STATE OF MICHIGAN
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR LEELANAU COUNTY

RIO RISBRIDGER

Plaintiff,

v.

RICHARD LEE ROBBINS,

Defendant.
_____/

COURT FILE NO.: 26- 11722 -NZ
HON.

FILED
13TH CIRCUIT COURT
NOV 19 2026
MICHELLE L. CROCKER
LEELANAU COUNTY CLERK

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COMPLAINT

There is no other civil action between these parties arising out of this same transaction or occurrence as alleged in this complaint pending in this Court nor has any such action been previously filed and dismissed after having been assigned to a judge, nor do I know of any other civil action, not between these parties, arising out of the same occurrence as alleged in this complaint that is either pending or was previously filed and dismissed, transferred, or otherwise disposed of after having been assigned to a judge in this court.

Plaintiff, Rio Risbridger ("Plaintiff"), by and through her attorneys, RINGSMUTHWUORI PLLC, and for her Complaint against Defendant, Richard Lee Robbins ("Robbins"), states as follows:

NATURE OF CLAIM

1. Plaintiff brings this action seeking the recovery of compensatory and other damages against Defendant for harms and losses suffered due to defamation in violation of law as alleged further herein.

2. The amount in controversy is well above the jurisdictional requirement or minimum for this Honorable Court.

3. Venue properly lies in this Court pursuant to MCL 600.1629.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

4. Plaintiff incorporates by reference the allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 3 above, and all subsequent allegations, as if fully set forth herein.

5. At all times relevant, Plaintiff was a resident of Leelanau County, Michigan, and the Leelanau County Finance Director.

6. At all times relevant, Defendant was and is a resident of Leelanau County, Michigan, and a Leelanau County Commissioner.

7. On or about September 29, 2026, Plaintiff and Defendant were in attendance at a Leelanau County budget meeting. One of the issues to be discussed was the consolidation of certain job positions within the County related to, among other things, the County's facilities. Such consolidation was approved by the County Commission at a prior meeting.

8. At the County's direction, Plaintiff then did an analysis of the budget impact such consolidation would have, finding that it would save the County more than $100,000.

9. During a break in the budget meeting, and while speaking to another meeting attendee informally, Defendant accused Plaintiff of illegally manipulating the relevant budget to financially benefit herself. Specifically, so that Plaintiff's husband could gain full-time employment with the County.

10. Defendant's accusation was a statement of fact and not mere opinion. Furthermore, he claimed to have personal knowledge of Plaintiff's alleged illegal plan.

11. Such financial impropriety by Plaintiff, were it true, would be a crime under Michigan law.

12. Defendant's accusation was heard by multiple attendees at the meeting, including Plaintiff. It can still be heard today, as it is saved and viewable on YouTube.

13. The accusation of criminal misconduct was shocking and extremely upsetting to Plaintiff and, upon information and belief, others who heard Defendant's statement.

14. After making the statement, Defendant left the meeting and had an altercation with another Commissioner outside the meeting room.

15. Within a day or two of making the accusation against Plaintiff, Defendant again made the same accusation of Plaintiff's alleged illegal conduct to a journalist.

16. In turn, on October 2, 2026, the journalist contacted Plaintiff and repeated Defendant's accusation of her alleged illegal conduct indicating he was going to run a story to include Defendant's accusation.

17. The fact that a journalist was likely going to publish Defendant's defamatory accusation against Plaintiff further horrified her.

18. On October 5, 2026, the journalist in fact repeated Defendant's allegations of Plaintiff's criminal wrongdoing in a published article in "the Ticker."

19. "[T]he Ticker" is a widely read publication in the surrounding area.

20. The Defendant's allegations are patently and unequivocally false and without any basis in fact whatsoever.

21. Furthermore, Defendant's allegations were made with actual malice knowing they

were false and/or with reckless disregard of their falsity.

22. Defendant's malice toward Plaintiff stems, in part, from her prior "whistleblowing" related to misconduct of the former County Administrator whom Defendant supported.

23. Defendant's allegations of illegality constitute defamation per se pursuant to MCL 600.2911(1).

24. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant's defamatory statements, including the broadcast of them by publication, Plaintiff has been significantly harmed in both reputation and personally, entitling her to all damages allowed by law.

COUNT I-DEFAMATION PER SE

25. Plaintiff incorporates by reference the allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 24 above, and all subsequent allegations, as if fully set forth herein.

26. Defendant's defamatory statements, both during the break in the budget meeting and later to the journalist, constituted statements of fact, not opinion, that Plaintiff was engaged in criminal activity.

27. Defendant knew those defamatory statements were untrue when he made them.

28. Alternatively, Defendant made the defamatory statements with reckless disregard of their falsity.

29. Defendant's statements were made with actual malice.

30. Defendant's conduct constitutes defamation per se as defined in MCL 600.2911(1).

31. As a direct result of Defendant's defamatory action, Plaintiff has suffered significant and ongoing harm to her reputation and personally, including serious emotional distress.

32. In addition to the harms alleged, Plaintiff is entitled to an award of exemplary

and/or punitive damages, as well as an award of attorneys' fees pursuant to case law and MCL 600.2911.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, Rio Risbridger, respectfully requests that this Court enter a judgment against Defendant, Richard Lee Robbins, in her favor in excess of $25,000.00 that is reasonably calculated to compensate her for damages, including costs and attorney fees, and all other relief deemed just by the Court.

RINGSMUTHWUORI PLLC

Date: November 12, 2026

By: _____
Blake K. Ringsmuth (P44013)
Attorney for Plaintiff

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff, Rio Risbridger, by and through her attorneys, RINGSMUTHWUORI PLLC, demands a trial by jury of the above-captioned matter.

RINGSMUTHWUORI PLLC

Date: November 12, 2026

By: _____
Blake K. Ringsmuth (P44013)
Attorney for Plaintiff