IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI

LAWRENCE LUCKY, an individual, Plaintiff, vs. KANSAS CITY STAR COMPANY, a corporation, JUDY THOMAS, an individual, JUSTIN WERNER, an individual, Defendants.	Case No. 2516-CV03684 Division 11 **Plaintiff Demands Trial By Jury**

AMENDED PETITION FOR DEFAMATION

Plaintiff Lawrence Lucky, for his petition, states as follows:

Parties, Jurisdiction, and Venue

1. Plaintiff Lawrence Lucky ("Lucky") is a natural person residing in Cass County, Missouri. He is the owner of Scriptones LLC and American Joe Coffee, two businesses based in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. He is also an inventor with two issued patents.

2. Defendant Kansas City Star Company is a business located in Kansas City, Missouri. Its principal place of business is 1601 McGee Street, Kansas City, MO 64108.

3. Defendant Judy Thomas is a natural person who, on information and belief, resides in Missouri.

4. Defendant Justin Werner is a natural person who, on information and belief, resides in Missouri.

5. Venue is proper in Jackson County for all Defendants because Kansas City Star Company's headquarters is located in Jackson County and all Defendants reside in the state of Missouri.

Factual Allegations

6. REDACTED

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7. Shortly after this, Werner's family moved to Missouri.

8. In 2008 Werner met Lucky through the International House of Prayer, Kansas City ("IHOPKC").

9. From 2008 until the beginning of 2010, Lucky held a paid staff position with IHOPKC related to IT and music. In addition to his paid staff responsibilities, Lucky volunteered with youth ministries during this same time. Lucky and Werner occasionally interacted in group settings between 2008 and 2010.

10. Lucky and Werner never met one on one for private meetings between 2008 and 2010.

11. In February 2010, Lucky accepted a new job as a recording engineer and production manager for a record label.

12. After accepting the new position, Lucky voluntarily left his job at IHOPKC.

13. Between 2010 and 2022, Lucky did occasionally continue to play bass at IHOPKC even after leaving his paid staff position.

14. In 2011, Werner was hired to do IT and website design for the same record label where Lucky had been hired a year prior.

15. At the time Werner began working with Lucky at the record label, Lucky had not been volunteering with IHOPKC youth ministries for nearly a year.

16. In August 2011, after Werner and Lucky began working together at the record label and after Werner's had already turned eighteen, Werner asked Lucky if they could begin meeting privately outside of work.

17. Werner was the one actively and persistently seeking to meet with Lucky outside of work.

18. Werner and Lucky's first private meeting took place on August 19, 2011, when Werner was an adult.

19. Between August 19, 2011, and November 22, 2011, Werner and Lucky met approximately eight to ten times. Audio recordings exist for four of these meetings.

20. REDACTED

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21. Werner also used these private meetings to discuss his sexual attraction to men.

22. Werner's demeanor and intent for these meetings seemed to shift over time. Unfortunately, Lucky was a victim of sexual abuse as a child and still processing his trauma. Therefore, Lucky, while celibate, harbored bi-curious desires. Over time, Werner encouraged Lucky to test these sexual desires with him, and, after several meetings, Lucky agreed.

23. Werner and Lucky met approximately two to four times to engage in consensual sexual acts.

24. Lucky never videotaped any of their sexual encounters.

25. On November 22, 2011, Werner suggested, and Lucky agreed, that they should stop meeting privately.

26. After November 22, 2011, Werner and Lucky continued to work amicably in a professional capacity, but never again had sexual contact.

27. Werner invited Lucky to his wedding in 2013.

28. REDACTED

29. REDACTED .

30. Werner was an adult when he began to pursue Lucky.

31. Lucky and Werner had no sexual encounters until after Werner was an adult and they were working together as professional colleagues. The only sexual contact Lucky and Werner ever had with one another happened between August 19, 2011, and November 22, 2011, as described above.

32. Werner and Lucky only engaged in consensual sexual contact.

33. Other than his prior abuse, Lucky's brief sexual experimentation with Werner was and is the only time Lucky has ever had any type of sexual contact with another male.

34. Additionally, Lucky's brief sexual experimentation with Werner was the only sexual acts Lucky ever had before marriage with anyone.

35. Lucky married his wife in 2020. Prior to his marriage, Lucky was transparent with his wife about his sexual past with Werner.

36. The last time Lucky remembers communicating with Werner was 2013 regarding Werner's wedding.

Werner's false allegations to police

37. In July 2022, Werner filed a false police incident report with the Kansas City police ("KCPD") claiming that Lucky committed statutory rape by having sex with Werner in 2010 when Werner was 16. Werner's police incident report did not claim that his sexual contact with Lucky was forced, and there was no suggestion that it was unwanted. Instead, Werner claimed that the consensual sexual contact happened when Werner was underage.

38. Werner later suggested that these rapes occurred in "counseling" sessions that were somehow connected to Lucky's job at IHOPKC.

39. Lucky was blindsided and shocked by these salacious and utterly false allegations.

40. Any meeting between Werner and Lucky between 2008 and 2010 always had other people present and never included any sexual contact.

41. Further, Lucky was and has never been a counselor. His position at the church was primarily IT and music related. He was not an ordained minister or licensed counselor.

42. It was only after Werner was an adult and he and Lucky were coworkers in a professional setting that they engaged in consensual sexual activity.

43. Moreover, Werner was consistently the individual who initiated the meetings and pursued sexual contact with Lucky. The record aptly demonstrated that Werner was encouraging their continued meeting and driving the sexual nature of these encounters.

44. Police investigated Werner's allegations over the course of a year. The police investigation found no evidence to support Werner's claims that Lucky was guilty of rape or sexual assault. Instead, the evidence conclusively supported Lucky's innocence. Werner stated everything

that they did was consensual, and Werner was found to have been a consenting adult at the time of their sexual interactions. This is why Lucky was never arrested and never charged with any criminal wrongdoing. Werner further admitted to police that he was sexually fulfilled by his encounters with Lucky.

45. On August 9, 2023, KCPD informed Lucky that, due to the investigation yielding no evidence supporting Werner's allegations, they were closing the case and not filing charges.

46. After a year of anxiety, fear, and trepidation, Lucky and his family thought the matter was finally behind them, and they could move on with their lives. Unfortunately, Werner was not finished with his vicious defamatory campaign.

Werner and the Kansas City Star partner to destroy Lucky's reputation

47. Despite Werner's claims already having been debunked by the KCPD, Werner decided to recycle his defamatory lies to Judy Thomas, reporter for the Kansas City Star, in the summer of 2024.

48. Thomas had recently published a series of articles about clergy sexual abuse, and specifically sexual misconduct at IHOPKC. Thus, Werner framed his defamatory allegations to Thomas as another example of sexual abuse sanctioned by IHOPKC.

49. Werner told Thomas that, while serving as an IHOPKC "counselor," Lucky sexually abused him, raped him, and other related allegations.

50. On or around this time, Thomas and Werner also contacted other former members of the student ministries, seeking to recast innocent interactions as sexual, provocative, and inappropriate for the purposes of making Werner's claims of sexual abuse seem both likely and widespread.

51. On July 30, 2024, Thomas contacted Lucky, asking questions related to claims about Lucky's involvement in student ministries between 2008 and 2010, and specifically about claims by Werner that Lucky had abused him in early 2010 when Werner was 16 years old.

52. Lucky responded to Thomas the following day providing evidence that Lucky's private meetings with Werner began in August 2011, after Werner had already turned 18. Further, the evidence provided to Thomas showed that Lucky and Werner were coworkers at the time they met privately and had been for several months. Lucky also provided Thomas with evidence showing that Werner not only had a history of lying in general, but a record of lying and deception about his sexual history.

53. Notably, the evidence Lucky provided to Thomas was the corroborating evidence provided to the KCPD and on which the police relied for their decision not to pursue charges against Lucky.

54. Lucky is now aware that the allegations surfaced to law enforcement a second time in 2024. Despite finding no probable cause, the investigative detective sent the case to the prosecutor for review with a blank probable cause statement. The prosecutor declined to press charges due to insufficient evidence and no probable cause.

55. Prior to publication, Thomas claims to have had the police report from the KCPD. Under Missouri law, law enforcement may not release investigative reports until cases are closed. Thus, at the time of publication, Thomas would have already known that police had determined not to press charges against Lucky.

56. Thomas also selectively quoted portions of messages to make them appear to have a different meaning than when read in context. For example, Thomas selectively quoted a message

trying to schedule a group gathering to play video games to make it seem like Werner and Lucky were scheduling a one-on-one meeting and that Lucky was the one initiating the request to meet.

57. But Thomas wasn't about to let the truth get in the way of a good story.

58. Thomas went on to publish five articles containing numerous defamatory claims about Lucky.

59. Thomas's first article, published August 9, 2024, was titled "Former IHOPKC teens allege sexual misconduct by youth group leader. Was it covered up?." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit A ("Article 1").

60. Article 1 falsely claimed that:

- Multiple individuals alleged Lucky engaged in sexual abuse.
- Werner endured "sexual abuse" "at the hands of his volunteer youth group leader," Lucky.
- Werner's parents sent Werner to Lucky for "private counseling when he was going through puberty and struggling with sexuality issues."
- Lucky raped Werner in 2010 during private counseling sessions when Werner was 16.
- Two other IHOPKC youth described personal incidents similar to Werner's allegations.
- Lucky had a sleepover with teen boys at his duplex in south Kansas City on Jan. 16, 2009.
- Lucky showered alone with boys.
- Lucky filmed sexual encounters with Justin on a video recorder.
- Lucky told Justin to keep their sexual encounters secret.
- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC facilities and programs.

61. Thomas's second article, published August 20, 2024, was titled "IHOPKC says it banned youth group leader accused of abuse. He was still there years later." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit B ("Article 2").

62. Article 2 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky sexually assaulted Werner in early 2010 when Werner was 16
- Lucky asked boys to shower nude with him "to cleanse them of their sins."

- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC.

63. Thomas's third article, published August 21, 2024, was titled "IHOPKC says outside firm to examine handling of abuse claims. Is it truly independent?" A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit C ("Article 3").

64. Article 3 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC over allegations of sexual misconduct with teen boys.
- Lucky sexually abused Werner in 2010.
- Lucky raped Werner when Werner was 16 and seeing Lucky for private counseling at his home.
- Lucky asked teen boys to shower with him.

65. Thomas's fourth article, published September 11, 2024, was titled "Outside group with law enforcement expertise investigates handling of IHOPKC scandal." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit D ("Article 4").

66. Article 4 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky had inappropriate sexual contact with teenage boys.
- Werner was sexually abused by Lucky in 2010.

67. Thomas's fifth article, published October 17, 2024, was titled "Prosecutor won't file sex abuse charges against former IHOPKC volunteer youth group leader." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit E ("Article 5").

68. Article 5 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky had sexual contact with Werner when he was 16 and 17.
- Lucky took boys to the gym and asked them to shower nude with him.
- Lucky was "terminated" from his positions at IHOPKC on February 28, 2010.
- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC.
- Lucky was still under investigation after the case was declined and cleared by the prosecutor on October 15, 2024.

69. To be clear, Lucky never sexually abused or raped anyone. Lucky never showered alone with boys. Werner's parents never sent Werner to Lucky for counseling about puberty or otherwise. Besides Werner's claims starting in 2022, no one has ever accused Lucky of rape or sexual assault. Lucky was never asked to leave or banned from IHOPKC. Lucky never filmed sexual encounters with Werner. And police investigated Werner's claims in 2022, 2023, and 2024, and determined Werner was a consenting adult at the time of the incidents he described. The case was reviewed and authorities declined to prosecute twice—once by the KCPD and a second time by the Jackson County Prosecutor.

70. Despite numerous facts and evidence in her possession that put her on notice the falsity of Werner's claims and these outrageous allegations, Thomas published her defamatory allegations anyway.

71. In the Articles, Thomas repeatedly named Lucky, stated his occupation, listed his business, told people where Lucky lived, and made numerous insinuations to the public that Lucky was a dangerous child predator, groomer, and rapist.

72. Even more shameful, Werner is now profiting and glorying from his lies as a self-described victim's advocate "for boys and men abused in the church." Werner's self-aggrandizement based on his defamatory claims is despicable. On social media, Werner has described himself as a "hero," a "survivor," and "brave," for speaking out about his "abuse," clearly relishing the accolades and benefits he is receiving for his victim status. Unfortunately, his false claims discredit and cheapen the harm suffered by actual victims of church sexual abuse.

73. Meanwhile, the damage to Lucky's family, his reputation, his businesses, and his health from these lies has been catastrophic.

74. Due to these false and reprehensible claims, Lucky has become a pariah in his community. He and his wife have been shunned, threatened with physical violence, and live in fear of their safety. Lucky is no longer permitted to play music in local churches, musical projects he has been a part of are not being released for fear of backlash, and he and his family have been ostracized.

75. Lucky's sound mixing business declined precipitously immediately following the publication of the defamatory allegations and continues to suffer. A colleague posted one of the articles, which led the false allegations to be passed around co-workers, professional colleagues, and former employers in a small, tight-knit community which thrives on word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals from local film and TV producers, production managers, and peers.

76. Lucky's coffee business also suffered. The Kansas City Star sold paper copies of the defamatory articles in the same locations where Lucky's brand of coffee is sold, contributing to the sharp downturn in sales immediately after the Articles' publication. Other prospective business ventures and government partnerships halted as the false claims circulated among Lucky's business contacts.

77. Lucky and his wife have been singled out for derision and lost friends and community standing. They are excluded from social gatherings and have been cut off from other sources of community engagement. Lucky and his wife are both in therapy to try to deal with the aftermath, and they worry these lies are going to negatively impact their child and their ability to adopt or foster children in the future.

78. Lucky is being treated by both a psychologist and psychiatrist. He has been diagnosed with severe depression and PTSD and now takes psychotropic medication for his mental

health. Lucky's PTSD symptoms include disassociation, avoidance, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, and a persistent negative state.

79. In short, Werner and Thomas's defamatory claims, made with knowledge they are false and maliciously to destroy Lucky and his family, have had their desired effect.

Count I – Libel/Defamation by Judy Thomas and the Kansas City Star

80. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

81. Thomas and the Kansas City Star published statements about Lucky.

82. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements accused Lucky of crimes, including rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse as described above. Thomas and the Kansas City Star accused Lucky of despicable behavior including abusing children, grooming children for sexual abuse, and having been banned and fired from a church for the same. These false claims are of the nature that would tend to harm the reputation of another so as to lower him in the estimation of the community or deter third persons from associating or dealing with Lucky.

83. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements identified Lucky directly.

84. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were false.

85. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were not privileged.

86. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were published with malice as Thomas knew they were false or had reckless disregard for their truth or falsity.

87. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements have caused Lucky actual damage, including loss of reputation, humiliation, scorn, ridicule, loss of business, and emotional harm.

88. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count I against Thomas and the Kansas City Star for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Count II – Libel/Defamation by Justin Werner

89. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

90. Werner published statements to the Kansas City Star and others about Lucky.

91. Werner's statements accused Lucky of crimes, including rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse as described above. Werner's false claims are of the nature that would tend to harm the reputation of another so as to lower him in the estimation of the community or deter third persons from associating or dealing with Lucky.

92. Werner's statements identified Lucky directly.

93. Werner's statements were false.

94. Werner's statements were published with malice as he knew they were false or had reckless disregard for their truth or falsity.

95. Werner's statements have caused Lucky actual damage, including loss of reputation, humiliation, scorn, ridicule, loss of business, and emotional harm.

96. Werner's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count II against Defendant Werner for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

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Count III – Injurious Falsehood by Judy Thomas and the Kansas City Star

97. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

98. Thomas and the Kansas City Star published false statements about Lucky.

99. Thomas and the Kansas City Star intended for publication of his statements to result in harm to interests of Lucky having a pecuniary value, or either recognized or should have recognized that it was likely to do so.

100. Thomas and the Kansas City Star knew that its statements were false or acted in reckless disregard of the statements' truth or falsity.

101. As a result, Lucky has suffered pecuniary loss.

102. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count III against Thomas and the Kansas City Star for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Count IV – Injurious Falsehood by Justin Werner

103. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

104. Werner published false statements about Lucky.

105. Werner intended for publication of his statements to result in harm to interests of Lucky having a pecuniary value, or either recognized or should have recognized that his statements were likely to do so.

106. Werner knew that its statements were false or acted in reckless disregard of the statements' truth or falsity.

107. As a result, Lucky has suffered pecuniary loss.

108. Werner's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count IV against Defendant Werner for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Count V – Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress by Thomas and the Kansas City Star

109. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

110. Thomas and the Kansas City Star acted intentionally or recklessly.

111. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's conduct was extreme and outrageous.

112. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's conduct caused and continues to cause Lucky extreme and severe emotional distress.

113. The extreme and severe emotional distress caused by Thomas and the Kansas City Star has caused Lucky bodily harm.

114. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's acts were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count V against Defendants Thomas and the Kansas City Star for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

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Count VI – Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress by Justin Werner

115. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

116. Werner acted negligently.

117. Werner's conduct was extreme and outrageous.

118. Werner's acts were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

119. Werner had a duty to exercise reasonable care to refrain from taking actions Werner knew or, in the exercise of reasonable care, should have known would create a foreseeable and unreasonable risk of harm because it was not merely likely, but under the circumstances, almost certain, these actions would cause a reasonable person in Lucky's position to suffer severe emotional distress.

120. Werner breached the duty to exercise reasonable care by undertaking a course of conduct that was certain to cause any person severe emotional distress including, but not limited to, making false police reports, intentional interference with Lucky's professional relationships, and the strategic dissemination of information in a manner calculated to cause maximum harm — conduct that is independent of and in addition to any defamatory statements.

121. Werner's conduct caused and continues to cause Lucky extreme and severe emotional distress.

122. The extreme and severe emotional distress caused by Werner has caused Lucky medically diagnosable and medically significant harm.

123. Lucky has been formally diagnosed by a licensed mental health professional with severe Major Depressive Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), both constituting medically diagnosable and medically significant neuropsychiatric conditions, as documented in

clinical records and confirmed through ongoing treatment. As a result of these diagnoses, Lucky requires ongoing treatment and takes prescribed psychotropic medication. His PTSD manifests in clinically documented symptoms including dissociation, avoidance behaviors, hypervigilance, significant sleep disturbance, and a persistent negative emotional state, all of which substantially impair his daily functioning.

Count VII – Negligence by Justin Werner

124. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference all preceding paragraphs as though fully set forth herein.

125. At all relevant times, Werner owed Lucky a duty to exercise reasonable care to refrain from engaging in conduct that would foreseeably cause harm to Plaintiff's professional livelihood, business relationships, and economic interests. This duty extends beyond refraining from defamatory publication, and includes refraining from initiating official or quasi-official processes in a reckless or negligent manner.

126. This duty included refraining from more than mere speech: making false and unfounded reports or questioning third parties—including law enforcement, employers, customers, and members of the press—that could foreseeably economic interference with Lucky's ability to secure or maintain gainful employment.

127. Werner breached this duty by, among other things, (a) negligently initiating, promoting, and disseminating false accusations to law enforcement, the press, and others, without reasonable care to verify their truth, (b) knowingly making or recklessly disregarding the truth when making false statements to local press and law enforcement about Plaintiff; (c) initiating or encouraging baseless inquiries by third parties into Lucky's conduct; and (d) engaging in a course of conduct intended to damage Lucky's business, profession, and economic interests in a manner

that foreseeably exposed Lucky to a substantial risk of harm to his livelihood, safety, and well-being.

128. As a direct and proximate result of Werner's negligent conduct, not only was Lucky's reputation damaged, but economic and professional opportunities were destroyed or severely limited, causing Plaintiff to lose income and business contracts that he otherwise would have secured.

129. Werner did not only cause reputational harm and solely economic damages, his conduct caused personal harm: fear for Lucky's safety in the community (e.g., due to harassment, threats, community hostility incited by Werner's conduct).

130. The economic damage to lost income includes, but is not limited to, loss of current earnings, loss of future earning capacity, and loss of specific contractual opportunities that were rescinded or never offered due to Werner's actions.

131. As a further foreseeable direct and proximate result of Werner's conduct, Lucky has suffered other compensable damages, beyond the costs of mitigating just reputational harm, such as seeking replacement employment, and managing the personal and professional fallout caused by Werner's actions.

132. Lucky demands judgment against Werner in an amount to be determined at trial, together with pre-judgment interest, post-judgment interest, court costs, and all other relief deemed just and proper.

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Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count VI against Defendant Werner for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Date: August 27, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Karin Sweigart

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned certifies that a true and correct copy of the following document was served on all counsel of record via the Court's e-filing system.

- AMENDED PETITION FOR DEFAMATION

/s/ Karin Sweigart
KARIN M. SWEIGART
Attorney for Plaintiff