

FILED IN THE
U.S. DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON

Oct 10, 2018

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON SEAN F. MCAVOY, CLERK

<p>ALETA BUSSELMAN,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Plaintiff,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">v.</p> <p>BATTELLE MEMORIAL INSTITUTE, an Ohio nonprofit corporation,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Defendant.</p>	<p>No. 4:18-CV-05109-SMJ</p> <p>ORDER GRANTING IN PART AND DENYING IN PART PLAINTIFF’S REQUEST FOR JUDICIAL NOTICE, AND DENYING DEFENDANT’S MOTION TO DISMISS</p>
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No. 4:18-CV-05109-SMJ

**ORDER GRANTING IN PART
AND DENYING IN PART
PLAINTIFF’S REQUEST FOR
JUDICIAL NOTICE, AND
DENYING DEFENDANT’S
MOTION TO DISMISS**

Before the Court, without oral argument, is Defendant Battelle Memorial Institute’s Motion to Dismiss for Failure to State a Claim, ECF No. 8, and Plaintiff Aleta Busselman’s related Request for Judicial Notice, ECF No. 10.

Defendant asks the Court to dismiss Plaintiff’s complaint, which alleges whistleblower retaliation under the National Defense Authorization Act, 41 U.S.C. § 4712 (“NDAA”). Defendant argues Plaintiff did not make a disclosure protected by the NDAA. Construing the complaint in the light most favorable to Plaintiff and drawing all reasonable inferences in her favor, the Court disagrees with Defendant. Specifically, the Court concludes the complaint states a facially plausible claim that Defendant retaliated against Plaintiff for disclosing information she reasonably

**ORDER GRANTING IN PART AND DENYING IN PART PLAINTIFF’S
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MOTION TO DISMISS - 1**

1 believed evidenced Defendant's gross mismanagement of, or abuse of authority
2 relating to, its contract with the U.S. Department of Energy, as well as Defendant's
3 violation of regulations governing that contract. Accordingly, the Court denies
4 Defendant's motion to dismiss.

5 In deciding Defendant's motion to dismiss, Plaintiff asks the Court to take
6 judicial notice of six documents. The Court denies Plaintiff's request as to the third,
7 fourth, and fifth documents because Defendant disputes whether they apply. The
8 Court grants Plaintiff's request as to the first, second, and sixth documents because
9 the complaint necessarily relies on them, they are posted on the energy department's
10 official website, and Defendant does not contest their authenticity. Accordingly, the
11 Court grants in part and denies in part Plaintiff's request for judicial notice.

12 **BACKGROUND**

13 Defendant is an energy department contractor that manages the Pacific
14 Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington. ECF No. 1 at 1–2. Plaintiff
15 is Defendant's employee at this location and has worked there for over 30 years. *Id.*
16 at 2–3. Plaintiff eventually became Defendant's Enforcement Coordinator. *Id.* at 4,
17 8. In that role, Plaintiff served as Defendant's single point of contact for enforcement
18 coordination and reporting into the energy department's Noncompliance Tracking
19 System, which all contract laboratories use for notifying the energy department of
20 events exceeding noncompliance risk limits. *Id.* at 4. Such reports communicate a

1 contractor's compliance assurance processes so the energy department may decide
2 whether to exercise regulatory discretion, mitigate possible sanctions, or both. *Id.* at
3 4–5. Plaintiff also interfaced and integrated Laboratory Issues Management
4 processes with key staff in the Incidents of Security Concerns Program. *Id.* at 5.
5 Plaintiff performed this function for concerns that needed to be reported in the
6 energy department's Safeguards and Security Information Management System. *Id.*

7 As Enforcement Coordinator, Plaintiff had a team of eight people who
8 reported to her directly and were responsible for various aspects of independent
9 oversight, assessment, and issues management. *Id.* The team's focus was to
10 investigate issues of medium or high significance. *Id.* at 5–6. The team would work
11 with an appropriate manager to critique an issue by documenting surrounding facts,
12 determine the issue's root cause through specialized technical analysis, create a
13 formal corrective action plan, and conduct a formal effectiveness evaluation to
14 determine whether the corrective actions fixed the underlying root and contributing
15 causes. *Id.* at 6.

16 When Plaintiff began her job, she interviewed her individual team members
17 and observed their work. *Id.* She learned her team was reluctant to participate in
18 controversial root cause analyses because management exerted pressure to change
19 the results of the team's final conclusions. *Id.* While management is not qualified to
20 make substantive changes to an identified root or contributing cause, Plaintiff

1 learned that management had previously ordered or supported such changes in
2 varying circumstances. *Id.* In 2015, the Quality and Assurance Associate Laboratory
3 Director retired because upper management investigated and learned he had been
4 changing the language of root cause analysis results and other subsequent
5 deliverable results, i.e., corrective action plans. *Id.* at 7–8. It was known by those
6 conducting these analyses that such changes were prohibited to preserve the
7 independent analysis of the qualified team chartered to discover the root cause of an
8 issue. *Id.* at 7. This was known even in the absence of a formal written policy
9 preventing management from making such changes. *Id.*

10 Plaintiff developed such an internal policy in October 2016. *Id.* at 10. The
11 policy reads,

12 In cases where the Issue Owner does not agree with the results of the
13 [root cause] analysis, the Laboratory Senior Cause Analyst will work
14 with the Lead Cause Analyst, line management, the Lab-level Issue
15 Team, and other independent technical experts as necessary, to resolve
the issue(s). If the issue(s) cannot be resolved, the cause analysis team’s
results will remain the final documented root cause analysis, and the
lack of consensus will be documented in the Issue Tracking System
.....

16 *Id.* (alteration in original).

17 In December 2016, Defendant authorized payment of a \$530,000 invoice
18 submitted by a fraudulent entity posing as a subcontractor. *Id.* at 10–11. The U.S.
19 Department of the Treasury electronically transferred the funds to the fraudulent
20

1 entity. *Id.* at 11. Defendant became aware of the fraud in January 2017. *Id.* Schemes
2 like this had been an ongoing issue for Defendant since 2015. *Id.* at 13. Defendant
3 had notice of such efforts to defraud since early 2016. *Id.*

4 Defendant's contract with the energy department requires it to comply with
5 various federal policies and guidelines for combating fraud. *Id.* at 12. Specifically,
6 management must develop internal policies and procedures to combat fraud and
7 ensure they are properly implemented and effective. *Id.* at 13.

8 Defendant requested Plaintiff's assistance to determine the root cause of its
9 \$530,000 payment to a fraudulent entity. *Id.* Under Plaintiff's supervision, a cause
10 analysis team was assigned. *Id.* at 13–14. The issue was determined to be of medium
11 significance, requiring a level 2 root cause analysis. *Id.* at 14. The scope of the cause
12 analysis was limited to Defendant's response to the fraudulent entity's prompt. *Id.*
13 Other governmental agencies launched investigations into how the fraudulent entity
14 obtained the information necessary to accomplish this deception. *Id.*

15 After reviewing over twenty-five documents and interviewing nineteen
16 witnesses, Plaintiff's team determined the root cause of Defendant's \$530,000
17 payment to a fraudulent entity was management's failure to clearly define adequate
18 controls. *Id.* at 14–15. Specifically, in March 2017, Plaintiff's team found

19 Business Systems Directorate . . . management did not clearly define
20 adequate controls regarding the identification, detection and response
to potential fraudulent activities by external criminal entities in the

1 Vendor Management Process; primarily relying on individual staff
2 members to identify and respond to potential external threats.

3 *Id.* at 15. Plaintiff's team also identified relevant facts surrounding the fraud, finding,

4 2.38.1 There is no segregation of duties between the Contracts
5 Vendor Coordinator and the Accounts Payable Vendor
6 Coordinator; the same person currently fills both roles.

7 2.38.2 Transition of key staff out of both the AP and Contracts
8 organizations resulted in some staff assuming additional
9 responsibilities while maintaining their normal work load.

10 2.38.3 In the Accounts Payable and Contracts organizations, some
11 staff indicated they felt that the work load was impacting the
12 completeness and accuracy of their work.

13 2.38.4 The current Accounts Payable Manager has been in the role
14 for approximately 1.5 years; this manager is less familiar with
15 the identities of the vendors/POCs.

16 2.38.5 [Defendant] relies on individual staff members to identify and
17 respond to potential fraudulent activity by external sources;
18 however, this is not a written expectation.

19 2.38.6 The training was informal and included 'tribal knowledge' of
20 processes and expectations; it did not include the personal
best practice of confirming changes with the listed vendor
POCs.

Id. at 15–16.

Plaintiff learned management was dissatisfied with her team's root cause
finding and sought to change it. *Id.* at 17. Plaintiff opposed any change to the
language above. *Id.* Around March 29, 2017, Defendant's Chief Financial Officer
and Associate Laboratory Director for Business Systems became concerned over the
root cause finding and began to exert pressure to change it because he felt it made
management look bad. *Id.* at 19. He told Plaintiff that the way the root cause finding

1 was written did not put the laboratory in a good light and made it look as if it were
2 asleep at the wheel. *Id.* In the ensuing days, Plaintiff attended several meetings and
3 exchanged numerous emails with management seeking to protect her team from
4 pressure to change the root cause finding. *Id.*

5 On March 31, 2017, Plaintiff wrote to Defendant's Associate Laboratory
6 Director, stating,

7 Per our HDI requirements and cause analyst qualification process, this
8 is not how we do cause analysis at our Lab. We do not just let concerned
9 stakeholders manipulate root causes at the end of the process to make
10 us sound better. Steve Cooke looked at this report twice before it came
11 to [management]. [Management] has yet to bring the team together to
12 discuss how they got to the end results. That (changing root causes and
13 results at the 11th hour) was the [prior Quality and Assurance Associate
14 Laboratory Director's]way. Not doing it and I am not going to have
15 this cause analysis team think that we have returned to the 'old' way of
16 doing business. Otherwise, why bother.

17

18 I am not going to make this team sign a product they can't stand behind.

19 *Id.* at 19–20.

20 Plaintiff's efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. *Id.* at 17–18. Defendant's
final April 2017 Cause Analysis Report changed the language as follows:

Business Systems Directorate management had a primary focus on
controls over internal fraud risks in response to [the energy
department]'s annual risk statements in the Accounts Payable area
(which did not specifically address external fraud risks) and based on
the majority of previous experience involving internal fraud.
Consequently, the controls for the identification, detection and
response to evolving fraudulent activities by external criminal entities
in the Vendor Management Process were less than adequate.

1 *Id.* at 17. Additionally, Defendant’s final report deleted many of the relevant facts
2 surrounding the fraud. *Id.* at 18.

3 Management’s actions in changing the root cause finding violated internal
4 policy. *Id.* Management lacked training and expertise to make these changes. *Id.* at
5 17. Further, it was a conflict of interests for management to makes these changes
6 because the root cause finding blamed management’s failure to clearly define
7 adequate controls. *Id.* at 17–18.

8 Defendant soon retaliated against Plaintiff. *Id.* at 17, 20–24. After exhausting
9 administrative remedies, Plaintiff filed this lawsuit against Defendant on July 2,
10 2018. *Id.* at 2–3. Defendant moves to dismiss the complaint for failure to state a
11 claim upon which relief can be granted. ECF No. 8. As part of her response, Plaintiff
12 requests judicial notice of documents relating to her claim. ECF No. 10.

13 **LEGAL STANDARD**

14 A complaint must contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing
15 that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). Under Federal Rule of
16 Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), the Court must dismiss the complaint if it “fail[s] to state
17 a claim upon which relief can be granted.”

18 In deciding a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the Court construes the complaint in the
19 light most favorable to the plaintiff and draws all reasonable inferences in the
20

1 plaintiff's favor. *Ass'n for L.A. Deputy Sheriffs v. County of Los Angeles*, 648 F.3d
2 986, 991 (9th Cir. 2011). Thus, the Court must accept as true all factual allegations
3 contained in the complaint. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). But the
4 Court may disregard legal conclusions couched as factual allegations. *See id.*

5 To survive a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the complaint must contain "sufficient
6 factual matter, accepted as true, to 'state a claim to relief that is plausible on its
7 face.'" *Id.* (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). Facial
8 plausibility exists where the complaint pleads facts permitting a reasonable
9 inference that the defendant is liable to the plaintiff for the misconduct alleged. *Id.*
10 Plausibility does not require probability but demands more than a mere possibility
11 of liability. *Id.* While the complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations,
12 threadbare recitals of a cause of action's elements, supported only by conclusory
13 statements, do not suffice. *Id.* Whether the complaint states a facially plausible
14 claim for relief is a context-specific inquiry requiring the Court to draw from its
15 judicial experience and common sense. *Id.* at 679.

16 DISCUSSION

17 **1. The Court takes judicial notice of appendixes 1, 2, and 6 in ECF No. 10-
18 1 and rejects the other documents provided.**

19 "The court . . . must take judicial notice if a party requests it and the court is
20 supplied with the necessary information." Fed. R. Evid. 201(c)(2). Taking judicial

1 notice does not convert a Rule 12(b)(6) motion into a summary judgment motion.
2 *Lee v. City of Los Angeles*, 250 F.3d 668, 688–89 (9th Cir. 2001).

3 Although the Court generally may not consider material beyond the pleadings
4 in deciding a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the Court “may consider extrinsic evidence not
5 attached to the complaint if the document’s authenticity is not contested and the
6 plaintiff’s complaint necessarily relies on it.” *Johnson v. Fed. Home Loan Mortg.*
7 *Corp.*, 793 F.3d 1005, 1007 (9th Cir. 2015) (considering a deed of trust in ruling on
8 a Rule 12(b)(6) motion because the parties did not dispute the deed’s authenticity
9 and the plaintiff’s complaint necessarily relied upon the deed as the source of the
10 defendant’s alleged duty).

11 Additionally, the Court “may take judicial notice of some public records,
12 including the records and reports of administrative bodies.” *Khoja v. Orexigen*
13 *Therapeutics, Inc.*, 899 F.3d 988, 1001 (9th Cir. 2018). Thus, the Court “may take
14 judicial notice of ‘official information posted on a governmental website, the
15 accuracy of which [is] undisputed.’” *Ariz. Libertarian Party v. Reagan*, 798 F.3d
16 723, 727 n.3 (9th Cir. 2015) (alteration in original) (quoting *Dudum v. Arntz*, 640
17 F.3d 1098, 1101 n.6 (9th Cir. 2011)).

18 Plaintiff asks the Court to take judicial notice of six documents. Defendant
19 disputes whether the third, fourth, and fifth documents apply. Therefore, the Court
20 may not take judicial notice of those documents—various energy department

1 orders. Defendant argues the first, second, and sixth documents are irrelevant. The
2 Court disagrees. The complaint cites and necessarily relies on those documents—
3 two modifications to Defendant’s contract and one energy department handbook
4 outlining Plaintiff’s job. Further, those documents are posted on the energy
5 department’s official website and Defendant does not contest their authenticity.
6 Therefore, the Court must take judicial notice of those documents. The Court turns
7 now to the substance of those documents.

8 By regulation, an energy department contractor “shall be responsible for
9 maintaining, as an integral part of its organization, effective systems of management
10 controls.” 48 C.F.R. § 970.5203-1(a)(1). These controls must “reasonably ensure
11 that . . . financial, statistical, and other reports necessary to maintain accountability
12 and managerial control are accurate, reliable, and timely.” *Id.* Further, these controls
13 “shall be documented and satisfactory to [the energy department].” § 970.5203-
14 1(a)(2). Also, an energy department contractor “shall be responsible for
15 maintaining, as a part of its operational responsibilities, a baseline quality assurance
16 program that implements documented . . . control and assessment techniques.
17 § 970.5203-1(b).

18 Defendant’s contract contains identical provisions as the regulation quoted
19 above. ECF No. 10-1 at 6–7, 14–15. Additionally, the contract provides Defendant
20 “shall develop a Contractor assurance system that is . . . implemented throughout

1 the Contractor’s organization.” *Id.* at 4, 12. This system, “at a minimum, shall
2 include the following key attributes,” as relevant here. *Id.* at 5, 12. First, this system
3 must include “[a] comprehensive description of the assurance system with
4 processes, key activities, and accountabilities clearly identified.” *Id.* Second, this
5 system must include “[r]igorous, risk-based, credible self-assessments, . . .
6 including . . . independent reviews.” *Id.* Finally, this system must include
7 “[i]dentification and correction of negative . . . compliance trends.” *Id.*

8 According to an energy department handbook, an Enforcement Coordinator’s
9 responsibilities include “[e]nsuring that contractor managers have a working
10 knowledge of [the energy department]’s enforcement program,” “[m]onitoring
11 contractor compliance assurance program effectiveness and progress in moving
12 toward a culture of critical self-evaluation and continuous improvement,”
13 “[m]anaging or overseeing screening of problems, issues, findings, and conditions
14 to identify noncompliances,” and, critically “[e]nsuring proper and timely reporting
15 of noncompliances.” *Id.* at 106.

16 ‘Noncompliance’ is “[a] condition that does not meet a[n energy department]
17 regulatory requirement.” *Id.* at 102. Sometimes, “noncompliances that led to the
18 event may not be identified until the root cause analysis and preliminary inquiry
19 have been completed.” *Id.* at 126. Thus, “[a]n effective causal analysis is essential.”
20 *Id.* at 131.

1 Generally, “a root cause analysis [is] appropriate for more significant or
2 complex issues.” *Id.* at 129. But regardless of the issue involved, the energy
3 department “expects a contractor conducting an investigation/causal analysis to
4 ensure that . . . the personnel who conduct the investigation are sufficiently
5 independent of involvement in the event and adequately trained and qualified.” *Id.*
6 “[C]ontractors should . . . investigate whether organizational and management
7 issues contributed to the failure.” *Id.* at 131. And “[a]ny identified noncompliances
8 should be reported . . . along with associated corrective actions developed from the
9 causal/root cause analysis.” *Id.* at 126.

10 The Court has considered the preceding content in deciding Defendant’s
11 motion to dismiss.

12 **2. The complaint states a facially plausible claim for relief.**

13 The NDAA protects an employee of a federal contractor who discloses
14 information he or she “reasonably believes” evidences one of the following five
15 types of misconduct: (1) “gross mismanagement of a Federal contract”; (2) “a gross
16 waste of Federal funds”; (3) “an abuse of authority relating to a Federal contract”;
17 (4) “a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety”; or (5) “a violation
18 of law, rule, or regulation related to a Federal contract.” 41 U.S.C. § 4712(a)(1).

19 Defendant argues Plaintiff did not make a disclosure protected by the NDAA,
20 a relatively newer statute with scant interpretive case law. The parties agree the

1 Court should consult cases regarding the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, 5
2 U.S.C. § 2302, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L.
3 No. 111-5, § 1553, 123 Stat 115, 297, for guidance in interpreting the NDAA’s
4 parallel provisions.

5 An employee makes a protected disclosure “if ‘a disinterested observer with
6 knowledge of the essential facts known to and readily ascertainable by the employee
7 [could] reasonably conclude that the actions [at issue] evidence gross
8 mismanagement,’ a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a violation of
9 any law, rule, or regulation.” *Coons v. Sec’y of U.S. Dep’t of Treasury*, 383 F.3d
10 879, 890 (9th Cir. 2004) (first alteration in original) (quoting *Lachance v. White*,
11 174 F.3d 1378, 1381 (Fed. Cir. 1999)). To establish that she held the requisite
12 reasonable belief, Plaintiff “need not prove that the condition disclosed actually
13 established one or more of the listed categories of wrongdoing,” and instead “must
14 show that the matter disclosed was one which a reasonable person in h[er] position
15 would believe evidenced one of the situations specified.” *Drake v. Agency for Int’l*
16 *Dev.*, 543 F.3d 1377, 1382 (Fed. Cir. 2008).

17 “Mere differences of opinion between an employee and [federal contractor]
18 superiors as to the proper approach to a particular problem or the most appropriate
19 course of action do not rise to the level of gross mismanagement.” *White v. Dep’t*
20 *of Air Force*, 391 F.3d 1377, 1381 (Fed. Cir. 2004). “[W]here a dispute is in the

1 nature of a policy dispute, ‘gross mismanagement’ requires that a claimed [federal
2 contractor] error in the . . . continued adherence to . . . a policy be a matter that is
3 not debatable among reasonable people.” *Id.* at 1383.

4 An ‘abuse of authority’ is “an arbitrary and capricious exercise of authority
5 that is inconsistent with the mission of the executive agency concerned or the
6 successful performance of a contract . . . of such agency.” 41 U.S.C. § 4712(g)(1).

7 “[T]here may be a reasonable belief that a [legal] violation has occurred, even
8 though the existence of an actual violation may be debatable.” *White*, 391 F.3d at
9 1382 n.2. However, such a belief is not reasonable unless it is based on an
10 employee’s perception of a “genuine infraction[] of law,” as opposed to an
11 “arguably minor and inadvertent miscue[] occurring in the conscientious carrying
12 out of one’s assigned duties.” *Frederick v. Dep’t of Justice*, 73 F.3d 349, 353 (Fed.
13 Cir. 1996).

14 An employee’s disclosure must “identify a ‘specific law, rule, or regulation
15 that was violated.’” *Langer v. Dep’t of Treasury*, 265 F.3d 1259, 1266 (Fed. Cir.
16 2001) (quoting *Meuwissen v. Dep’t of Interior*, 234 F.3d 9, 13 (Fed. Cir. 2000)).
17 However, “this requirement does not necessitate the identification of a statutory or
18 regulatory provision by title or number, when the employee’s statements and the
19 circumstances surrounding the making of those statements clearly implicate an
20 identifiable violation of law, rule, or regulation.” *Id.*

1 In *Coons*, an Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”) employee “made disclosures
2 regarding the manual processing of a large refund that he believed to be fraudulent
3 for [a taxpayer] under highly irregular circumstances.” 383 F.3d at 890. The Ninth
4 Circuit concluded this was a protected disclosure, not a mere policy dispute. *Id.* The
5 court reasoned a disinterested observer with knowledge of the essential facts would
6 reasonably conclude this disclosure—“alleging that the IRS, whose mission is to
7 collect taxes, improperly processed a large, fraudulent refund for a wealthy
8 taxpayer”—raised concerns of gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, or an
9 abuse of authority. *Id.*

10 In *Langer*, another IRS employee “mention[ed] to the [assistant U.S.
11 attorney]s and his supervisor that he believed there was a problem with a
12 disproportionately high number of African Americans being prosecuted.” 265 F.3d
13 at 1266. The Federal Circuit concluded this statement “clearly implicated the
14 question of selective prosecution and sufficiently raised possible violations of civil
15 rights to constitute a protected disclosure.”

16 Here, Plaintiff objected to Defendant changing or manipulating the root cause
17 finding—the official determination of how and why Defendant lost over half a
18 million dollars to a fraudulent entity—in a report that the energy department would
19 rely upon in determining what to do in response. Plaintiff expressed her belief that
20 Defendant’s actions were prohibited. She mentioned the internal policy, which

1 Plaintiff designed and implemented to comply with Defendant's contract and
2 governing regulations. But it is not reasonable to infer her concerns were limited to
3 the internal policy. After all, it was known even in the absence of a formal written
4 policy that management was prohibited from changing a root cause finding. A
5 disinterested observer with knowledge of the essential facts would reasonably
6 conclude Defendant's actions evidenced gross mismanagement of, or an abuse of
7 authority relating to, a federal contract, as well as a violation of regulations
8 governing that contract. By inference, Plaintiff held the requisite reasonable belief.
9 The NDAA therefore protects her objection.

10 Defendant argues the complaint is deficient and premised on an inviable legal
11 theory because Plaintiff invokes internal policy only and does not specifically allege
12 'gross mismanagement,' an 'abuse of authority,' or a 'violation of law, rule, or
13 regulation.' The Court disagrees. Such labels, even if alleged, would be legal
14 conclusions and would not be entitled to the presumption of truth. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S.
15 at 678. Further, "a complaint need not pin plaintiff's claim for relief to a precise
16 legal theory"; it must contain "only a plausible 'short and plain' statement of the
17 plaintiff's claim, not an exposition of his legal argument." *Skinner v. Switzer*, 562
18 U.S. 521, 530 (2011). The Court must construe the complaint in the light most
19 favorable to Plaintiff and draw all reasonable inferences in her favor. *See Ass'n for*
20 *L.A. Deputy Sheriffs*, 648 F.3d at 991. As Enforcement Coordinator, Plaintiff

1 designed and implemented internal policy to comply with Defendant's contract and
2 governing regulations. So she clearly implicated the contract and regulations when
3 she expressed her belief that Defendant's actions violated the policy. Accepting as
4 true all factual allegations contained in the complaint, *see Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678, it
5 appears Defendant's error was not reasonably debatable because it constituted an
6 actual violation of the policy and, by implication, the contract and regulations.
7 Moreover, Defendant took such action despite a conflict of interests and a lack of
8 training and expertise.

9 In sum, "these allegations suffice to 'raise a reasonable expectation that
10 discovery will reveal evidence' satisfying the [protected disclosure] requirement,
11 and to 'allo[w] the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable
12 for the misconduct alleged.'" *Matrixx Initiatives, Inc. v. Siracusano*, 563 U.S. 27,
13 46 (2011) (second alteration in original) (citations omitted) (quoting *Twombly*, 550
14 U.S. at 556; *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678). The complaint states a facially plausible claim
15 for relief.

16 Accordingly, **IT IS HEREBY ORDERED:**

- 17 **1.** Plaintiff's Request for Judicial Notice, **ECF No. 10**, is **GRANTED IN**
18 **PART** and **DENIED IN PART**.
- 19 **2.** Defendant's Motion to Dismiss for Failure to State a Claim, **ECF No.**
20 **8**, is **DENIED**.

