to avoid paying up to 75% of their rent.

Although federal, state and local governments enacted many laws to assist tenants, other laws were adopted to assist landlords. Of particular relevance here, the California legislature adopted a statute making it clear that landlords could not be punished for reducing access to amenities that were closed to help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. See *Civil Code Section* 1942.9(b).

Although landlords could not be sued for reducing amenities due to the pandemic, some tenants began to demand concessions, because they were paying rent for amenities that were no longer available. Although some landlords *unilaterally* reduced their rents to appease those tenants, Santiago Villa did not follow that course. Instead, Santiago Villa negotiated "concession agreements" with its tenants, which provided for a reduction in monetary consideration, but *only* if the tenant honored the remaining terms of his or her rental agreement. Under those concession agreements, both Santiago Villa and the tenants received something of value.

Approximately eight months after the pandemic began, but almost a year before rent

control was adopted in Mountain View, the Petitioners applied to upgrade the mobilehome they were renting at Santiago Villa, moving from an older two-bedroom unit to a newer threebedroom unit. Pursuant to the lease for that newer unit, their beginning rent was \$3,595 per month. At that same time, the Petitioners and the Parkowner entered into a "concession agreement," which stated that if the Petitioners did not breach their new lease, the Parkowner would accept a monetary payment of only \$2,614.55 during eleven months of the twelve-month rental period. However, that concession agreement also made clear that if the Petitioners breached their lease, they would be immediately required to pay the full \$3,595 per month, in cash, as rent.

Ten months after that new lease was entered into, the City of Mountain View adopted a rent control ordinance for mobilehome parks. That ordinance used the "rent" that was in effect on March 16, 2021 as the starting point for existing tenants. Again, of particular importance here, that ordinance specifically defined "rent" to include both monetary <u>and</u> nonmonetary consideration.

The Petitioners initiated these proceedings on November 16, 2022, claiming that their \$3,595 rent should be permanently reduced to the \$2,614.55 monetary payment they made in March of 2021, completely ignoring the nonmonetary consideration the Parkowner bargained for, and which all parties had previously agreed to value at \$980.45 per month. (\$2,614.55 + \$980.45 = \$3,595).

The City's hearing officer rejected the Petitioners' claims, finding that the Rental Housing Committee's regulations regarding "concessions" did not apply to tenancies commenced prior to March 16, 2021. However, the hearing officer did not address several of the other defenses raised by the Parkowner, including the plain language in the City's ordinance, which defines "rent" to include both monetary and non-monetary consideration.

This memorandum will demonstrate that the hearing officer properly rejected the Petitioners' claims, because the Committee's regulations regarding concessions do not apply to tenancies commenced prior to March 16, 2021. However, even if the Committee were to SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION AND IN SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION.

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reverse that finding, the Petitioners' claims must nevertheless be rejected under the rules of statutory construction, because "rent" is defined to include both "monetary and nonmonetary consideration" under the City's own ordinance.

In this light, it must also be stressed that at hearing, the tenants admitted that they had **breached** their rental agreement, by engaging in commercial activity in their mobilehome. The fact that the Petitioners' breached their agreement provides further support for the Parkowner's position, as it clearly demonstrates the Parkowner did not unilaterally lower the rent, but received valuable non-monetary consideration, which could result in the Petitioners being required to reimburse the monetary concessions they previously received.

Finally, this memorandum will demonstrate that any attempt by the City to retroactively apply a rent control ordinance in a manner that transforms a temporary rent credit provided during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic into a permanent rent reduction of almost \$1,000 per month violates the Contract Clause of the United States Constitution. Although it may be true that the hearing officer did not have the power to declare the City's rent control laws unconstitutional on their face, the hearing officer had the authority to find they were unconstitutional "as applied" to the facts of this particular case. For all of these reasons, the Petitioners' appeal must be rejected.

II. STATEMENT OF FACTS

Santiago Villa is a 358-space mobilehome park located at 1075 Space Parkway in Mountain View, California ("the Park"). It is owned by V.G. Investments, a California limited partnership ("the Parkowner"). (Exhibit A). It is managed by De Anza Properties and Maintenance, Inc., which manages residential and commercial facilities in several states, including California, Utah and Florida ("De Anza"). Maria Ahmad is responsible for managing all eight mobilehome parks in De Anza's portfolio.

Santiago Villa contains an exceptional number of amenities, including a clubhouse with an auditorium, management offices, a lounge and reading area, and a billiards room. A separate building contains a gymnasium, laundry facilities and a covered car wash. Outdoor SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION AND IN SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION. Case No. M22230001

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facilities include a swimming pool, a spa, shuffleboard courts, horseshoe pits, a barbeque and picnic area, a swing set, and even a garden where tenants can grow their own fruits and vegetables. The Rental Housing Committee is encouraged to review the photographs of the Park that were submitted at the evidentiary hearing, to fully appreciate both the quality and the quantity of the many amenities offered at Santiago Villa. (Photo Exhibits 1 through 28).

The park is located only a few blocks from an entrance to Highway 101, in close proximity to the Shoreline Amphitheater and a number of high tech firms. Google's main campus is a little more than one mile from the entrance to the Park, and can be walked to in less than 20 minutes.

At most mobilehome parks in California, the tenants own the homes they live in, and rent the underlying space from the parkowner. At Santiago Villa, tenants own the homes at approximately 247 of the 358 spaces. The remaining 111 homes are owed by the Parkowner and rented out much like apartments would be.

The rental homes at Santiago Villa come in various sizes. Some were originally manufactured in the 1970s and 1980s, while others are new, or almost new, having been installed within the past ten years. The bigger, newer homes generally rent for more than the smaller, older homes. An appraisal in 2021 estimated the fair market value for the park-owned homes at Santiago Villa ranged from \$76,800 to \$394,060. (Exhibit B, Pg. 1).

The Petitioners, Elie Sfeir and Deena Donia, have been residents at the Park since at least 2013. During 2013 and 2014, they advised De Anza that they worked at Google, and it is believed Mr. Sfeir still does. (Exhibit D). They do not own their own mobilehome, but rent from the Parkowner. Since 2013, they have rented at least four different units, each time upgrading to a newer and more desirable unit. (Exhibits B and C). Several of the key characteristics of the four units the Petitioners have rented from the Parkowner at Santiago Villa over the years are summarized as follows:

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	Unit No.	Built	Move In Date	Max Rent	Size/Bedrooms	Fair Market Value
	275	n/a	3/2013	\$1,995	2Brm	Demolished
	194	1969	3/2013	\$2,145	2Brm	\$102,600
	115	1997	5/2014	\$2,995	2Brm	\$176,800
	203	2016	11/2020	\$3,774.75	3Bdrm	\$280,800
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On February 26, 2020, the Center for Disease Control ("CDC") confirmed the first case of Community Transmission of the COVID-19 virus in California. During February and early March of 2020, the Coronavirus spread throughout the United States, and much of the world. (Exhibit E).

On March 4, 2020, Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency due to the threat posed by COVID-19, thereby prohibiting evictions of residential tenants for 30 days. (Exhibit F). See also *Penal Code Section 396(f)*. On March 16, 2020, Governor Newsom extended the prohibition against evictions until May 31, 2020, with a penalty of up to one year in jail for landlords engaged in illegal evictions. See *Executive Order N-28-20*. (Exhibit G).

On March 17, 2020, Santiago Villa advised its residents of several precautions it was taking to help limit the transmission of the virus at the Park. Those precautions included closing the clubhouse for at least four weeks, eliminating in person communication with staff, and requiring rent to be paid at a "drop box," rather than at the office. (Exhibit H). As the pandemic continued to spread across the United States, the closure of the clubhouse was extended indefinitely, with the swimming pool, spa and gym also being closed.¹

On March 18, 2020, Governor Newsom advised the President of the United States that 25 million COVID-19 cases were expected in California by May 13, 2020. (Exhibit I). On March 19, 2020, Governor Newsom issued a "stay at home" order with respect to many non-

Because the closing of residential amenities was deemed essential to public health, the California Legislature prohibited tenants from suing landlords based on the reduction or elimination of services or amenities pursuant to federal, state or local public health orders or guidelines. See *Civil Code Section 1942.9(b)*.

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essential functions in California, to try and stop the spread of COVID-19. See *Executive Order N-33-20*. (Exhibit J).

On March 23, 2020, the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court suspended jury trials throughout the state for 60 days. On April 6, 2020, the California Judicial Council amended the Rules of Court to prohibit unlawful detainer actions unless necessary to protect public health and safety. See *California Rules of Court, Emergency Rule 1*. (Exhibit K).

On May 22, 2020, the California Employment Development Department issued a report showing California's April 2020 unemployment rate had increased to 15.5%, with a loss of 2,344,700 non-farm jobs, as a "direct result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic." (Exhibit L).

On August 31, 2020, California adopted the COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act, which prevented landlords from evicting qualifying tenants who were unable to pay their rent for reasons related to COVID-19. See *AB 3088*. During the initial "transition time period," from September 1, 2020 through January 31, 2021, qualifying tenants could not be evicted if they paid 25% of their rent by January 31, 2021, *meaning landlords could be forced to accept losses equal to 75% of the agreed to rent during that time frame*. See *Code of Civil Procedure Section 1179.04(a)(6)(2)*.

As the death toll mounted, millions were laid off, while millions more began to work remotely. As conditions worsened, many people began to leave densely populated and more expensive areas such as the Bay Area, and moved to more sparsely populated and less expensive areas, both in and out of California.

Santiago Villa was not immune from any of this. To the contrary, during the course of the pandemic, the number of vacant rental homes at the Park increased from 12 units in March of 2020 to 38 units in April of 2021. (Exhibit M). As a result, the Parkowner began negotiating "concession agreements" equal to up to three months rent with some of its tenants. However, unlike many landlords, the Parkowner's concession agreements did <u>not</u> provide "free" rent. Rather, the "concession agreements" at Santiago Villa were contingent upon the tenant not

defaulting under any of the other terms of their rental agreement.

In short, although the tenants would pay less money each month, the Parkowner would also receive something of value. More specifically, for tenants who complied with the "concession agreement," Santiago Villa would receive at least 75% of the rent in the form of monetary consideration, rather than the 25% the state of California was allowing tenants to pay. Again, however, if the tenant breached his or her lease, the tenant would be required to pay 100% of their rent in the form of monetary consideration.

In May of 2020, the Petitioners advised Santiago Villa they did not want to renew their lease for another year, as they had in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Instead, they renewed their lease for only six months, even though the rent for a six-month lease was \$50 per month more than the rent for a one year lease. (Exhibit N). At that time, the Petitioners were still residing in a two bedroom unit at Space No. 115. Again, at that time there was <u>no</u> rent control for mobilehome parks in the City of Mountain View.

In or about November of 2020, the Petitioners advised management they wanted to move into a bigger, newer and far more valuable home, with three bedrooms. On November 17, 2020, the Petitioners entered into a one year rental agreement with Santiago Villa for the unit at Space No. 203, with a beginning rent of \$3,595 per month, which was almost \$350 <u>below</u> the HUD Fair Market Rent of \$3,943 for a three-bedroom unit in Santa Clara County during 2020. (Exhibit O and Exhibit P).

At that same time, the Petitioners and the Parkowner entered into an addendum, that provided for a rental concession of up to \$980.45 per month, for the eleven-month period from December 1, 2020 through October 31, 2021. (Exhibit Q). Again, however, that addendum did *not* entitle the Petitioners to \$980.45 per month in "free" rent. Rather, it was contingent upon the Petitioners not defaulting under any of the terms of their rental agreement. That addendum provided in relevant part as follows:

"In the event that the Lessee commits a default under the Rental Agreement, the Lessee hereby *agrees to reimburse the Lesser the total rent concession* provided to Lessee, immediately on demand by Lesser, and such amount due Lesser shall be deemed <u>rent</u> under the Rental Agreement." (Emphasis added). (Exhibit Q, Pg. 2).

On January 29, 2021, the state of California passed SB 91, extending the period during which qualifying tenants could not be evicted for failure to pay their rent for reasons related to COVID-19, until July 1, 2021. That bill also provided rental relief assistance from the government for qualifying tenants of up to 80% of the amount owed, *provided* the landlord agreed to waive the remaining 20% owed. See *Code of Civil Procedure Sections 1179.02*, 871.10 and 871.11, Civil Code Section 1947.3 and Health and Safety Code Section 50897.1(d).

On June 28, 2021, the state of California adopted AB 832, extending the period during which qualifying tenants could not be evicted for failure to pay rent for reasons related to COVID-19, until October 1, 2021. See *Code of Civil Procedure Section 1179.03(c)*(6).

Three months later, on September 28, 2021, the City of Mountain View adopted a Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance ("the Ordinance"). (Exhibit R). Although the Ordinance did not go into effect until October 28, 2021, the City established the "base rent" date retroactively for most tenancies to March 16, 2021, some four months <u>after</u> the Petitioners had entered into their lease for the unit at Space No. 203. Again, however, the Ordinance defined "rent" to include monetary <u>and</u> nonmonetary consideration. (Exhibit R, Pg. 4).

On or about November 16, 2022, Elie Sfeir and Deena Donia initiated these proceedings with the City of Mountain View. Although their lease was entered into ten months before the Ordinance was adopted, and four months before the March 16, 2021 "base date," the Petitioners sought to have their rent permanently reduced by more than \$900 per month, or more than \$11,000 per year. The Petitioners sought that permanent reduction even though they specifically agreed the concession would end in November of 2021. The Petitioners also sought that permanent reduction even though it would result in a rent far *below* the rent for the older, smaller two bedroom unit they had moved out of in November of 2020, and even further *below* the HUD Fair Market Rent for three bedroom units in that region. (Exhibit C and Exhibit P).

The Petitioners' claims are without merit for several reasons. In addition to the reasons set forth in the hearing officer's decision, the Petitioners have completely ignored the definition of "rent" in the Ordinance, which includes both monetary <u>and</u> nonmonetary consideration. As the Petitioners specifically agreed their promise not to default was worth \$980.45 per month, the monetary and nonmonetary consideration for Space No. 203 totaled \$3,595 per month, and not a penny less.

Next, the Petitioners' claims are contrary to the stated policy of the state of California, which does not include concessions when calculating "rent" for rent control purposes. In addition, any attempt by the City to retroactively convert a temporary rent concession into a permanent rent reduction would violate the Contract Clause of the United States Constitution, especially given the fact that the temporary rent concession would <u>not</u> have been agreed to but for the death and economic destruction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it was discovered at the hearing that the Petitioners had breached their rental agreement, by engaging in commercial activity at the park, so their right to a monetary concession no longer existed.

III. ARGUMENT

A. The Tenants' Petition is Flawed Because it Ignores the Definition of "Rent" in the City's Mobilehome Rent Stabilization Ordinance.

Issues of statutory construction present "questions of law." *Coburn v. Sieverrt* (2005) 133 Cal. App. 4th 1483, 1492. The primary rule of statutory construction is that "if the statute is plain, the courts may not go beyond it to find another meaning." *Edington v. County of San Diego* (1981) 118 Cal. App. 3d 39, 46.

Where the Legislature has employed a term in one place, but excluded it in another, it may not be implied where excluded. *Wilson v. City of Laguna Beach* (1992) 6 Cal. App. 4th 543, 554. Of particular relevance here, the courts may *not* ignore specific definitions provided by the law itself. *Faulder v. Mendocino County Bd. of Supervisors* (2006) 144 Cal. App. 4th 1362, 1371.

In this case, Section 46.2(t) of the Ordinance defines "rent" to include both monetary SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION AND IN SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION.

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payments *and* nonmonetary consideration. Section 46.2(t) provides in relevant part as follows:

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"Rent" means the sum of all periodic payments and all nonmonetary consideration provided to a Park Owner for the use and occupancy of a Mobile Home Space or a Mobile Home Landlord for the use and occupancy of a Mobile **Home...** including but not limited to, the fair market value of goods accepted, labor performed or services rendered." (Exhibit R, Pg. 4).

Even if the City could apply its law to invalidate contracts entered into before its Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance was adopted, the City cannot ignore the definition of "rent" in Section of 46.2(t) of its own ordinance. Because the total of the monetary and nonmonetary consideration for Space No. 203 was \$3,595 each and every month from December of 2020 through November of 2022, including March of 2021, the tenants' petition must be rejected.

B. Forbearance of a Right is Valuable Consideration Under California Law.

The state of California has long recognized that forbearance of a right is valuable consideration. As stated by the Court in *Healy v. Brewster* (1967) 251 Cal. App. 2d 541, 551:

> "Forbearance to make use of some legal remedy is sufficient consideration for a promise. Also forbearance to press a claim or a promise of such forbearance, may be sufficient consideration even though the claim is wholly ill founded."

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of California found that millions of tenants were in danger of losing their homes, based on their inability to pay rent. To limit the number of people losing their homes, all three branches of government worked to provide tenants with rights that had not previously existed, including (1) protection from unlawful detainer actions, (2) the right to withhold rent for up to two years, (3) immunity from late fees, and (4) mandatory landlord participation in rental assistance programs. (A summary of those rights is set forth in Appendix A to this brief; See also Exhibits Y and Z).

As a result of the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and the new burdens imposed on landlords by the state of California, Santiago Villa agreed to accept nonmonetary consideration for part of the rent, *provided* the tenants honored the remaining terms of their rental agreements. However, if a tenant did not honor the remaining terms of his or her rental SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING

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agreement, the tenant would be required to pay their rent entirely in cash, rather than partially in cash, and partially as nonmonetary consideration.

With respect to Space No. 203, the Parkowner and the Petitioners agreed that the fair market value for the rental was \$3,595 per month for the *twelve (12)* month period from November 17, 2020 through November 17, 2021. (See Exhibit O). However, the Parkowner and the Petitioners also agreed that the monetary portion of the rent would be reduced by \$980.45 per month during the *eleven (11)* month period from December 1, 2020 through October 31, 2021, *provided* the Petitioners did not default on their obligations under their rental agreement. (See Exhibit Q).

On the other hand, if the Petitioners (1) did not honor their other obligations, (2) failed to pay the monetary portion of the rent, (3) forced the Parkowner to participate in rent subsidy programs, and/or (4) vacated the premises, the Petitioners would be required to pay their entire \$3,595 rental obligation in cash, as in each of those cases the Parkowner would not have received the benefit of its bargain with the Petitioners.

At the time the November 17, 2020 rental agreement was entered into, neither party knew whether the Petitioners would honor their obligations under the rental agreement, quit their jobs, decide to move to a less populated area, vacate the premises, or take advantage of one or more of the new rights the state of California had bestowed on every residential tenant in the state.

The Petitioners did not vacate the premises or exercise any of the new rights provided to them by the state of California during the pandemic. To the contrary, the Petitioners provided monetary and/or nonmonetary compensation to the Parkowner totaling \$3,595 per month from December of 2020 through October of 2021, including in March of 2021. Although each of those payments are documented in Appendix B to this brief, the monetary and nonmonetary "rent" paid by the Petitioners during March of 2021 is also set forth here:

Month	Monetary	Nonmonetary	Total "Rent" Per
	Consideration	Consideration	Section 46.2(t)
March 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00

On November 1, 2021, the agreement to accept nonmonetary consideration for part of the rent at Space No. 203 expired. Accordingly, the Petitioners paid the entire \$3,595 rent for November of 2021, using only monetary consideration.

On or about November 17, 2021, the Parkowner and the Petitioners entered into another agreement, whereby the \$3,595 rent from December of 2021 through November 16, 2022 would be allocated \$3,295 per month to monetary consideration and \$300 per month to nonmonetary consideration. (Exhibit S). Again, however, the parties agreed that the entire rent must be paid in cash if the Petitioners breached the agreement, which they had the right to do under the new laws passed by the state of California. (See Exhibit T).

Because forbearance of those rights is valuable consideration under California law, the Petitioners' claims must be rejected. This is particularly obvious in this case, because at the hearing the Petitioners admitted to engaging in business and commercial activity in their mobilehome, in violation of their rental agreement, the park's rules and regulations, and the concession agreement. (See Exhibit O, pg. 12, ¶ 33; Exhibit CC, pg. 5 ¶ 8 and Exhibit Q).²

C. The Committee's Regulations Regarding Concessions Do Not Apply to Tenancies Commenced Prior to March 16, 2021.

As demonstrated above, where the Legislature has employed a term in one place, but excluded it in another, it may not be implied where excluded. *Wilson v. City of Laguna Beach* (1992) 6 Cal. App. 4th 543, 554. In this case, the Rental Housing Committee adopted a

The statute of limitations for breach of contract is four years. See *Code of Civil Procedure Section 337*. Although the Parkowner would prefer not to sue the Petitioners based on their breach of the rental agreement, the Parkowner reserves the right to enforce the concession agreement, should it become necessary to do so.

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Resolution on July 18, 2022, amending the definition of "Base Rent." (Exhibit U).

Part I of the amended definition applies to tenancies commenced on or before March 16, 2021, but makes <u>no</u> mention of "rent concessions." Part II applies to tenancies commenced after March 16, 2021, and attempts to provide tenants with a permanent rent reduction for rental "concessions" in tenancies commenced after that date. Under the rules of statutory construction, the provision for "concessions" in Part II of the Resolution cannot be implied or imputed to Part I of the Resolution.

In short, even if the Rental Housing Committee's treatment of "concessions" in Part II is constitutional, it could not be applied in Part I, which applies to tenancies commenced on or before March 16, 2021. Because the Petitioners' tenancy at Space No. 203 commenced in November of 2020, Part II of the July 22, 2022 Resolution simply does not apply in this case. See also *Ocean Park Associates v. Santa Monica Rent Board* (2004) 114 Cal. App. 4th 1050, 1065 ("[A]n administrative agency may not, under the guise of its rule making power . . . act beyond the powers given to it by the statute which is the source of its power.").

D. The Petitioners' Interpretation of the Ordinance and the Regulations are Contrary to California's Stated Policy Regarding Concessions.

Rental concessions have been used by landlords throughout California for decades, including in and around San Jose, Sunnyvale and Mountain View. Over the years, such concessions have taken many forms, ranging from television sets and microwave ovens to gift cards and rent credits. As the Parkowner demonstrated at the hearing, concessions are also used in mobilehome parks to enable tenants to provide services to pay all or part of their rent, including closing recreational facilities at night, picking up trash in the common areas, or citing illegally parked vehicles.

In 2019, the state of California adopted the Tenant Protection Act. See *Civil Code Section 1947.12*. That provision placed rent controls on the overwhelming majority of residential rental properties that were not already subject to some form of local rent control.

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That provision also recognized the longstanding use of rent concessions in California, specifically stating they could <u>not</u> be considered when establishing the "base rent" for annual rent increases under the Tenant Protection Act. The Tenant Protection Act addressed that issue as follows:

"[A]n owner of residential real property shall not, over the course of a twelve month period, increase the gross rental rate for a dwelling or unit more than 5 percent plus the percentage change in the cost of living, or 10 percent, whichever is lower ... In determining the lowest gross rental amount pursuant to this section, *any rent discounts, incentives, concessions, or credits* offered by the owner of such unit of residential rental property and accepted by the tenant *shall be excluded*." (Emphasis added).

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of non-essential businesses throughout the United States, with millions of essential and non-essential workers losing their jobs, and millions more allowed by their employers to work remotely. Many of those workers left the Bay Area for reasons directly related to the Coronavirus, including the search for safer and less expensive places to live and work.

The COVID-19 pandemic also resulted in a significant and unexpected increase in vacancy rates throughout the Bay Area. In order to limit an unprecedented loss of rental income at the height of the pandemic, Santiago Villa negotiated monetary concessions equal to three (3) months rent with a number of its tenants, which the tenant could take in three consecutive installments, or spread out over twelve months, *provided* the tenant did not breach his or her remaining obligations under the rental agreement.

At the time the Petitioners commenced their tenancy at Space No. 203, there was <u>no</u> rent control ordinance for mobilehome parks in Mountain View. Moreover, the policy of the state of California was to "exclude" concessions when calculating "base rent" under the Tenant Protection Act. As a result, there was no reason to believe negotiating temporary rental concessions in response to a deadly global pandemic would lead to permanent rent reductions, resulting in millions of dollars in losses. As will be demonstrated in Section F of this brief, that SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION AND IN SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION.

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fact is particularly important with respect to the Parkowner's rights under the Contract Clause of the United States Constitution.

E. Any Attempt to Set the Petitioners' Rent Based on the Amount Paid is Preempted by California Law.

Neither the City of Mountain View nor the Rental Housing Committee may adopt ordinances or regulations that are contrary to California law. See Tri-County Apartment Association v. City of Mountain View (1987) 196 Cal. App. 3d 1283, 1293-1294.

The Rental Housing Committee has adopted a Resolution, purporting to establish the base rent based on the amount "paid by the Mobile Home Owner or Mobile Tenant." (Exhibit U, Pg. 3). As demonstrated above, that section of the Resolution does not apply in this case, because the Petitioners' tenancy at Space No. 203 commenced prior to March 16, 2021. However, even if that Section applied to the Petitioners, it would clearly be unconstitutional, because California law allows landlords to either evict tenants who do not pay their rent, or sue them for breach of contract. See Civil Code Section 798.56(e) and Code of Civil Procedure *Sections 337* and *1161*.

If the Committee's Resolution was valid, any tenant who did not pay "rent" in March of 2021 would have a "base rent" of \$0.00, and would be entitled to live at Santiago Villa rent free in perpetuity, immune from any action for unlawful detainer, breach of contract, or even an inflationary rent increase, as multiplying \$0.00 by the Consumer Price Index would result in a \$0.00 rent increase. Of course, this would be true for all tenants who did not pay their rent in March of 2021, regardless of whether they were impacted by COVID-19.³

Such a policy would not only be preempted by California law, it would result in a

According to the California Department of Housing and Community Development ("HCD"), more than 271,000 households had applied for COVID-19 rental relief as of February of 2022, receiving more than \$2.7 billion in assistance, with more than \$30 million going to tenants in Santa Clara County. (See Exhibit V, Pgs. 1 and 12).

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taking under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution. *Kaiser Aetna v. United States*, (1979) 444 U.S. 164, 179-180. See also *Cedar Point Nursery v. Hassid* (2021) 141 S. Ct. 2063, 2072-2074, 2077-2078. Accordingly, the Committee must reject any claim that the Petitioners' rent may be determined by the dollar amount "paid," as opposed to the *total* of the monetary *and* nonmonetary consideration agreed to by the Parkowner and the Petitioners. *Ocean Park Associates v. Santa Monica Rent Board* (2004) 114 Cal. App. 4th 1050, 1065 ("[A]n administrative agency may not, under the guise of its rule making power.").

F. Any Attempt to Convert a Temporary Concession Agreed to Prior to the Adoption of Rent Control into a Permanent Rent Reduction is Unconstitutional.

The Contract Clause of the United States Constitution provides that "No state shall . . . pass any . . . law impairing the obligation of contracts." *U.S. Const., Art. I, Section 10.*Although many exceptions to the Contract Clause have been carved out since 1787, the Supreme Court continues to recognize that if it is to have meaning, "it must be understood to impose *some* limits upon the power of a State to abridge existing contractual relationships, even in the exercise of its otherwise legitimate police power." *Allied Structural Steel Co. v. Spannaus*, 438 U.S. 234, 242 (1978). (Emphasis in original).

In *Allied Structural Steel*, the Supreme Court held that the government's attempt to retroactively transform a temporary pension plan into a permanent pension plan violated the Contract Clause. In making that determination, the Court found that the government's attempted transformation of the pension plan could not be allowed for the following reasons:

"The law was not even purportedly enacted to deal with a broad, generalized economic or social problem. [citation omitted]. It did not operate in an area already subject to state regulation at the time the company's contractual obligations were originally undertaken, but invaded an area never before subject to regulation by the State. [citation omitted]. It did not effect simply a <u>temporary</u> alteration of the contractual relationships of those within its coverage, but worked a severe, <u>permanent</u> and immediate change in those

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relationships — irrevocably and retroactively. [citations omitted]. And its narrow aim was leveled, not at every employer . . . but only at those who had in the past been sufficiently enlightened as voluntarily to agree to establish pension plans for their employees." (*Id.* at 250). (Emphasis added).

In this case, the Parkowner's agreement to allow the rent to be paid with both monetary and nonmonetary consideration did <u>not</u> create a social or economic problem. To the contrary, that agreement helped <u>cure</u> social and economic problems brought about by a global pandemic, that caused many tenants to leave the Bay Area, and many more to experience a temporary decrease or loss of income.

Second, there was <u>no</u> rent control for mobilehome parks in Mountain View at the time the rental agreement was entered into, let alone a law prohibiting nonmonetary consideration. Moreover, when the City of Mountain View adopted rent control in September of 2021, it specifically defined "rent" to include both monetary <u>and</u> nonmonetary consideration.

Third, any attempt to include concessions when determining the "base rent" for parkowned mobilehomes would not be consistent with California law regarding concessions. In fact, such an attempt would directly contradict the policy set forth in the Tenant Protection Act, which specifically excludes concessions when determining base rent for purposes of calculating annual rent increases.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, although the Parkowner's agreement to allow part of the rent to be paid by nonmonetary consideration was clearly designed to provide a temporary contractual benefit, the Petitioners are asking the City to turn it into *a permanent and significant contractual benefit*, which would impact the income produced by park-owned homes at Santiago Villa for years to come.

For example, if the Petitioners remain at Space No. 203 for ten years, a permanent \$980.45 loss in monetary consideration would result in a loss of income of at least \$117,654, and a loss in value with a .06 capitalization rate of at least \$196,000. This is particularly

important here, because since the outbreak of COVID-19, the two Mountain View mobilehome parks managed by De Anza have provided tenants with concessions totaling more than \$575,000.

Depending on whether the capitalization rate is .04, .05, or .06, converting those temporary concessions into permanent rent reductions could would result in millions of dollars in losses in fair market value at those two properties, calculated as follows:

Park	Concessions	.04 Capitalization Rate	.06 Capitalization Rate
Santiago Villa	\$298,741.86	\$7,468,547	\$4,979,031
Sahara Village	\$276,720.30	\$6,913,675	\$4,612,005
Total	\$575,462.16	\$14,382,222	\$9,591,036

Finally, as in *Allied Structural Steel*, the City's regulations are <u>not</u> aimed at all of the rentals in all of the mobilehome parks in Mountain View. They are aimed only at nonmonetary consideration in excess of one month's rent, which was provided almost entirely, if not exclusively, by the two mobilehome parks managed by De Anza, resulting in a violation of the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. *Armendariz v. Penman* (9th Cir 1996) 75 F. 3d 1311, 1326; *Sierra Lake Reserve v. City of Rocklin* (9th Cir. 1991) 938 F. 2d 951, 957-958.

G. The Hearing Officer and the Rental Housing Committee Have the Authority to Determine Whether the Law Has Been Applied in a Manner that is Unconstitutional.

The hearing officer found she did not have the authority to declare the City's regulations unconstitutional, even if the requested roll-back resulted in a violation of the Parkowner's constitutional rights. Although it may be true that an administrative agency cannot declare a law unconstitutional on its face, administrative agencies can prevent a law from being applied in a manner that results in the denial of a constitutional rights. In fact, that happens all the time in rent control proceedings.

More specifically, the owners of rent controlled properties have a constitutional right to a fair return on investment. *Birkenfeld v. City of Berkeley* (1976) 17 Cal. 3d 129, 165. As a result, administrative agencies regularly conduct hearings to determine whether a particular property is generating a fair return, based on a number of factors, including expert testimony. *Whispering Pines Mobilehome Park, Ltd. v. City of Scotts Valley* (1986) 180 Cal. App. 3d 152, 160-161. Just as an administrative agency has the authority to determine whether a rent control ordinance has been applied in a manner that deprives an owner of its constitutional right to a fair return, administrative agencies may determine whether an ordinance has been applied in a manner that deprives an owner of its constitutional rights under the Contract Clause.

H. The Parkowner and De Anza Reserve All of Their Rights, Including Their Right to Enforce the Concession Addendum at Any Space at Santiago Villa or Sahara Village Where Tenants Have Defaulted on Their Lease.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in death and severe physical, emotional and economic harm to millions of Americans, including the owners of Santiago Villa and Sahara Village. During that period, De Anza worked tirelessly to prevent tenants from being evicted, even though some of them were thousands of dollars behind in their rent, with one tenant being more than \$57,000 in arrears. During that same period, De Anza negotiated rent concessions with dozens of tenants, totaling more than \$575,000. Of course, De Anza also took steps to limit the spread of the Coronavirus, while at the same time endeavoring to restore amenities and services as soon as it was safe to do so. (Exhibit W).

Like the overwhelming majority of people throughout this Country, and all around the world, the Parkowner and De Anza would prefer to put the pandemic behind them. Unfortunately, the Petitioners are attempting to take advantage of the temporary monetary concessions that were agreed to because of COVID-19, to obtain permanent and unwarranted windfalls, which could result in years of costly, stressful and time consuming litigation for all concerned, including dozens of other tenants in Mountain View. As demonstrated above, the

Petitioners are doing this, while simultaneously ignoring (1) the non-monetary consideration the Parkowner bargained for, and (2) the admitted breach of their concession agreement with the Parkowner.

As the potential financial losses for Santiago Villa and Sahara Village could total millions of dollars, the Parkowner and De Anza must reserve all of their rights, including their right to enforce the concession addendum against any resident who has breached his or her rental agreement at any time since the pandemic began. Although the Parkowner would prefer not to become involved in breach of contract or unlawful detainer proceedings with respect to each of its tenants who breached the concession agreement by not paying the full amount owing, or engaging in commercial activity in their mobilehome, the Parkowner must reserve that right, because literally millions of dollars could be at stake should the Petitioners continue to pursue their claims.

In this light, it must be noted that the hearing officer attempted to adjudicate the Parkowner's potential claims against the Petitioners, based on their breach of their rental agreement. As the California Supreme Court made clear long ago, rent control agencies do <u>not</u> have jurisdiction to adjudicate "a landlord's common law counterclaims . . . against a tenant," because doing so would violate the judicial powers clause of the California Constitution. *McHugh v. Santa Monica Rent Control Board* (1989) 49 Cal. 3d 348, 374-375.

This is especially true where, as here, (1) the Parkowner did not file a cross complaint against the Petitioners, (2) the Petitioners' breach was not discovered until the hearing on the merits, and (3) the hearing officer allowed the Petitioners to refuse to answer additional questions concerning their breach. Again, although the Parkowner would prefer not to become involved in a breach of contract action with the Petitioners, the Parkowner reserves all of its rights, and objects in the strongest possible terms to the hearing officer's attempt to adjudicate that potential claim.

I. The Parkowner Was Legally Entitled to Increase the Rent by 5% Effective November 17, 2022.

Under Sections 46.5 and 46.6 of the Ordinance, parkowners are entitled to increase rents once each year, beginning on September 1, 2022. According to those same Sections, those rent increases are based on the percentage change in Consumer Price Index for the San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward Region, All Urban Consumers, from February to February, with a minimum increase of 2% and a maximum increase of 5%.

The Consumer Price Index increased by 5.2% between February of 2021 and February of 2022, from 304.387 to 320.195. Because 5.2% is more than 5%, the Parkowner was entitled to increase the rent at Space No. 203 by 5%. Accordingly, the Petitioners' rent was increased to \$3,774.75, effective November 17, 2022. (Exhibit X).

Because both the state and federal government have indicated the pandemic is over, and because most of the COVID-19 programs for landlords and tenants have ended, the Parkowner is no longer accepting nonmonetary consideration as part of the rent for Space No. 203. As a result, the Petitioners must now pay their rent entirely with monetary consideration, at the rate of \$3,774.74 per month.

IV. CONCLUSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic the state of California provided tenants with many rights that did not previously exist, including protection from unlawful detainer actions, the right to withhold rent for up to two years, immunity from late fees, and mandatory landlord participation in rental assistance programs. (See Exhibits Y and Z). As a result of those new rights, landlords were faced with the potential for crippling economic losses, plus increased expenditures for attorneys' fees and management expenses.

In an attempt to avoid the negative consequences of COVID-19 and the losses associated with California's new laws, the Parkowner agreed to *temporarily* reduce the monetary component of the Petitioners' "rent," provided the Petitioners did not breach the

remaining terms of their rental agreements. At the time the Parkowner entered into that agreement, there was **no** rent control for mobilehome parks in the City of Mountain View.

The City did not adopt rent control for mobilehome parks until September of 2021, long after the Parkowner began agreeing to concessions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, the Petitioners, who are young and well paid employees in the tech industry, are attempting to convert those temporary concessions into permanent rent reductions, potentially exposing the Parkowner to millions of dollars in losses.

In attempting to obtain an unwarranted windfall, the Petitioners have ignored the fact that the Ordinance defines "rent" to include monetary and nonmonetary consideration. Because the parties agreed that the monetary and nonmonetary consideration for Space No. 203 would total \$3,595 per month, the Petitioners' claims must be rejected. This is especially true because any attempt by the City to retroactively convert those concessions into permanent rent reductions would not only be contrary the Ordinance and the guidelines, it would violate Californian public policy, and the Contract Clause of the United States Constitution

For all of the above reasons, the hearing officer's decision must be affirmed and the Petitioners' claims regarding the "rent" at Space No. 203 must be rejected.

Dated: August 16, 2023

Respectfully submitted.

/s/ Anthony C. Rodriguez Anthony C. Rodriguez Attorney for the Respondent

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OFFICER'S DECISION AND IN SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION.

SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING

APPENDIX A (Timeline of COVID-19 Pandemic and New Procedures Established by the State of California

2	and New Procedures Established by the State of California)
3	February 26, 2020: CDC confirms first case of Community Transmission of COVID-19 virus
4	in California.
5	March 4, 2020: Governor Newsom declares a state of emergency in California due to the
6	threat posed by COVID-19.
7	March 16, 2020: Governor Newsom extends the prohibition against evictions in California
8	under Penal Code Section 396(f) until May 31, 2020, with a penalty of up to one year in jail
9	for landlords engaged in illegal evictions. See <i>Executive Order N-28-20</i> .
0	March 17, 2020: Santiago Villa implements COVID-19 safety measures, including closing the
1	clubhouse and terminating in person contact with staff.
2	March 18, 2020: Governor Newsom advises the President of the United States that 25 million
3	COVID-19 cases are expected in California by May 13, 2020.
4	March 19, 2020: Governor Newsom issues a "stay at home" order with respect to many non-
5	essential functions in California, to stop the spread of COVID-19. See Executive Order N-33-
6	20.
.7	March 23, 2020: The Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court suspends jury trials in
8	California for 60 days, due to COVID-19.
9	April 6, 2020: The California Judicial Council amends the California Rules of Court to
20	prohibit unlawful detainer actions unless necessary to protect public health and safety. See
21	California Rules of Court, Emergency Rule 1.
22	May 22, 2020: California Employment Development Department issues a report showing
23	California's April 2020 unemployment rate increased to 15.5%, with a loss of 2,344,700 non-
24	farm jobs, as a "direct result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic."
25	August 31, 2020: AB 3088 - COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act prevents landlords from evicting
6	qualifying tenants who are unable to pay their rent for reasons related to COVID-19. During

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SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING

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rent through the California COVID-19 Rent Relief Program.

1	March 31, 2022: AB 2179 - Extends the period by which qualifying tenants cannot be evicted
2	through June 30, 2022, provided there is a pending application for rental assistance on file
3	under the California COVID-19 Rent Relief Program. See Code of Civil Procedure Section
4	1179.03.
5	October 12, 2022: The rent for Space No. 203 is increased by 5% effective November 17,
6	2022, from \$3,595 to \$3,774.75, pursuant to Section 46.5 and other provisions of the City of
7	Mountain View Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance.
8	November 16, 2022: Elie Sfeir and Deena Donia initiate these proceedings with the City of
9	Mountain View.
10	December 4, 2022: As of December 4, 2022, approximately 96,614 people in California had
11	died due to COVID-19. (Exhibit AA).
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APPENDIX B

Rent for Space No. 203 (Monetary and Nonmonetary Consideration)

Month	Monetary Consideration	Nonmonetary Consideration	Total "Rent" Per Section 46.2(t)
11/17/20-11/30/20	\$1,677.67 (14 days)	\$0.00	\$1,677.67
December 2020	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
January 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
February 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
March 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
April 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
May 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
June 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
July 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
August 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
September 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
October 2021	\$2,614.55	\$980.45	\$3,595.00
November 2021	\$3,595.00	\$0.00	\$3,595.00
December 2021	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
January 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
February 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
March 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
April 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
May 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
June 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
July 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
August 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
September 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00
October 2022	\$3,295.00	\$300.00	\$3,595.00

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1	11/1/22-11/16/22	\$1,757.28 (16 days)	\$160.00	\$1,917.28 (16 days)
2	11/17/22-11/30/22*	\$1,761.55 (14 days)	\$0.00	\$1,761.55 (14 days)
3	November 2022	\$3,518.83 (30 days)	\$160.00	\$3,678.83 (30 days)
4	December 2022	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
5	January 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
	February 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
6	March 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
7	April 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
8	May 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
9	June 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
0	July 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
1	August 2023	\$3,774.75	\$0.00	\$3,774.75
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* On October 12, 2022, the rent for Space No. 203 was increased by 5% effective November 17, 2022, from \$3,595 to \$3,774.75, pursuant to Section 46.5 and other provisions of the City of Mountain View Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance. As the Park's amenities are once again accessible, and as many of the rights granted to tenants by the state of California due to the pandemic have expired, the Parkowner is no longer accepting nonmonetary consideration as rent for either mobilehomes or mobilehome spaces at the park, except in those few cases where tenants provide operational services at the Park, such as closing the recreational facilities at night. See also *Civil Code Section 1942.9(b)*.

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Case No. M22230001 1 2 PROOF OF SERVICE BY MAILING 3 I declare I am employed in the County of Alameda, California. I am over the age of 18 4 years and I am not a party to the within cause. My business address is 1425 Leimert Boulevard, Suite 101, Oakland, California 94602. 5 On August 16, 2023 I served the following document(s): 6 7 1. RESPONDENT SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION AND 8 IN SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION 9 on the following by placing a true copy thereof enclosed in a sealed envelope with postage thereon fully paid, in the United States mail at Oakland, California, addressed as 10 follows: 11 Elie Sfeir Deena Donia 12 1075 Space Park Way, Space No. 203 Mountain View, California 94043 13 I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on 14 August 16, 2023 at Oakland, California. 15 16 /s/ Anthony C. Rodriguez By: Anthony C. Rodriguez 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 SANTIAGO VILLA'S MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF HEARING 27 OFFICER'S DECISION AND IN SUPPORT OF TENTATIVE DECISION. Case No. M22230001