1	1	FILED				
2		MAR 16 2022				
3		NOCONA SOBOLESKI, CLERK OF COURT UPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA				
4		COUNTY OF KINGS DEPUTY				
5		Jake withing				
6	SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF KINGS					
7						
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10	10					
11	In re Application of No. 21W0033A					
12	ADORA DANYEL PEREZ,	G PETITION FOR				
13	Petitioner. WRIT OF HABEAS					
14	14					
15	for Writ of Habeas Corpus.					
16						
17	On February 19, 2021, Petitioner ADORA DANYEL PEREZ ("Petitioner") filed a					
18	petition for writ of habeas corpus claiming ineffective assistance					
19	 knowing, voluntary, and intelligent waiver of rights and plea in K Case No. 18CM0021 ("Criminal Case"). Specifically, Petitioner 	• • •				
20						
21	advise Petitioner of a meritorious defense and took no st	advise Petitioner of a meritorious defense and took no steps to dismiss a				
22	the incorrect legal assumption on which the murder charge	ge rested; and (C) failed to				
23	advise Petitioner that a murder conviction requires proof					
24	doubt that she knew her conduct endangered the life of her fetus;					
25	2. That appointed counsel (Melina Benninghoff, Esq					
26	Motion to Withdraw Plea, the legal impossibility of a murder conviction arising from the facts alleged in the Criminal Case; and,					
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	RULING GRANTING PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS					

3. That appellate counsel (Michele Douglass, Esq.) failed to challenge the validity of the plea on direct appeal.

The petition prays as follows: "1. Issue a writ of habeas corpus, reverse petitioner's conviction, and/or issue an order to show cause why this Court should not reverse petitioner's conviction; [¶] 2. Grant whatever further relief this Court finds appropriate in the interests of justice." (Petition, 20.)

On June 28, 2021, an Order to Show Cause issued in this case. The Return to the Petition was filed on July 21, 2021. The Traverse was filed on August 20, 2021.

On September 20, 2021, an Order Re: Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus issued. In addition to the fact that the Order requested additional briefing by the parties, it determined that an evidentiary hearing would be required in connection with this matter.

On October 20, 2021, an Amended Order Re: Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus was filed. The Amended Order retained the finding of the court that an evidentiary hearing and additional briefing would be required in connection with Petitioner's request for habeas corpus relief.

On November 29, 2021, a Second Amended Order Re: Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus was filed. The Second Amended Order changes only the date of the scheduled Case Management Conference.

Between September 20, 2021 and December 20, 2021, all parties submitted briefs addressing those issues raised in the Orders Re: Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus.

On December 20, 2021, a Case Management Conference was conducted in connection with the hearing of the Petition. At the Conference, the court asked the parties to address the impact, *if any*, of the recent decision issued by the Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, Division Three in *People v. Richardson* (2021) 65 Cal. App. 5th 360.¹ In *Richardson*, the court held that the prosecution should not have offered, and the trial court should not have accepted, defendant's plea to human trafficking of a minor for a sex act, in

Although not binding upon this tribunal, it is worth noting that in a January 4, 2022 unpublished decision, the California Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District, cited to the *Richardson* decision for the following propositions: "The trial court need not obtain an element-by-element factual basis but need only obtain a prima facie factual basis for the plea" and "[t]o prevail on his claim, defendant would essentially need to show factual or legal impossibility . . ." (*People v. Picazo*, 2022 Cal. App. Unpub. LEXIS 29, 34-35.)

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violation of California Penal Code section 236.1(c)(1), when the actual age of the victim (26 years old) made the negotiated plea factually impossible. According to the *Richardson* Court, it is an abuse of discretion for the trial court to accept a guilty plea based upon a stipulation of defense counsel to a factual impossibility. (*Id.* at p. 372-373.)

Respondent's Supplemental Brief was filed January 18, 2022. On February 7, 2022, Petitioner filed her Reply to Respondent's Supplemental Brief.

On February 22, 2022, Petitioner and Respondent appeared through their counsel of record and presented oral arguments on the *Richardson* issue as summarized above. The court took the *Richardson* issue under consideration and set an evidentiary hearing date of April 8, 2022. The court informed all counsel that if the court's ruling on the *Richardson* issue rendered moot the remaining issues in the case and/or negated the need of the court to conduct an evidentiary hearing in this matter, the April 8, 2022 hearing would be vacated. The court stated to counsel that its ruling on the *Richardson* issue would be issued by March 17, 2022.

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Underlying Criminal Case

From the court's review of the Criminal Case record, it appears that on May 26, 2018, the Kings County District Attorney filed an amended complaint that charged Petitioner with murder of a fetus (Cal. Pen. Code §187(a) [Count 1]) and voluntary manslaughter (Cal. Pen. Code §192(a)) [Count 2]). Petitioner entered a plea in the Criminal Case to the voluntary manslaughter charge in exchange for dismissal of Count 1. In connection with the plea, the following exchange occurred between the court and the parties:

> The Court: . . . The first thing I want to make sure we all understand is the basis for the plea. And what the People are saying is that -- and your attorney is saying is that you are going to enter a plea under People vs. West. [¶] As I understand the reason for that is Count 1 is a murder conviction for which you can be sentenced to 15 years to life in prison, 25 to life if they find it was willful, deliberate, and premeditated. And that you want to plead guilty to the voluntary manslaughter even though the facts may not support that plea because you want to avoid the possibility of getting that life sentence on the murder case because of the death of your fetus. Is that what's happening?

The Defendant: Yes, sir.

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1	subparagraph (a) is a voluntary mansiaughter which is punishable by a low				
2	term of 3 years, a middle term of 6 years, and an upper term of 11 years in the state prison, and there's no agreement as to what that sentence would b				
3	And it could be that 3 years, that 6 years, or it could be 11 years. Do you				
4	understand that?				
5	The Defendant: Yes, sir.				
6					
7	The Court: Ms. Perez, how do you plead in the First Amended Complaint to Count 2 that on or about December 31st, 2017, you committed a felony violation of Penal Code Section 192 subparagraph (a), commonly called voluntary				
8	manslaughter, in that you did unlawfully and without malice kill a confidential				
9	victim, a human being, upon sudden quarrel in a heat of passion. How do you plead to that?				
10	(Private conversation had between the defendant and her counsel.)				
11	The Defendant: No contest.				
12	* * *				
13	The Court: And you are entering this plea even though you are not really guilty of Count 2, factually you can't be, but you are entering into that plea to avoid the				
14	conviction in Count 1; is that correct?				
15	(Private conversation had between the defendant and her counsel.)				
16	The Defendant: Yes, sir.				
17	The Court: And is there a factual basis that would have been presented as to Count				
18	1?				
19	Mr. Stover: Your Honor, had this matter proceeded to trial, the People would have				
20	provided evidence that Ms. Perez presented at Hanford Community Hospital on December 31st, 2017. She was pregnant with an unborn child. When the				
21	child was eventually delivered, the child was stillborn. The primary contributing factors to the child's death were asphyxiation from a placental				
22	detachment and a toxic level of methamphetamine within the fetus. Those were both based on Ms. Perez's admitted use of methamphetamine during				
23	the term of the pregnancy and were the primary contributing factors to the				
24	death of the fetus.				
25	The Court: Is that what happened, Ms. Perez?				
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28	RULING GRANTING PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS				
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The Defendant: Yes, sir.²

Petitioner filed a Motion to Withdraw Plea on May 29, 2018. In a supporting declaration, Petitioner alleged that good cause existed to withdraw her plea because she did not understand the change of plea proceeding and was unaware that she entered a no contest plea. She also alleged that her appointed counsel did not investigate the possible causes of her baby's death or discuss any potential defenses with her.

On June 15, 2018, Petitioner's Motion to Withdraw Plea was denied. Petitioner was thereafter sentenced to the aggravated term of eleven (11) years. On appeal, and in response to a brief filed pursuant to *People v. Wende* (1972) 25 Cal. 3d 436, the judgment in the Criminal Case was affirmed in all respects relevant herein.³ The factual background adopted on appeal, is as follows:

10 On December 31, 2017, at 12:37 a.m., a Hanford police officer was dispatched to Adventist Medical Center regarding a suspicious, full-term birth of a stillborn baby to 11 Perez earlier that night. The baby's placenta had detached from the uterine lining, 12 which is extremely common in mothers who habitually use methamphetamine. After being advised that the stillbirth may have resulted from illegal drug abuse, the officer 13 learned from a sheriff's deputy that Perez admitted she used methamphetamine during her pregnancy. Based on physical signs the baby exhibited, a doctor 14 estimated that the baby died between 12 and 18 hours earlier. The doctor believed the baby died from extensive drug use by Perez and he advised the officer that 15 Perez tested positive for methamphetamine and THC. A review of Perez's medical 16 records was conducted, and it disclosed that in prior visits, Perez had several positive tests for methamphetamine. Perez's chart indicated that she had not had 17 any prenatal care. During an interview with a probation officer, Perez stated she last used methamphetamine approximately two and a half days before the delivery of her 18 stillborn child and marijuana a day prior to the delivery. (Opinion in Case No. 19 F077851, filed on March 26, 2019.)

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II. Habeas Corpus Relief is Appropriately Granted to Petitioner

A. Applicable Law

In People v. Richardson (2021) 65 Cal. App. 5th 360, the Court of Appeal, First

Appellate District, Division Three, found that it was an abuse of discretion for the trial court

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25 ² Plea Transcript filed on Mary 11, 2018 in Case No. 18CM0021, 5:15-14:26.

³ The Court of Appeal directed that an Amended Abstract of Judgment be filed to reflect the court's imposition of a restitution fine of \$3,300 and a suspended parole revocation fine in the same amount.

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to accept a guilty plea based upon a stipulation of defense counsel to a factual impossibility, *to wit*: human trafficking of a <u>minor</u> for a sex act when the actual age of the victim was 26 years old. The holding in *Richardson* is not novel, but based upon established law, *including People v. Holmes* (2004) 32 Cal. 4th 432, 443 [acceptance of a plea based upon a stipulation to a factual impossibility was an abuse of discretion], *People v. Hoffard* (1995) 19 Cal. 4th 1170, 1182 [trial court is obligated to determine whether there is a factual basis for a plea of guilty or no contest when that plea arises from a negotiated resolution of the charges], and California Penal Code §1192.5. (*Richardson, supra*, 65 Cal. App. 5th 360, 372.)

California Penal Code §192(a) states in relevant part: "Manslaughter is the unlawful killing of a *human being* without malice. It is of three kinds: [¶] (a) Voluntary—upon a sudden quarrel or heat of passion. . ." (Emphasis added.) There is no crime in California of manslaughter of a fetus. A violation of California Penal Code §192, subdivision (a), expressly requires the victim to be "a human being." (*See, People v. Brown* (1995) 35 Cal. App. 4th 1585, 1592; *People v. Dennis* (1998) 17 Cal. 4th 468, 505-506.)

B. Summary of the Arguments Made

In its Supplemental Brief, the Kings County District Attorney's Office (People) seeks to distinguish the *Richardson* decision based upon the fact that, "the parties in *Richardson* never stated that they were entering their plea pursuant to *People v. West, supra.*" (People's Supplemental Brief [PSB] 2:2-8.) In People v. West (1970) 3 Cal. 3d 595, the California Supreme Court held that "[i]n accepting a knowing and voluntary plea of guilty or nolo contendere⁴, is not limited in its jurisdiction to the offenses charged or necessarily included in those charged." According to the People, since Richardson is not based upon a West plea, the decision therein does not overrule West in whole or in part. [PSB 2:8-16] The People go on to state that: (1) Petitioner's plea to a violation of California Penal Code §192(a) is reasonably related to Penal Code §187(a) [both involve the death of a person],

⁴ "West does not actually involve a claim of innocence but addresses the validity of a plea to an uncharged lesser offense entered pursuant to a plea bargain. A West plea is characterized as a plea of nolo contendere, not admitting a factual basis for the plea. West approves the practice of plea bargaining to a lesser charge in order to avoid exposure to greater penalties." (*Loftis v. Almager* (2012) 704 F. 3d 645, 651; *citing, In re Alvernaz* (1992) 2 Cal. 4th 924, 932.)

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and (2) a plea under *West* does not require the type of factual basis discussed in *Richardson*. [PSB 6:5-9.]

The People admit that "the charge Petitioner plead to is not a lesser-included charge nor is it a charge that she could be charged with for the death of her baby." [PSB 7:12-13.] The People go on to argue, however, that a no contest plea entered pursuant to *People v. West, supra*, 3 Cal. 3d 595 is not limited to the offenses charged or necessarily included within those charged and "as long as the plea is categorically related and/or reasonably related", it is appropriately entertained by the court. [PSB 7:17-20, 21-24; *Citing, Id.* at p. 613.] The People further state that, unlike in *Richardson* where the plea was based upon a factual impossibility, in this case "Petitioner could have committed voluntary manslaughter. The charge she pled to, Penal Code section 192(a) was a *legal* impossibility not a *factual* impossibility." [PSB 8:9-11.]

In her Supplemental Reply, Petitioner argues that: (1) because all negotiated pleas 11 (including West pleas) require the court to find a prima facie factual basis for the plea, 12 *Richardson* is directly on point, and (2) where the record conclusively establishes facts that 13 make Petitioner's commission of a crime impossible, a court abuses its discretion by finding 14 a factual basis and accepting a guilty plea to the crime. [Supplemental Reply (SR), 2:2-9.] 15 Petitioner also argues that although the parties in *Richardson* did not expressly state that a 16 West plea was being entered, there is no requirement that counsel utter the "magic words" 17 of West. Instead, the West case stands only for the proposition that court may accept pleas to charges that are not lesser included offenses as long as the charge is "reasonably 18 related to defendant's conduct"; and since in Richardson, "the bargain as disclosed on the 19 record included pleading to a related but not lesser-included offense", it was a West plea. 20 [SR 4:16-26.] Citing California Penal Code §1192.5⁵ and People v. Marlin (2005) 124 Cal. 21 App. 4th 559⁶, Petitioner also challenges the People's claim that a plea entered under West 22 does not require a factual basis. [SR 5:2-5.]

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 ⁵ California Penal Code §1192.5(c) states in relevant part: "[t]he court shall also cause an inquiry to be made of the defendant to satisfy itself that the plea is freely and voluntarily made, and that there is a factual basis for the plea."

⁶ In *Marlin*, the California Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District, stated in relevant part: "Pursuant to section 1192.5, the trial court is obligated to determine whether there is a factual basis for a plea of guilty or

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According to Petitioner, in taking her plea in the Criminal Case, the trial court was required to find that a factual basis existed to support the manslaughter charge before it accepted her plea. [SR 5:16-17.] The fact that Petitioner entered a plea to a related but not lesser-included offense and/or that she was advised of the potential consequences and agreed to the illegal plea, does not render the plea valid. [SR 5:16-23; *citing, Richardson, supra,* at p. 371.] Moreover, whether viewed as a factual or legal impossibility, because it is undisputed that due to the age of the victim (*i.e.*, a fetus) Petitioner *could not have* violated Penal Code section 192(a), her plea to that charge should be vacated. [SR 6:6-18.]

C.

Petitioner's Plea Bargain Was Illegal

Charged with murder of a fetus, Petitioner entered a no contest plea of the type envisioned in *West*, to voluntary manslaughter. Similar to the *Richardson* Case: (1) the voluntary manslaughter charge to which Petitioner ultimately entered her no contest plea, was part of an amended pleading filed *for the purpose of* effecting a resolution of the pending case, and (2) in exchange for Petitioner's plea, the more serious charge was dismissed, with sentencing left to the discretion of the trial court. Although there are many ways by which a trial court may inquire into the factual basis for a plea (*see, Richardson, supra*, 65 Cal. App. 5th at p. 372-373), in this case the facts were provided by defense counsel and included a description of the victim as an unborn child or fetus. Specifically, Mr. Stover stated:

. . .She was pregnant with an unborn child. When the <u>child was eventually delivered</u>, the <u>child was stillborn</u>... were the primary contributing factors to the death of the <u>fetus</u>. (Emphasis added.)⁷

- no contest when that plea arises from a negotiated resolution of the charges. (*See People v. Hoffard, supra*, 10 Cal. 4th at p. 1182.) Although not constitutionally required (*id.* at p. 1183), such an inquiry furthers constitutional considerations attending a guilty plea (*id.* at p. 1183, fn. 11), protects against the entry of a guilty plea by an innocent defendant, and makes a record in the event of appellate or collateral attacks on that plea. (*Id.* at p. 1183.) Given these significant policy considerations, a failure to make a sufficient inquiry, while not a constitutional or jurisdictional requirement, is one of the 'other' grounds going to the legality of the proceedings in the trial court." (*Id.* at p. 571.)

and 18 hours prior to birth.

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⁷ In its opinion, the California Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District, found that the fetus died between 12

Accordingly, while there can be no dispute that voluntary manslaughter is a charge which is reasonably related to homicide⁸, the relationship between the crimes does not overcome the more fundamental problem that the stipulation in this case was to a factual or *legal* impossibility⁹, to wit: voluntary manslaughter based upon the killing of "an unborn child" or "fetus". In regard to this issue, all parties admit that voluntary manslaughter of a fetus is not a crime in California. (See, People v. Brown, supra, 35 Cal. App. 4th at p. 1592; see also, Id. at p. 1593 [recognizing the legislative decision not to include "fetus" within the 6 Penal Code §192 was intentional].)

Furthermore, lest there be any question about a trial court's ability to accept a plea of no contest to a legally or factually impossible crime, the Richardson Court stated as follows:

At the risk of redundancy we repeat: A defendant cannot plead no contest to human trafficking of a minor for a sex act when the victim is an adult well over the age of 18. Where, as here, the "trial court is asked to approve an illegal plea bargain ... the proper course of action for the court is clear. It should decline to act in excess of its authority and should refuse to approve an arrangement under which it is called upon to do so.' (In re V.B. (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 899, 908 [46 Cal. Rptr. 3d 451]; accord, People v. Soriano (1992) 4 Cal.App.4th 781, 785 [6 Cal. Rptr. 2d 138] ["Faced with ... an unlawful plea bargain, a trial court should withhold approval of the bargain."].)" (People v. John (2019) 36 Cal.App.5th 168, 176 [248 Cal. Rptr. 3d 288].)

16 Similarly in this case, faced with Petitioner's illegal plea bargain based upon a factual or 17 legal impossibility and/or non-existent crime, to wit: the unlawful and without malice killing of a fetus, the trial court should have withheld its approval of the same.

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RULING GRANTING PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS

²⁰ ⁸ In its opinion, the West Court explained, "In common practice and under the ABA standard a reasonable relationship between the charged offense and the plea obtains when (1) the defendant pleads to the same 21 type of offense as that charged (the ABA Standards refer to this as a 'categoric similarity'), or (2) when he pleads to an offense which he may have committed during the course of conduct which led to the charge." (Id. 22 at p. 613.) The West Court then went on to explain that "[i]n homicide, for example, there may be reduction from murder to manslaughter or negligent homicide or, occasionally, even to assault, but grossly inconsistent

offenses, such as larceny or possession of narcotics are never arbitrarily used in place of murder unless 23 these offenses were part of the actual conduct involved.' (Newman, p. 100; see ABA Standards, p. 68; Comment, Judicial Plea Bargaining (1967) 19 Stan.L.Rev. 1082, 1087 fn. 35.)" (Id. at 613.) 24

²⁵ ⁹ See also, People v. Solariano (1992) 4 Cal. App. 7th 781, 784 [legal impossibility]; People v. Bean (1989) 213 Cal. App. 3d 639, 646-647 (nullifying plea of guilty to "attempted petty theft with a prior," which is not a crime). 26

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED: Petitioner's request for habeas relief in the form of a reversal of her conviction in Kings County Superior Court Case No. 18CM0021 for voluntary manslaughter, a violation of California Penal Code §192(a), is granted. The judgment in Kings County Superior Court Case No. 18CM0021 is vacated.

IT IS HEREBY FURTHER ORDERED:

I. Kings County Superior Court Case No. 18CM0021 shall be placed on calendar before the Honorable Robert Shane Burns, Judge, for: (1) entry of an order vacating Petitioner's no contest plea to Count 2, (2) amendment of the First Amended Complaint to remove Count 2, and (3) reinstatement of dismissed Count 1 (Cal. Pen. Code §187(a)).

II. Petitioner ADORA DANYEL PEREZ shall be immediately released from the custody of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to the custody of the Kings County Jail. Counsel for Petitioner shall prepare an Order for Transportation, or any other order, necessary to achieve her transfer to local custody.

III. Petitioner ADORA DANYEL PEREZ is ordered to appear in Department 6 of the Kings County Superior Court on <u>April 6, 2022</u> at 8:15 a.m. Unless she has retained counsel to represent her in the criminal action, the court will appoint counsel to represent Petitioner.

IV. The April 8, 2022 hearing in Case No. 21W0033A, is removed from the court's calendar. Petitioner's conviction in Case No. 18CM0021 has been vacated. Upon her return to D-6, Petitioner's plea will be removed, and the original charges alleged in Case No. 18CM0021 will be reinstated. Accordingly, the court finds Petitioner's claims of ineffective assistance of counsel based upon her entry of an unknowing, involuntary, and/or unwilling plea, to have been rendered moot.

V. Service of this Ruling by the Clerk of the Court shall as to those parties identified in the relevant proof of service, constitute Notice of Entry of Judgment for all purposes.

Dated: 3/10/2002

Valerie R. Chrissakis, Judge Kings County Superior Court

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1	PROOF OF SERVICE BY MAIL			
2	-000-			
3	Superior Court of the State of California Case Number: 21W-0033A			
4	County of Kings ss.			
5				
6	I hereby declare under penalty of perjury that I am employed by the Kings County Superior			
7	Court, over the age of eighteen (18) years, and not a party to the within action.			
8 9	That on March 16, 2022 I served the RULING GRANTING PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS			
10	<u>CORPUS</u> by placing a true copy thereof, enclosed in a sealed envelope and deposited at my place of			
11	business for collection and mailing with the United States mail at Hanford, California, following our			
12	ordinary business practices with which I am readily familiar, addressed as follows:			
13		ings County District Attorney 400 W. Lacey Blvd.	Matthew Missakian 5150 E. Pacific Coast Hwy, Suite 200	
14		anford, CA 93230	Long Beach, CA 90804-3399	
15		Inter-Department Mailing)	(<u>matthew@missakian-law.com</u>)	
16		udrey Barron	Mary McNamara	
17	s	wanson & McNamara, LLP	Swanson & McNamara, LLP	
18		00 Montgomery St, Suite 1100 an Francisco, CA 94104	300 Montgomery St, Suite 1100 San Francisco, CA 94104	
19		audrey@smllp.law)	(<u>mary@smllp.law</u>)	
20 21	Executed on March 16, 2022 , at Hanford, California.			
21		uteu on <u>March 10, 2022 ,</u> at Hamoru, C	anorna.	
23		No	cona Soboleski , Clerk of the Court	
24			fille hain	
25	By: Jake Williams , Deputy Clerk			
26				
27				
28				
a.				
	Attached Proof of Service Page 1 of 1			