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Former Cal State San Bernardino administrator awarded \$6 million for gender discrimination

Anissa Rogers' attorney said the ex-associate dean stood up for women 'who have been subjected to gender-based double-standards' in the CSU system



Clare Weber is the former vice provost at California State University San Bernardino, and Anissa Rogers is the former associate dean of CSUSB's Palm Desert campus. Both sued the Cal State University system's board of trustees and top Cal State San Bernardino officials in March 2023 alleging pay disparity and discrimination against female employees. On Monday, Oct. 20, 2025, a Los Angeles jury awarded Rogers \$6 million. A trial for Weber is scheduled for next year. (Courtesy of Courtney Abrams)



By **JOE NELSON** | jnelson@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun
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A Los Angeles jury has awarded \$6 million to a former Cal State San Bernardino administrator who alleged she was subjected to “severe or pervasive” gender harassment that her attorneys claim is systemic across the Cal State system.

Attorney Courtney Abrams, who represented Anissa Rogers, the former associate dean at Cal State San Bernardino's Palm Desert campus, said in a statement that the jury award Monday, Oct. 20, represented “a resounding rejection of CSU's long-running denials of gender bias within its ranks.”

“Dr. Rogers stood up not only for herself, but also the other women who have been subjected to gender-based double-standards within the Cal State system,” Abrams said following the three-week trial before Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Maurice Leiter.

Problem 'systemic'

Rogers and Clare Weber, the former vice provost at the Palm Desert campus, sued Cal State San Bernardino President Tomas Morales, Jake Zhu, the former dean of the Palm Desert campus, and the Board of Trustees of the California State University system, which comprises 23 campuses statewide and is the largest four-year public university system in the United States, employing nearly 56,000 faculty and staff.



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The lawsuit, filed in March 2023, alleged a pattern and practice of discrimination and sexual harassment against female employees in the CSU system in violation of the state's Equal Pay Act. Rogers and Weber claim they were either forced to resign or fired for speaking out against mistreatment of and pay disparity for female employees.

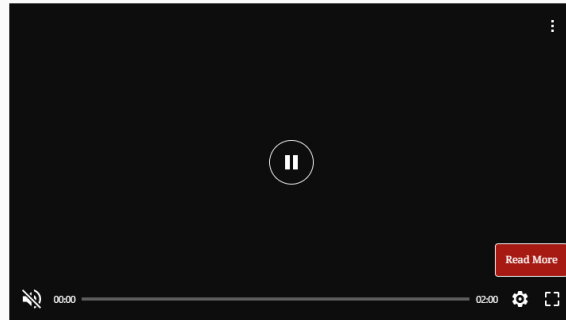
"This case exposed what women inside Cal State have been saying for years: the mistreatment of women within the Cal State system is not just a series of one-off incidents; the problem is systemic and structural," said Andrew Friedman of Helmer Friedman, an attorney who represented Rogers in the lawsuit.

In an email Tuesday, Oct. 21, CSUSB spokesman Alan Llavore said: "We were disappointed by the verdict reached by the jury (Monday) morning, and we will be reviewing our options to assess next steps." He declined further comment.

Officials at the California State University Office of the Chancellor in Long Beach also declined to comment.



DAVID BAUMAN – STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Cal State San Bernardino President Tomas Morales, on Wednesday, Mar. 16, 2016.



Forced out

Rogers, who was hired as associate dean at the Palm Desert campus in August 2019, alleged in the lawsuit that on Oct. 15, 2021, she fielded multiple complaints from female employees who attended a "coffee with the dean" meeting Zhu hosted in which two male department heads berated a female administrator for about a half-hour. Zhu allegedly witnessed the conduct but did nothing.

Rogers confronted Zhu about what happened the same day after hearing about it from the other employees who attended the meeting. Zhu, according to the lawsuit, subsequently targeted Rogers for termination, pretextually complaining about vacation time she took and for attending an event at her daughter's college that he initially approved.

On Jan. 1, 2022, Rogers, according to the lawsuit, was "constructively terminated" when she was forced to resign her position.

Evidence presented at trial showed that in addition to Rogers, several other current and former CSUSB employees brought forth complaints that Zhu treated women worse than men, but neither the university's human resources department nor its Title IX offices ever launched an investigation into the allegations, said David deRubertis of The deRubertis Law Firm in Studio City, who served as the lead trial attorney for Rogers.

Weber alleges in the lawsuit that she wrote to Morales in July 2022 raising concerns that female vice provosts at the university were being paid less than their male counterparts. She said she was one of the lowest paid vice provosts in the CSU system, despite her large assignment portfolio. She called the alleged practice "highly offensive, totally discriminatory, and retaliatory."

Weber, according to the lawsuit, asked Morales to put an end to the alleged practice and requested an investigation into her concerns. The next day she was fired.

Zhu retires

Two months after Rogers and Weber filed their lawsuit, CSUSB [announced Zhu was retiring](#), commending him for, among other things, being "instrumental in moving the Palm Desert campus forward" and growing the campus to meet the needs of students in the Coachella Valley.

Zhu testified during trial that his retirement was unrelated to the lawsuit, and that he wanted to take care of his ailing mother and spend more time with his children, who were getting older, deRubertis said.

He said evidence at trial showed that allegations of female employee mistreatment by Zhu were brought up during a faculty meeting at the Palm Desert campus on Sept. 20, 2022, and that CSUSB Provost Rafik Mohamed and Morales already were planning to replace him due to so-called "leadership issues" before Zhu decided to retire.

Problems ignored

DeRubertis argued during trial that the gender-based mistreatment of Rogers was "an inevitable result" after CSUSB ignored a climate survey suggesting a culture of fear, intimidation, gender-based mistreatment and bullying at the university. The survey recommended that the university adopt an anti-bullying policy and an audit of HR practices

and policies.

Morales acknowledged during trial that neither recommendation was implemented, deRubertis said.

In May 2017, [Cal State San Bernardino's faculty voted 181-113 to express no-confidence in Morales](#), sharply criticizing him for failing to address issues raised in the campus climate survey the previous year.

The no-confidence vote and faculty senate resolution was a point of contention in the lawsuit, which described the resolution as “scathing.” It noted that within there years of Morales' appointment as university president, 89% of the faculty, staff and administrators who were surveyed reported that the climate had become worse, and that Morales had failed to implement the bulk of the recommended changes.

“President Morales continues to be unwilling to acknowledge the severity of the problems of fear and distrust among employees,” according to the lawsuit.

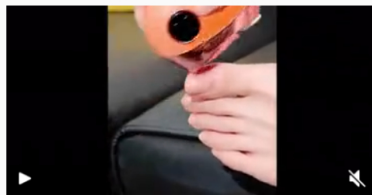
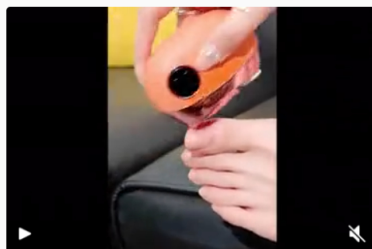
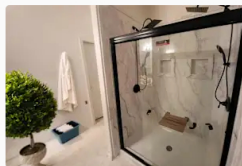
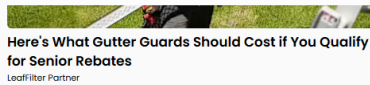
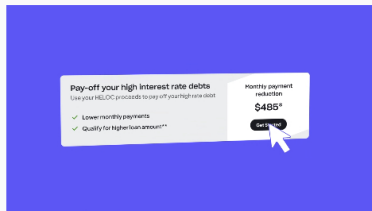
Weber's case, which was separated from Rogers' case at trial, is expected to go to a jury next year.



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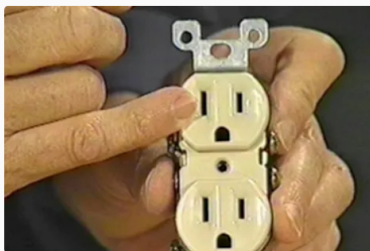
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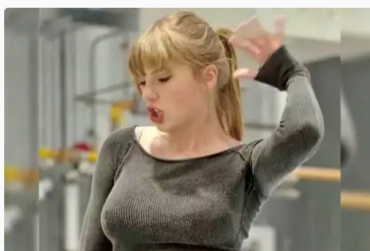
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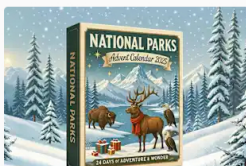


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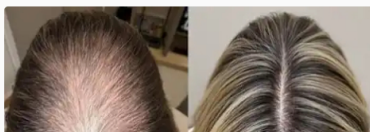


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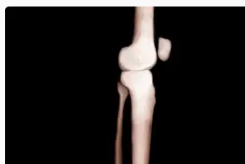
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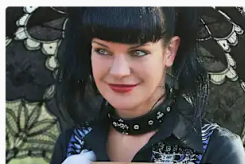
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