1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA								
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3	MONTAGE MARKETING, LLC, Case No. 59063								
4	formerly known as MONTAGE  MARKETING CORPORATION, a  Delaware limited liability  company,  Electronically Filed Feb 17 2012 02:45 p  Tracie K. Lindeman Clerk of Supreme Co								
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6	Appellant,								
7	V.								
8	WASHOE COUNTY ex rel								
9	9 WASHOE COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION; and WASHOE								
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12	Respondents.								
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14	ON APPEAL FROM THE FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA IN AND FOR CARSON CITY								
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17	WASHOE COUNTY'S ANSWERING BRIEF								
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	MAUPIN, COX & LEGOY RICHARD A. GAMMICK								
19	Washoe County District								
20	NV. BAR #5374								
21	NV. BAR #5808 Chief Deputy District								
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25	ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENTS								
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## IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA

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MONTAGE MARKETING, LLC, 3 formerly known as MONTAGE 4 MARKETING CORPORATION, a Delaware limited liability 5

Case No. 59063

company,

Appellant,

v.

WASHOE COUNTY ex rel WASHOE COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION; and WASHOE COUNTY ASSESSOR JOSH WILSON,

Respondents.

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STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

II.

I.

JURISDICTIONAL STATEMENT

These Respondents adopt the "Jurisdictional

Statement" contained in the Appellant's Opening Brief.

Did the District Court correctly conclude that the evidence upon which the State Board of Equalization relied supported the State Board of Equalization's decision with respect to valuation issues, for ad valorem taxation purposes, of the Appellant's property? In particular, did the record contain evidence to support the State Board's decision, given the applicable law in this case?

## III.

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## STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This case involves an ongoing dispute which originated between the Appellant ("Montage") and Respondent Washoe County Assessor ("Assessor"). That. dispute centers on the proper methodology for appraising, for ad valorem taxation purposes, a multi-unit condominium project in downtown Reno, Nevada. At the heart of this case is the question of whether the Assessor, as confirmed by the State Board of Equalization (JA Vol. II, 272-274), and as the State Board of Equalization's decision was confirmed by the First Judicial District Court in a petition for judicial review proceeding (JA Vol. III, 583-589), arrived at his valuation in a manner authorized by law, by first bifurcating the land from the improvements, and then by viewing the condominium units as a series of individual units. Or, as contended by Montage (JA Vol. I, 39-235), should the Assessor have employed a valuation method which, in the opinion of Montage's expert, viewed the condominium project as a single unit, despite its obvious status as a series of individual condominium units for sale? A secondary question may arise as a result of the answer to the first question. That secondary question centers on whether, if Montage's position is adopted, the

Assessor's determination to value other similar unsold condominium projects in Washoe County as a series of individual units (just as he valued the Montage), will result in a violation of the Nevada Constitution's provision for "uniform and equal rates of assessment and taxation" by valuing the Montage's condominium units differently.

IV.

## **ARGUMENT**

## A. Standard of Review

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The factual findings of an agency which are supported by evidence are conclusive. State, Employment Security Dep't v. Nacheff, 104 Nev. 347, 757 P.2d 787 (1988). In the context of judicial review of the actions of an administrative board, "substantial evidence is that which a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion." Nevada Employment Security Dep't v. Hilton Hotels Corp., 102 Nev. 606, 729 P.2d 497 (1986). The above-described deferential standard of review normally applied to factual findings of an administrative agency is not modified, under the facts of this case, by the standard set forth in Canyon Villas Apartments Corp. v. State of Nevada Tax Comm'n., 124 Nev. Adv. Op. 72, 192 P.3d 746 In Canyon Villas the Court opined that when a "fundamentally wrong principle" is applied to the

valuation of real property for ad valorem tax purposes, it results in an "unjust and inequitable" valuation.

But <u>Canyon Villas</u> only applied to the taxable value of income-producing rental property, as contrasted here to the Montage units, each of which is a residential unit listed for individual sale.

B. The Appellant's continuing reliance upon Canyon Villas is misplaced.

Montage consistently relies upon the case of <u>Canyon Villas Apartments Corp. v. State of Nevada Tax Comm'n.</u>, 124 Nev. 833, 192 P.3d 746 (2008), for the proposition that the Assessor applied a "fundamentally wrong principle" to his valuation of the Montage condominium project, resulting in an "unjust and inequitable" valuation by both the Assessor and the State Board of Equalization. But Montage's reliance on <u>Canyon Villas</u> is seriously misplaced.

Canyon Villas applied to the taxable value of income-producing real property in the form of apartment units. In determining that the Clark County Assessor and the State Board of Equalization erred in not applying the income capitalization method for valuing the property, especially in light of known construction defects in the property, the Court explained that "the income capitalization method ... evaluates the following two factors to determine a property's full

cash value: (1) the annual income that a hypothetical buyer expects to receive from the property, and (2) the rate at which the buyer expects a return on his investment in the property or the capitalization rate." Canyon Villas, 124 Nev. At 843, 192 P.3d at 754.

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But the record in this case is replete with references to the Montage's status as something other than an annually income-producing property. (JA Vol. I, 40-96) ("the subject property consists of the remaining 343 units of an existing 376-unit individual condominium complex containing approximately 369,056+/square feet of net rentable area (remaining units less retail).... 142 of the subject's units were originally pre-sold, with 26 closing to date, 7 pending closings and 109 remaining pre-sold units); (JA Vol. I, 178) ("There are 11 different floor plans in total"; "Sales related activities are brokered by Edge Realty of Reno") (JA Vol. I, 184) (Sales analysis); (JA Vol. II, 425) ("if you want it valued as a single unit, go down to the courthouse and re-record it as a single fee simple apartment building"); (JA Vol. II, 432) ("You don't do a discounted cash flow on a condominium project to a single buyer for tax purposes. It just doesn't make sense"); (JA Vol. II, 433) (discounted cash flow analysis is "appropriate ... in the fee world" "if they're going to sell it to another

investor). The Assessor valued the Montage units in a manner entirely consistent with the Montage's use at the time, and with its marketing plan. The Montage cannot have it both ways — wanting its property valued (for taxation purposes) as if it were one economic unit, while simultaneously offering up the individual units for individual sale.

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Canyon Villas made it clear that the annual income that a buyer expects to receive from property is usually in the form of rent. <u>Canyon Villas</u>, 124 Nev. At 843, 192 P.3d at 754. Yet, although Montage expects to make money from the condominium project, it does not expect to do so in the form of annually recurring rental income. Instead, it hopes to profit from its one-time sale of the individual Montage condominiums to individual purchasers, after the sale of all of which the Montage will no longer be in the business of making money from the condominium project. Simply stated, Montage never was in the business of operating income property in the sense that the owner of the apartments at issue in the <u>Canyon Villas</u> case was. For this reason, Montage's reliance on <u>Canyon Villas</u> is misplaced.

C. Contrary to the Appellant's assertions, the District Court necessarily had to undertake a detailed analysis of the statutory scheme under which the Assessor valued the Montage property.

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The Appellant argues that the District Court neglected to analyze the statutory scheme under which the Assessor valued the Montage property. Yet a review of the District Court's Order establishes that although the District Court characterized the case as "primarily a factual decision," it could only do so in with a full understanding of the statutory scheme, such an understanding only possible after analyzing the statutory scheme under which property of this type is valued.

The District Court was aware that this case involves the valuation of individual condominium units for ad valorem tax purposes. (JA Vol. III, 583-589). The District Court was aware that the Assessor followed the procedures set forth in NRS 361.227, and applicable regulations of the Nevada Department of Taxation which guide Assessors through the property valuation process. (JA Vol. III, 585). The District Court's Order which is the subject of this appeal clearly states the status of the law in this area, more particularly set forth as follows:

#### NRS 361.227(1)(a) requires a separate 1. analysis of the land and the improvements.

The District Court recognized that NRS 361.227(1)(a) essentially directs the Assessor to appraise two components of property in determining its taxable value: the land and any improvements on the land. With respect to appraising improvements on the land, NRS 361.277(1)(b) directs the Assessor to use the cost approach, providing that the value of any improvements must be appraised by subtracting any applicable obsolescence, or "impairment to property," NAC 361.116, and other depreciation from the cost of replacing the improvements.

# 2. The Assessor's valuation of the Montage land.

The District Court recognized that the value of the land is determined by appraising vacant land while considering the uses to which the vacant land may lawfully be put, any legal or physical restrictions upon those uses, the character of the terrain and the uses of other land in the vicinity. NRS 361.227. The statute further states that to determine the taxable value of improved land the Assessor must appraise its full cash value consistently with the use to which the improvements are being put. NAC 361.113 defines improved land as "land on which there is an improvement sufficient to allow the identification of or establish actual use.." The Montage condominium project meets this definition of "improved land."

In an ideal world, the Assessor turns to comparable sales to determine land value, the authority for doing

so being found at NAC 361.118. However, if the Assessor is unable to use the comparable sales approach to determine land value, NAC 361.119 permits the use of alternate methods, including the "allocation method" to ascertain the ratio of the land's value to the total value of the property to determine the value that the land contributes to the total value of the property.

NAC 361.119(1)(e); NAC 361.109. This is precisely the methodology first employed by the Assessor in ascertaining the taxable value of the Montage property.

(JA Vol. II, 289-330, JA Vol. II, 373-453).

But the Assessor's work does not stop there. The Assessor next turns to NRS 361.227(2)(b) which requires the Assessor to determine the taxable value of real property as a single unit in stating that "[t]he unit of appraisal must be a single parcel..." Then the statute goes on to provide for an exception applicable to this case. That exception states that the single parcel rule may be avoided if "[t]he parcel is one of a group of contiguous parcels which qualifies for valuation as a subdivision pursuant to the regulations of the Nevada Tax Commission..." NRS 361.227(b)(2)(c).

The Montage qualifies as such a "subdivision," it being located on what was formerly a single parcel, but one which was subsequently subdivided. In determining the taxable value of such subdivided real property, and

its individual parcels, NRS 361.227(6)(d) next requires the Assessor to reference applicable regulations of the Nevada Tax Commission establishing the "criteria for valuation of two or more parcels as a subdivision." Those regulations are found at NAC 361.129 and NAC 361.1295. Despite NAC 361.129's (and NRS 361.227's) consistent reference to "parcel," and despite the fact that Montage would have the court believe the subdivision regulations apply to the entirety of its condominium project (in other words, to both the land and the individual condominium units), NAC 361.129 and NAC 361.1295 have consistently been interpreted by the Assessor as applying only to the land portion of such a Support for the Assessor's interpretation is to be found in a reading of the two sections in harmony with one another, a method of construction consistently preferred by Nevada's courts. See Buckwalter v. Eighth Judicial District Court, 126 Nev. Adv. Op. 21, 234 P.3d 920 (2010) ("Statutes must be construed together so as to avoid rendering any portion of a statute immaterial or superfluous); Quinlan v. Camden USA, Inc., 26 Nev. Adv. Op. 30, 236 P.3d 613 (2010) ("'this court will interpret a rule or statute in harmony with other rules and statutes, 'especially where, as here, one provision is silent on specifics included in another"). particular, NAC 361.1295 guides assessors "[i]n

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determining the taxable value of land within a qualified subdivision." The regulation provides the Assessor ("the county assessor shall use, as he deems appropriate based upon the available information concerning the subdivision"), and not the taxpayer, a choice of valuation methods, including "[t]he full cash value of the subdivision as unimproved land..., " "[t]he selling price of any comparable suvdivision or group of parcels..., " and "[t]he estimated retail selling price of all parcels in the subdivision which are not sold, rented or occupied, reduced by the percentage ... for the expected absorption period of the parcels." NAC 361.1295(1)(a), (b) and (c). In the case of the Montage, the Assessor permitted a discount, based on the land's status as part of a subdivision, and its expected absorption into the market period of 10 or more years, of 50%. NAC 361.1295(1)(c); (JA Vol. I, 178; JA Vol. II, 292). Once such a discount was applied, NAC 361.1295 (3) then goes on to refer the Assessor back to NRS 361.227 for determining the taxable value of "any improvements made within a qualified subdivision."

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 The Assessor's valuation of the Montage condominium units fully recognized the statutory prohibition against taxable value exceeding full cash value of property.

In deciding against appraising the condominium

units as a single unit under NRS 361.227, based on the property's current use, once the Assessor assigned a value to the land portion of the condominium project (discounted, as described above, for its status as within a subdivision and its anticipated absorption into the market), the Assessor next proceeded to assign value to each individual condominium unit within the The Assessor assigned the taxable value of Montage. the improvements based on the size of the condominium unit as a percentage of the entire building. 624,061 square feet of finished area, the replacement cost of such finished area was determined to be \$105,666,016. The total replacement cost was then divided by the percentage of the entire project represented by each individual condominium unit. Thus, by way of example, a condominium unit of 1,273 square feet would represent 1,273/624,061ths, or .204% of the entire project. The replacement cost was then multiplied by .204% to determine the replacement cost new of the condominium in this example. From that result, statutory depreciation and an allowance for obsolescence were deducted, and a pro-rated common area value was finally added, pursuant to NRS 361.233. These calculations were performed for each unsold unit within the Montage, and they were consistently performed. The Assessor's methodology is documented in

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the record in this case, as this methodoogy was documents before the District Court. (JA Vol. I, 176-247).

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Because the computed taxable value under NRS 361.227 exceeded the full cash value of the individual units, the Assessor had no option but to exercise his judgment in applying obsolescence to those individual Authority for doing so is found at NRS 361.227(5) ("taxable value of any property must not exceed its full cash value"), in the Assessor's interpretation of NAC 361.344 ("[0]bsolescence means the lessening of value due to causes other than physical causes and may be functional where circumstances internal to the property item render it less desirable or economic where circumstances external to the item and beyond the control of the owner render the property item less desirable") wherein he concluded that economic conditions worked an element of external obsolescence on the property, NAC 316.116 ("[o]bsolescence means an impairment to property resulting in the full cash value of the property being less than its taxable value as otherwise computed."), NAC 361.131 (permitting reduction in taxable value where full cash value is exceeded, but requiring the reduction to first be applied for the improvements) and at Nev. Op. Att'y. Gen. 82-10 (May 28,

1982) ("obsolescence" includes economic obsolescence).

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4. The Assessor also applied the functional equivalent of discounted cash flow analysis in valuing the Montage units to assure that taxable value did not exceed full cash value.

Appellant Montage would have this court remand this case to the District Court to adopt the discounted cash flow analysis presented by Montage's expert in valuing the condominium property. Discounted cash flow analysis is a theory which provides that money to be received at a specific future time is to be discounted from that time to the present at a given rate of interest. In other words, the appraiser must consider the present value of future receipts when determining today's market value. This concept is included in the comparative sales and capitalization of income approaches to appraisal, which are found in NRS 361.227(4)(a). Nv. Op. Att'y. Gen. 87-08 (April 15, 1987). Yet the Montage's position on this topic disregards that the Assessor has already provided the Montage with the functional equivalent of a discounted cash flow analysis, at least with respect to the land portion of the property involved in this case, in his application of the 50% subdivision discount.

The Assessor applied the 50% subdivision discount in recognition of the same principle furthered by a discounted cash flow analysis --- that tomorrow's value

of a dollar differs from today's value of a dollar. In effect, the Assessor recognized that the expected absorption period for the Montage's parcel is the length of time within which all of the parcels in the Montage condominium complex may be expected to be sold, rented or occupied if they are actively marketed. NAC 361.1125. The Assessor determined the absorption period by establishing an annual rate from the sales within the development phase or unit and dividing that rate into the number of developer-owned parcels in order to obtain the number of years required for full absorption into the market. And in doing so, the Assessor determined the period to be 10 or more years, for which NAC 361.125 provides the 50% discount applied by the Assessor to the Montage parcel. For this reason, the Montage has already received the functional-equivalent of a discounted cash flow analysis. And Montage is entitled to nothing more, given the nature of the project and the fact that it is the Assessor, and not the taxpayer, who decides how property within Washoe County is best appraised under the statutory and regulatory framework by which he is bound.

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D. The Assessor, the State Board of Equalization and the District Court did not need to rely upon uneffective regulations of the Nevada Tax Commission.

Montage goes to some length in complaining of the State Board of Equalization's reference to uneffective regulations to support the Assessor's earlier-described determination that NAC 361.129 and 361.1295 refer only to the land portion of a subdivision. While it is true that the regulations were not in effect at the time of the State Board of Equalization's hearing, and that they provided that they would "not apply to or affect the appraisal, valuation or assessment of any property ... for any fiscal year beginning before July 1, 2012," the fact remains that the State Board of Equalization's action, in interpreting its statutory authority, as it did in this case, is governed by principles set forth by the United States Supreme Court in a 1984 case known as <u>Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural</u> Resources Defense Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837 (1984). In that case, the United States Supreme Court held that the legal test for determining whether to grant deference to a government agency's interpretation of its statutory authority involves a two-step analysis. The first step requires the Court to determine whether the law being implemented is ambiguous or whether the law contains a gap that the legislature intended the government agency If such an ambiguity or gap exists, the Court to fill. next determines whether the government agency's interpretation of the statute, through the regulations

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and policies it adopts, is reasonable or permissible. If it is, the Court is bound to defer to the agency's interpretation of its statutory responsibilities. Id

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Similar to the United States Supreme Court, Nevada's Supreme Court has adopted Chevron's "deference" standard. It did so in a case known as Thomas v. City of North Las Vegas, 122 Nev. 82, 127 P.3d 1057 (2006), a case in which the Court had the opportunity to review an administrative interpretation of the "Code of Professional Responsibility for Arbitrators of Labor-Management Disputes," In determining the validity of an interpretation of that code, Nevada's Supreme Court clearly, and simply, concluded "[w]e give deference to administrative interpretations," and cited to the Chevron case. Thomas, 122 Nev. at 101 - 102, 127 P.3d at 1070, f. 50 (2006). Nevada adheres to the Chevron standard when reviewing administrative agency interpretations of the agency's statutory obligations.

The State Board of Equalization merely recognized that which has always been the case with respect to the NAC 361.129's applicability to only the land portion of a parcel, as the Assessor also interprets that regulation. The new regulations merely confirm existing law, pursuant to authority contained in Welfare Division v. Maynard, 84 Nev. 525, 529, 445 P.2d

153 (1968). The State Board of Equalization's recognition is entitled to <u>Chevron</u> deference, at this point-in-time, as a demonstrated expression of the Assessor's belief, as set forth above, of the proper interpretation of NAC 361.129's reference to "parcel" as being limited to the land within a subdivision, and to nothing more.

E. Appellant's desired result in this case opens a virtual "Pandora's Box" of public policy and constitutional problems.

Finally, Nevada's taxpayers have a right to a uniform and equal rate of assessment and taxation, which is guaranteed by Article 10, Section 1, of the Nevada Constitution. The Supreme Court has concluded under State ex Rel State Bd. of Equalization v. Barta, 124 Nev. 58, 188 P.3d 1092 (2008), that a property value determined using unconstitutional, nonuniform methods is necessarily unjust and inequitable.

But if the Montage's position is adopted by this Court, the method of valuing the 350 unsold condominium units in the Montage complex would be different from the Assessor's chosen method of valuing the previously sold 26 Montage condominium units. The Montage does not ask for all of the Montage's 376 condominium units to be valued in the manner the Montage prefers, because the Montage cannot do so --- for the simple reason that the Montage no longer owns those other units. The rule

that Montage cannot now impact the value of the 26 previously sold condominium units is affirmed by NRS 361.355, 361.356 and 361.357 which provide a taxpayer (as in the owners of the previously-sold condominium units), if dissatisfied with his or her assessment, with a manner to appeal or protest that valuation. And the record here is devoid of any such appeals, from the other 26 condominium owners within the Montage complex. Were the Montage's position adopted in this proceeding, this simply-seen nonuniform use of assessment methods, internal to the Montage condominium complex, is necessarily unjust and inequitable.

As for external nonuniformity, the record establishes that the Montage was compared with other downtown Reno condominium complexes. (JA Vol. II, 418) ("like we value any other condominium project to determine what the base lot value will be for these parcels"). The adoption of the Montage's preferred method of valuation will make the methods used to value the Montage different from other downtown Reno condominium projects, also necessarily unjust and inequitable.

## VI.

## CONCLUSION

This case involves the application of facts to a complex statutory scheme for valuing real estate in

In Nevada's Washoe County, it is the duly-Nevada. elected Washoe County Assessor who is entrusted with responsibility for administering that statutory scheme. And, in this case, the fact that the Assessor did just that is fully supported by the record before the State Board of Equalization, as that record came before the District Court. The District Court's order in this case establishes that the District Court understood the applicable law and recognized how the facts of this case could lead a reasonable mind to conclude that the Washoe County Assessor properly valued the Montage property. This appeal should be denied.

Dated this 17th day of February, 2012.

RICHARD GAMMICK Washoe County District Attorney

/S/ DAVID C. CREEKMAN By: DAVID C. CREEKMAN Chief Deputy District Attorney Nevada Bar No. 4580 P. O. Box 30083 89520-3083 Reno, NV (775) 337-5700

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENTS

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## CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

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- 1. I hereby certify that this brief complies with the formatting requirements of NRAP 32(a)(4), the typeface requirements of NRAP 32(a)(4) and the type style requirements of NRAP 32(a)(6) because this brief has been prepared in a proportionally spaced typeface using Corel WordPerfect X3 in 14 Courier New font.
- 2. I further certify that this brief complies with the page volume limitations of NRAP 32(a)(7) because, excluding the parts of the brief exempted by NRAP 32(a)(7)(C), it does not exceed 30 pages.
- 3. Finally, I hereby certify that I have read this appellate brief, and to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, it is not frivolous or interposed for any improper purpose. I further certify that this brief complies with all applicable Nevada Rules of Appellate Procedure, in particular NRAP 28(e)(1), which requires every assertion in the brief regarding matters in the record to be supported by appropriate references to the page and volume number, if any, of the transcript or appendix where the matter relied on is to be found. I understand that I may be subject to sanctions in the event that the accompanying brief is not in conformity with the requirements of the ///

Nevada Rules of Appellate Procedure. Dated this 17th day of February, 2012. /S/ DAVID C. CREEKMAN DAVID C. CREEKMAN Chief Deputy District Attorney Nevada Bar No. 4580 P. O. Box 30083 Reno, NV 8952 (775) 337-5700 89520-3083 

# CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that this document was filed
electronically with the Nevada Supreme Court on
February 17, 2012. Electronic Service of the foregoing
document shall be made in accordance with the Master
Service List as follows:
Rick Hsu, Esq.

Debra Waggoner, Esq.

Dated this 17th day of February, 2012.

/s/ MICHELLE FOSTER MICHELLE FOSTER