

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND ETHICS COMMISSION**

**In re: Tia Ristaino-Siegel,  
Respondent**

**Complaint No. 2016-10**

**ORDER**

This matter having been heard before the Rhode Island Ethics Commission on September 13, 2016, pursuant to Commission Regulation 1011, and the Commission having considered the Complaint herein, the arguments of the parties, and the proposed Information Resolution and Settlement, which is incorporated by reference herein, it is hereby

**ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED**

THAT, the Commission approves the Informal Resolution and Settlement as submitted;

THAT, the Commission incorporates by reference herein the Findings of Fact and Admissions, and the Conclusions of Law, set forth in the Informal Resolution and Settlement;

THAT, the Respondent violated Rhode Island General Laws § 36-14-16;

THAT, the Respondent is ordered to pay a civil penalty in the amount of Two Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$250.00).

ENTERED as an Order of this Commission,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson

Dated: September 13, 2016

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
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In re: Tia Ristaino-Siegel,  
Respondent

Complaint No. 2016-10

**INFORMAL RESOLUTION AND SETTLEMENT**

The Respondent, Tia Ristaino-Siegel, and the Rhode Island Ethics Commission (“Commission”) hereby agree to a resolution of the above-referenced matter as follows:

**I. FINDINGS OF FACT & ADMISSIONS**

**A. Financial Disclosure Statement**

1. The Respondent was elected to the Central Falls City Council (“City Council”) in November 2013 and has served continuously in said capacity.

2. As a municipal elected official during calendar year 2015, the Respondent was required to file a 2015 Financial Disclosure Statement with the Commission on or before April 29, 2016.

3. During calendar year 2015, the Respondent served as Secretary of the Central Falls Public Library, a non-profit corporation located in Central Falls, Rhode Island.

4. The Respondent failed to disclose her position as Secretary of the Central Falls Public Library on her 2015 Financial Disclosure Statement (“2015 Statement”), as required by Rhode Island General Laws § 36-14-17(b)(6).

5. On August 18, 2016, the Respondent presented at the Commission’s Office to amend her 2015 Statement to reflect her position as “Vice Chair” of the Central Falls Public Library. Subsequently, on September 7, 2016, the Respondent again presented to the Commission’s Office to amend her 2015 Statement to reflect her actual position as Secretary of

the Central Falls Public Library.<sup>1</sup>

**B. Voting to Appropriate Funds to the Public Library**

1. In 2010, the City of Central Falls (“City”) entered into receivership. In 2011, the State Appointed Receiver for the City filed for bankruptcy protection, resulting in the closure of the Central Falls Public Library.

2. For a short time thereafter, a group of volunteers reopened and operated the Central Falls Public Library. Then, on December 13, 2011, the Central Falls Public Library became incorporated as a non-profit entity governed by a three-member Board of Directors.

3. In April 2013, the State Appointed Receiver and the Central Falls Public Library executed a Memorandum of Understanding (“MOA”) under which the City agreed to budget for and make fixed annual appropriations to the Central Falls Public Library.

4. In January 2016, the Central Falls Public Library merged with the Board of Trustees of the Adams Public Library. Pursuant to the merger, the Board of Trustees of the Adams Public Library ceased to exist as a separate entity and the Central Falls Public Library continued its existence as the “Adams Public Library.”

5. The Respondent served as Secretary of the Central Falls Public Library in 2015 and, subsequent to the merger, as Vice President of the Adams Public Library in 2016.

6. At a Special Council Meeting held on May 31, 2016, the City Council, including the Respondent, voted on the Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Operating Budget Ordinance for the City, which included a line-item appropriation of \$118,825.00 to the Adams Public Library.

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<sup>1</sup> The Respondent’s initial amendment to her 2015 Statement was based on the position that she held with the Central Falls Public Library during the fiscal versus calendar year. The Respondent’s new position will be reflected in her 2016 Statement, which will be filed in 2017.

7. Although a line-item appropriation to the Adams Public Library appeared in the Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Operating Budget Ordinance, the City Council voted on the budget as a whole and not on any individual line items.

8. The City Council does not have any discretionary authority with respect to the amount of appropriations to be made to the Adams Public Library, which is fixed and established pursuant to the terms of the MOA.

**C. Use of Municipal Email**

1. The Respondent is a candidate for the Office of Mayor of Central Falls in the November 2016 general election.

2. Following her declaration of candidacy for mayor, the Respondent was contacted by the editor and owner of “America News En Español,” a Latino newspaper based in Rhode Island with coverage throughout New England, requesting that the Respondent draft a formal announcement of her campaign for publication in the editor’s newspaper.

3. In August 2016, the Respondent, utilizing her personal email address, emailed her draft announcement to the editor. However, in the text of her email, she provided her municipal email address to be included in the published announcement.

4. Shortly thereafter, a Spanish language article appeared in “America News En Español” that announced the Respondent’s mayoral campaign and contained the Respondent’s municipal email address as a point of contact.

5. The Respondent represents that she was not aware that listing her municipal email contact information in a news article regarding her mayoral campaign would constitute a violation of the Code of Ethics. She further represents that she only utilized her municipal email address in relation to her mayoral campaign in the aforesaid news article. The Respondent also represents

that, excluding said news article, she has used her personal email address for all her communications. See Respondent's Affidavit attached hereto.

## **II. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

### **A. Financial Disclosure**

1. As a municipal elected official, the Respondent was, at all relevant times, subject to the financial disclosure mandate of Rhode Island General Laws § 36-14-16.

2. The Respondent failed to disclose her position as Secretary of the Central Falls Public Library on her 2015 Statement, in violation of Rhode Island General Laws § 36-14-16.

### **B. Voting to Appropriate Funds to the Public Library**

1. As a municipal elected official, the Respondent was, at all relevant times, subject to the Rhode Island Code of Ethics in Government, pursuant to Rhode General Laws § 36-14-4(1).

2. The Ethics Commission concludes that the Respondent's participation in the City Council's May 31, 2016 vote on the Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Operating Budget Ordinance, which included a non-discretionary line-item appropriation of \$118,825.00 to the Adams Public Library pursuant to the MOA, did not constitute a violation of § 36-14-5(a) & (d).

### **C. Use of Municipal Email**

1. As a municipal elected official, the Respondent was, at all relevant times, subject to the Rhode Island Code of Ethics in Government, pursuant to Rhode General Laws § 36-14-4(1).

2. The Ethics Commission concludes that the Respondent's use of her municipal email address in a news article in "America News En Español" regarding her mayoral campaign did not constitute a knowing & willful violation of § 36-14-5(a) & (d).

## **III. SETTLEMENT**

Pursuant to the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the parties hereby agree,

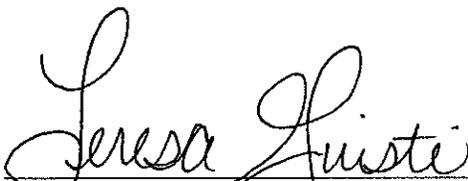
subject to the approval of the Commission, to the following, pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws § 36-14-13(d) and Commission Regulation 1011:

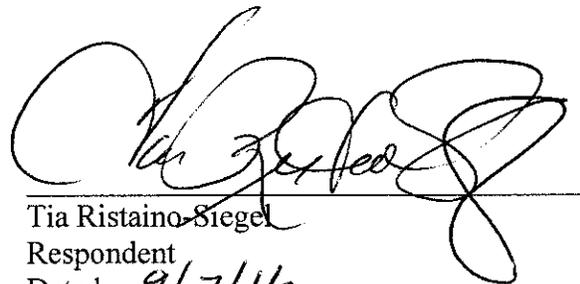
1. The Commission shall enter an Order and Judgment that the Respondent's failure to make the required disclosure on her 2015 Statement filed with the Commission violated Rhode Island General Laws § 36-14-16.

2. The Respondent agrees that, pursuant to the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the Prosecution will recommend the imposition of a civil penalty in the amount of Two Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$250.00). The Respondent agrees to the payment of said civil penalty.

3. Further, the Respondent agrees that she will refrain from utilizing any public resources including, but not limited to, her municipal email address, in furtherance of her mayoral campaign, consistent with § 36-14-5(a) & (d).

4. The above terms represent the full and complete Informal Resolution and Settlement for Complaint No. 2016-10.

  
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Teresa Giusti, Esq. (Bar No. 8006)  
Commission Prosecutor  
Dated: 9/7/16

  
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Tia Ristaino-Siegel  
Respondent  
Dated: 9/7/16