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DFEH Files Sexual Harassment Lawsuit Against Venture Capital Partnership

Case against Silicon Valley Growth Syndicate and partners is first to be filed by State under new legal authority

Sacramento - The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) has filed a sexual harassment lawsuit in San Francisco County against the Silicon Valley Growth Syndicate Fund I, L.P., Silicon Valley Growth Syndicate I, L.L.C., International Direct Marketing Consultants, Inc., Lee W. McNutt, William Bunker, and Russell Lewis.

The civil complaint alleges that Lee William McNutt, a co-founder of the Silicon Valley Growth Syndicate, employed a woman identified in the complaint as Jane Doe to further the interests of the Syndicate. The complaint further alleges that during her employment, McNutt used his position of power to sexually harass her. In one alleged incident, during official travel to an investor meeting in La Jolla, California, McNutt exposed himself to her and touched her without her consent. The DFEH alleges the conduct constitutes sexual harassment prohibited by the Fair Employment and Housing Act and California Civil Code section 51.9.

Civil Code section 51.9 prohibits sexual harassment in business, service, and professional relationships. This is the first lawsuit brought by the DFEH under Civil Code section 51.9 since it obtained the authority to do so on January 1, 2019.

“The California legislature has recognized that people in business, service, and professional relationships, including those involving investors, have the right to be free from harassment,” said DFEH Director Kevin Kish. “DFEH is committed to eradicating such conduct.”

Associate Chief Counsels Melanie Proctor and Andrew Huang and Staff Counsel Martha Gomez represent DFEH in this matter. The case is *Department of Fair Employment and Housing v. Silicon Valley Growth Syndicate I, L.L.C., et al.*, Case No. CGC19577178.

The DFEH is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. The mission of the DFEH is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit the DFEH's web site at www.dfeh.ca.gov.

