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IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF ARIZONA
IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF MARICOPA

ARIZONA DEMOCRATIC PARTY, et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

NO LABELS, et al.,

Defendants.

CASE NO. CV2023-004832

**DEFENDANT ARIZONA
SECRETARY OF STATE ADRIAN
FONTES' REPLY IN SUPPORT OF
MOTION TO DISMISS**

BEFORE THE HON. KATHERINE COOPER

(ORAL ARGUMENT REQUESTED)

Both the Secretary's and No Labels' Motions explain why Plaintiffs' requested relief is unavailable as a matter of law.¹ In response, Plaintiffs decry "dismissal at this early stage, before any discovery," but no discovery is needed to resolve the purely legal issues (*i.e.*, statutory interpretation) central to, and dispositive of, this case. Resp. at 2:4, 2:24. Indeed, Plaintiffs' Complaint hinges on the wholesale legal conclusion that No Labels cannot be recognized as a party as a matter of statutory construction. Compl., ¶¶ 30–35. Thus, discovery is no impediment to resolving the issues the Defendants have raised.

As we know, when faced with a motion to dismiss, Arizona courts do not assume as true a complaint's legal conclusions. *Jeter v. Mayo Clinic Ariz.*, 211 Ariz. 386, 389, ¶ 4 (App. 2005). And, *as a matter of law*, (1) A.R.S. §§ 16-801 through 804 do not allow

¹ All terms defined in the Secretary's Motion shall be ascribed the same definition in this Reply.

1 Plaintiffs to challenge the Secretary’s decision to recognize No Labels as a new political
2 party, (2) Plaintiffs’ requested declaratory and injunctive relief are unavailable, and (3)
3 Plaintiffs’ requested mandamus relief is inappropriate.

4 Plaintiffs fail to state any claim as a matter of law. And their response does not
5 compel a contrary conclusion. Thus, for the following reasons, this Court should dismiss
6 the Complaint with prejudice.

7 **A. PLAINTIFFS CANNOT CHALLENGE THE SECRETARY’S DETERMINATION**
8 **BECAUSE THEY LACK A PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION**

9 Plaintiffs admit there is no express private right of action in A.R.S. §§ 16-801 through
10 804. Resp. at 16:3–17. Relying on *Chavez v. Brewer*, Plaintiffs argue they nonetheless
11 have an implied right to override the Secretary’s duty to recognize No Labels as a political
12 party. *Id.* (citing, 222 Ariz. 309, 318, ¶¶ 25, 28 (App. 2009)). Not so.

13 Arizona courts assess a purported implied private right of action by considering
14 “whether such a right is consistent with the context, language, subject matter, effects, and
15 purpose of the statutory scheme.” *Chavez*, 222 Ariz. at 318, ¶ 25. There is no implied right
16 “where third persons are only incidental beneficiaries of the statutory enactment.”
17 *McCarthy v. Scottsdale Unified Sch. Dist. No. 48*, 409 F. Supp. 3d 789, 820 (D. Ariz. 2019).
18 “Similarly, where the statute’s intended benefit was something broad, not designed for a
19 special class of voters,” courts have “found no implied right of action.” *Id.* (citing
20 *McNamara v. Citizens Protecting Tax Payers*, 236 Ariz. 192, 195, ¶ 8 (App. 2014)).

21 To start, Plaintiffs do not explain how they are “members of the class for whose
22 *especial* benefit the statutes were adopted.” *See* Resp. at 16:12–13 (cleaned up, emphasis
23 added). Indeed, A.R.S. §§ 16-801 through 804 are not designed for a special class of voters,
24 but to “ensure the administration of free and fair elections” for *all* voters. *Id.* at 16:9–13.
25 This is why Plaintiffs’ reliance on *Chavez* is misplaced. The *Chavez* court held that “*certain*
26 qualified electors could maintain a private cause of action based on election officials’
27 alleged failure to provide voting machines in compliance with statutory requirements.”
28 *McNamara*, 236 Ariz. at 196, ¶ 9 (citing 222 Ariz. at 311, ¶ 1 (App. 2009)) (emphasis

1 added). “The *Chavez* plaintiffs were not simply members of the electorate, but individuals
2 with disabilities and persons whose primary language was not English.” *Id.* (emphasis
3 added).

4 Conversely, in this action, Plaintiffs are a political party (the Democratic Party), and
5 qualified elector who is also a member of that party, who are concerned with the competition
6 a new recognized political party may bring to the ballot box. Compl., ¶¶ 10, 12. Plaintiffs
7 are not “a special class of voters for whose *specific* benefit” the new political party
8 recognition statutes were enacted; they are not seeking recognition of a new political party
9 at all, or are even members of No Labels. *Id.* (emphasis added). Therefore, having no
10 claims for being denied a specific benefit from the statutes at issue, Plaintiffs do not have
11 an implied private right of action to challenge the Secretary’s assessment of new political
12 party petitions. *McNamara*, 236 Ariz. at 196, ¶¶ 9–10 (no private right of action in election
13 statutes concerning campaign finance despite statutory purpose to broadly ensure
14 “transparency and integrity” in elections).

15 Plaintiffs next assert that there is “long-standing precedent” that permits their
16 requested relief “in the election-law context.” Resp. at 2:28–29. Not so. No Arizona court
17 has held that an established political party or its elector can challenge the Secretary’s
18 assessment of a new political party petition. And there is no blanket right to bring an action
19 just because the claims relate to election laws. *See, e.g., McNamara*, 236 Ariz. at 196, ¶ 14
20 (statute on how political committees must dispose of surplus monies does not have implied
21 private right of action); *Pacion v. Thomas*, 225 Ariz. 168, 170, ¶ 12 (no right of action “to
22 disqualify signatures on initiative and referendum petitions obtained before the formation
23 of a political committee[]”).

24 Moreover, the language of A.R.S. §§ 16-801 through 804 is inconsistent with an
25 implied private right of action. Sec’y Mot. at 5:17–6:5. By contrast, there are express
26 statutory mechanisms to challenge nomination petitions and election results. *See, e.g.,*
27 A.R.S. §§ 16-351(B) (“Any elector may challenge a candidate for any reason relating to the
28 office sought as prescribed by law, including age, residency, professional requirements, or

1 failure to fully pay fines, penalties or judgments”), 16-672(A) (“Any elector of the state may
2 contest the election of any person declared elected to a state office, or declared nominated
3 to a state office[.]”); *cf. also* A.R.S. § 16-552(D) (exclusive procedures for challenging an
4 early ballot). But A.R.S. §§ 16-801 through 804 contain no such right of action. This must
5 have been intentional since the legislature knows how to provide a private right of action
6 when the legislature desires to do so. *See, e.g., id.; P.F.W., Inc. v. Superior Court*, 139 Ariz.
7 31, 34 (App. 1984) (“[W]e must assume that the legislature intended different consequences
8 to flow from the use of different language.”).

9 Plaintiffs argue that not having a right of action “would deprive citizens of any means
10 or opportunity to challenge the legal sufficiency of the inclusion of a new party on their
11 ballots.” Resp. at 16:27–17:1 (cleaned up). But this concern boils down to a fear of
12 frivolous candidates or ballot competition rather than new political parties. Resp at 9:2-12.
13 The new political party petition statutes do “not qualify to have candidates on the ballot.
14 Candidates must meet the additional support requirements through petition signatures or
15 write-in votes.” *Ariz. Libertarian Party v. Reagan*, No. CV-16-01019-PHX-DGC, 2017
16 WL 2929459, at *10 (D. Ariz. July 10, 2017), *aff’d sub nom. Ariz. Libertarian Party v.*
17 *Hobbs*, 925 F.3d 1085 (9th Cir. 2019). And as we know, candidate challenges exist, and
18 private voters can bring such challenges to a candidate’s nomination and qualifications. *See*
19 A.R.S. § 16-351. Even so, the Secretary’s recognition of a new political party does not
20 entail that a particular candidate from that party may run in an election. Moreover, there is
21 no precedent supporting the conclusion that a fear of competition at the ballot box from
22 another political party is grounds to obtain judicial nullification of a political party’s right
23 to ballot access. Plaintiffs’ unfounded fears simply do not imply a private right of action.

24 Plaintiffs next contend that “given the limits of the sampling procedure, [80%] of the
25 petition signatures . . . will never receive any review at all[,]” presumably serving as a reason
26 why a private right of action must be implied. Resp. at 8:27–9:1. This argument collapses
27 under scrutiny. The legislature means what it says, and had it wanted to provide a private
28 right of action in this context, it could have done so. *See Owner-Operator Indep. Drivers*

1 *Ass'n v. Pac. Fin. Ass'n, Inc.*, 241 Ariz. 406, 410, ¶ 14 (App. 2017) (“When the language
2 of a statute is clear and unambiguous, a court should not look beyond the language, but
3 rather simply apply it without using other means of construction, assuming that the
4 legislature has said what it means.” (cleaned up)). The legislature made no such provision
5 and we cannot rewrite the law to suit Plaintiffs’ desires. *See Lewis v. Debord*, 238 Ariz. 28,
6 31, ¶ 11 (2015) (“It is not the function of the courts to rewrite statutes” (cleaned up)).

7 Moreover, Plaintiff’s argument ignores that *all* signatures are reviewed by the
8 Secretary to confirm each signer provided all the required information. A.R.S. § 16-
9 803(B)(2). And in any event, the random sample process identified is expressly required by
10 statute. A.R.S. § 16-803(I) (“If the number of valid signatures as projected from the random
11 sample . . . is at least [100%] of the minimum number required by this section, *the party*
12 *shall be recognized*. If the number of valid signatures as projected from the random sample
13 is less than [100%] of the minimum number, *the party shall not be recognized*.” (emphasis
14 added)). The legislature could have opted for something different but did not. And this
15 Court is not the place for a party to rewrite the law. *See Debord*, 238 Ariz. at 31, ¶ 11. That
16 relief must be sought through our legislature. *See McNamara*, 236 Ariz. at 196, ¶ 14 (“If a
17 statute is [alleged to be] oppressive or unworkable, relief lies with the legislative
18 department.” (cleaned up)).

19 Plaintiffs argument also fails to account for the fact that the Secretary’s review of a
20 new political party petition is supplemented by other election officials, so even if Plaintiff’s
21 hypothetical fear of an inadequate review could give rise to a cause of action (and it cannot),
22 that fear is unfounded. *See* A.R.S. § 16-803(C) (the Secretary must send a 20% random
23 sample of the signatures to county recorders for verification), (E) (county recorders assess
24 whether signatures should be disqualified), (H) (the Secretary determines the number of
25 valid signatures by subtracting both those disqualified by the county recorders and “a like
26 percentage from those signatures remaining”); *see also* 2019 EPM at 261. These layers of
27 review help ensure that a new political party petition is support by the appropriate number
28 of qualified electors. *Id.* And more critically, the legislature determined these protections

1 are enough; no other mechanisms were expressly provided and none can be inferred here.
2 *See Roberts v. State*, 253 Ariz. 259, ¶ 20 (2022) (“It is a foundational rule of statutory
3 construction that courts will not read into a statute something which is not within the
4 manifest intention of the legislature as gathered from the statute itself, and similarly the
5 court will not inflate, expand, stretch or extend a statute to matters not falling within its
6 expressed provisions.” (cleaned up)). In fact, other election laws rely on limited random
7 samples to assess the veracity of vote outcomes. *See, e.g.*, A.R.S. §§ 16-602(B) (post-
8 election hand count audit of ballots cast in-person uses random sample) (F) (post-election
9 hand count audit of early ballots use limited random sample). If Plaintiffs disagree with the
10 legislature’s statutory scheme for analyzing new political party petitions, then Plaintiffs’
11 grievances must be addressed by the legislature rather than the courts. *McNamara*, 236
12 Ariz. at 196, ¶ 14 (“If a statute is [alleged to be] oppressive or unworkable, relief lies with
13 the legislative department.” (cleaned up)).

14 In the end, Plaintiffs fail to show they have a right of action to challenge the
15 Secretary’s assessment of new political party petitions. Thus, it follows that Plaintiffs
16 cannot request any special action, declaratory, injunctive, or mandamus relief premised on
17 the existence of such a right.² *Lancaster v. Ariz. Bd. Of Regents*, 143 Ariz. 451, 457 (App.
18 1984) (“Because no private right of action exists . . . there is no basis for the Declaratory
19 Judgment relief sought . . . nor for the Mandamus relief sought”); A.R.S. § 12-1802(4)
20 (injunctions “shall not” be issued to stop “enforcement of a public statute by officers of the
21 law for the public benefit”).

22 **B. PLAINTIFFS’ REQUESTED DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF IS**
23 **UNAVAILABLE AS A MATTER OF LAW**

24 The Secretary agrees with, and incorporates by reference, No Labels’ argument that

25 _____
26 ² Plaintiffs assert that the Secretary admits they “at most may seek possible injunctive or
27 mandamus relief.” Resp. at 16:24–25. This misunderstands the Secretary’s position. *See*
28 *Sec’y Mot.* at 5:24–6:6 (lack of a private right of action entails that Plaintiffs’ claims must
be dismissed with prejudice). Plaintiffs are not entitled to injunctive or mandamus relief
here because they do not have a private right of action and their interpretation of the law is
wrong. *Id.* at 9:11–21.

1 Plaintiffs’ interpretation of A.R.S. § 16-801 fails. In the interest of judicial economy, rather
2 than repeat all those arguments again here, the Secretary highlights the fact Plaintiffs fail to
3 rebut certain related points he made in his Motion, which further compels dismissal.

4 **1. THE ELECTORS’ AFFIDAVITS VERIFIED THE PETITION**

5 Plaintiffs argue that “A.R.S. § 16-801(A)(1) obligates the affiants to verify the
6 petition as a whole – that is, that they must attest to the accuracy, completeness, and integrity
7 of the final packet of signature sheets filed with the Secretary.” Resp. at 6:27–7:2. The
8 problem with this argument is that there is no such express requirement anywhere in A.R.S.
9 §§ 16-801 through 804.

10 Instead, A.R.S. §§ 16-801 through 804 prescribe the procedures for the Secretary and
11 other public officials to evaluate a new political party petition’s accuracy, completeness,
12 and integrity. The Secretary performs an initial review of the signatures and removes those
13 lacking all the required information. A.R.S. § 16-803(B)(2). Subsequent reviews of the
14 petition involve other public officials. See A.R.S. § 16-803. None of these tasks are
15 assigned to the Electors and we cannot create a statutory responsibility where none exists.
16 *Ponderosa Fire Dist. v. Coconino Cnty.*, 235 Ariz. 597, 604, ¶ 30 (App. 2014) (“Where a
17 statute is silent on an issue, we will not read into it . . . nor will we inflate, stretch or extend
18 the statute to matters not falling within its expressed provisions.”).

19 Plaintiffs also assert that the Petition “was never verified by any No Labels elector.”
20 Resp. at 7:5–6. But the Electors did just that, stating: “We, the ten undersigned qualified
21 electors of the state of Arizona, request that the signers of the attached petitions be
22 recognized as a new political party, to be called No Labels Party.” Sec’y Mot., Ex. A. The
23 Electors’ job is to verify that there is a petition for formation of a new political party. A.R.S.
24 § 16-801(A)(1). Conversely, the Electors’ “status as qualified electors of the signers of the
25 affidavit *shall be certified by the county recorder* of the county in which they reside.”
26 A.R.S. § 16-801(A)(1) (emphasis added). Detailed statutory procedures prescribe how
27 public officials assess the signatures for a petition. A.R.S. § 16-803. And any verification
28 of the “integrity” of a petition is done by public officials rather than the Electors, signers,

1 or any other private actors.³ *Id.* Plaintiffs may prefer differently, but their remedy for
2 change lies with the legislature, not with this Court.

3 2. THE ELECTORS' AFFIDAVIT FORMS COMPLY WITH THE LAW

4 First, Plaintiffs fail to address the Secretary's argument that, since A.R.S. § 16-
5 801(A)(3) calls for specific wording for a petition caption but *not* for the Electors' affidavits,
6 it follows that Plaintiffs' critique of the Electors' affidavits' language cannot state a claim.
7 Sec'y Mot. at 7:22–4. Plaintiffs thereby concede the Secretary's point. *See* Ariz. R. Civ. P.
8 7.1(b)(1), (2); *Tapestry on Cent. Condo. Ass'n v. Liberty Ins.*, No. CV-19-01490-PHX-
9 MTL, 2021 WL 1171504, at *14 (D. Ariz. Mar. 29, 2021) (collecting cases deeming a
10 party's lack of response to argument made at summary judgment as a concession of the
11 validity of an opposing party's argument on the merits).

12 Second, Plaintiffs fail to rebut the reality that the Complaint fails to provide any well-
13 pled facts supporting their legal conclusion that the Electors' affidavits do not substantially
14 comply with A.R.S. § 16-801(A). For example, Plaintiffs do not rebut the Secretary's
15 argument that the Complaint does not allege subtracting the number of signatures after the
16 last Elector executed their affidavit reduces the number of signatures below the required
17 amount for ballot access. Sec'y Mot. at 9 n.5. Plaintiffs also concede these points by
18 ignoring them. *See* Ariz. R. Civ. P. 7.1(b)(1), (2); *Tapestry on Cent. Condo. Ass'n*, 2021
19 WL 1171504, at *14.

20 Both the Petition and the Secretary's electronically available forms substantially
21 comply with A.R.S. § 16-801.⁴ That is sufficient to justify the Secretary's decision to

22 ³ Plaintiffs assertion that the Electors are required to know “the identities of all the petition
23 signers[]” is nowhere to be found in the statutes. Resp. at 8:16–18. Again, Plaintiffs are
24 forced into imposing public officials' duties onto private actors in order to make their claims
25 viable. This we cannot do. *Ponderosa Fire Dist.*, 235 Ariz. at 604, ¶ 30 (“Where a statute
is silent on an issue, we will not read into it . . . nor will we inflate, stretch or extend the
statute to matters not falling within its expressed provisions.”).

26 ⁴ Plaintiffs opine that the 2019 EPM provisions related to new political party petitions lack
27 the force of law. Resp. at 12:2–19. But Plaintiffs are not seeking any relief to enjoin
28 enforcement of these provisions. *See* Compl., Prayer for Relief, ¶¶ A–D (only seeking
mandamus, declaratory, and injunctive relief on the Secretary's actions and No Labels'
status as a new political party).

1 recognize No Labels as a new political party.

2 **3. NO LABELS' CORPORATE STATUS IS IRRELEVANT**

3 No Labels' corporate status simply does not matter for purposes of this action. *See*
4 *Resp.* at 3:8–19 (complaining about No Labels corporate status without explaining how this
5 affects the Petition). Critically, Plaintiffs do not even attempt to address either Defendants'
6 arguments in this regard, let alone explain why or how this matters. *See id.*; *see also* Sec'y
7 *Mot.* at 9:23–10:9. So, Plaintiffs again concede the Secretary's point. *See* *Ariz. R. Civ. P.*
8 *7.1(b)(1), (2); Tapestry on Cent. Condo. Ass'n*, 2021 WL 1171504, at *14.

9 **C. PLAINTIFFS ARE NOT ENTITLED TO MANDAMUS RELIEF**

10 Plaintiffs assert that “[m]andamus is available as a procedural mechanism here
11 because [they] allege . . . a nondiscretionary duty to reject the No Labels' petition”
12 *Resp.* at 14:16–19. This is wrong for multiple reasons.

13 First, as explained above and in No Labels' briefing, the Secretary followed the law
14 in recognizing No Labels as a new political party. And no law “specifically imposes” on
15 the Secretary a duty to review the Petition *to Plaintiffs' satisfaction*. *Sensing v. Harris*, 217
16 *Ariz.* 261, 263, ¶ 6 (App. 2007). Plaintiffs argue that this truth confuses the merits of their
17 claims with the procedures for bringing mandamus. *Resp.* at 14:14–19. But a mandamus
18 claim that rests upon a faulty legal conclusion necessarily fails as a matter of law. *See*
19 *Joshua Tree Health Ctr., LLC v. State*, No. ___ *Ariz.* ___, ¶ 20, 1 CA-CV 22-0427, 2023
20 WL 3312945, at *4, ¶ 20 (App. 2023) (mandamus relief not available where law at issue did
21 not require public agency to perform act demanded by plaintiffs). And Plaintiffs'
22 mandamus claim rests upon the faulty legal conclusion that the Secretary has a duty to act
23 as Plaintiff prefers. Thus, Plaintiffs' mandamus claim fails.

24 Second, Plaintiffs fail to engage with, let alone overcome, the Secretary's argument
25 that mandamus is unavailable because Plaintiffs' claim targets alleged errors in performance
26 rather than a total refusal to act. *Sec'y Mot.* at 11:13–12:2. The mandamus statute only
27 permits relief based on allegations that a public official “refused to perform [his] statutory
28 duties” *Transp. Infrastructure Moving Ariz.'s Econ. v. Brewer*, 219 *Ariz.* 207, 213, ¶

1 32 (2008). Not allegations, as Plaintiffs proffer, that a public official erred in the
2 performance of his duties. *Id.*; *Stagecoach Trails MHC, L.L.C.*, 231 Ariz. at 370, ¶ 21.
3 Plaintiffs’ failure to even try to clear this hurdle speaks volumes and is dispositive of their
4 mandamus claim.

5 Third, Plaintiffs are not entitled to mandamus merely because they allege the
6 Secretary should have assessed a petition differently. Resp. at 13:16–25. As explained
7 above and in No Labels’ briefing, the Secretary need only assess a new political party
8 petition for substantial compliance with the applicable statutes. Sec’y Mot. at 8:5–18. And
9 the assessment of new political party petition falls within the discretion of the Secretary and
10 other election officials. A.R.S. § 16-804(C) (“The secretary of state shall determine the
11 political parties qualified for continued representation on the state ballot”), (D) (“Each
12 county recorder shall determine the political parties for the county ballot”), (E) (“Each city
13 or town clerk of a city or town providing for partisan elections shall determine the political
14 parties qualified for such city or town ballot”). Mandamus relief cannot be used to control
15 or dictate a public official’s discretionary power to assess whether a petition substantially
16 complies with the law. *Kahn v. Thompson*, 185 Ariz. 408, 411 (App. 1995) (“Mandamus
17 may compel the performance of a ministerial duty or compel the officer to act in a matter
18 involving discretion, but not designate how that discretion shall be exercised.”).

19 **D. CONCLUSION**

20 This Court should dismiss this action with prejudice.

21 RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED: June 5, 2023.

22 SHERMAN & HOWARD L.L.C.

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