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6 **IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
7 **FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA**  
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9 Rebekah Massie, et al.,

10 Plaintiffs,

11 v.

12 City of Surprise, et al.,

13 Defendants.  
14

No. CV-24-02276-PHX-ROS (DMF)

**ORDER**

15 Plaintiff Rebekah Massie, who is represented by counsel, brought this action  
16 pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and Arizona state law. (Doc. 32.) Defendants move to  
17 partially dismiss Plaintiff's Second Amended Complaint. (Doc. 34.)<sup>1</sup>

18 **I. Second Amended Complaint**

19 In her Second Amended Complaint, Plaintiff relevantly alleges as follows.

20 Plaintiff is a resident of Surprise, Arizona and frequently attends Surprise City  
21 Council meetings to share her opinions on city affairs. (Doc. 32 at 4.) Plaintiff is a vocal  
22 critic of the government of the City of Surprise and operates a nonprofit that runs a website  
23 that is frequently critical of the City of Surprise government, including Defendant former  
24 City of Surprise Mayor Skip Hall. (*Id.* at 10.) She also is critical of the government of  
25 Defendant City of Surprise in media appearances. (*Id.*)

26 On August 6, 2024, Plaintiff spoke at a Surprise City Council meeting twice and  
27 former Mayor Hall exhibited visible distaste at her remarks. (*Id.* at 11-12.)

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<sup>1</sup> The Court resolves the Motion without oral argument. *See* LRCiv 7.2(f).

1 On August 20, 2024, during the public comment portion of the Surprise City  
2 Council meeting, Plaintiff spoke in opposition to a planned pay increase for Surprise's City  
3 Attorney. (Doc. 32 at 2.) Defendant Hall<sup>2</sup> interrupted Plaintiff's remarks and scolded her  
4 for violating a City Council policy prohibiting "complain[ing]" about public officials. (*Id.*)  
5 The policy prohibits remarks leveling "charges or complaints against any employee of the  
6 City or members of the body." (*Id.* at 5.) Although the policy prohibited criticism, praise  
7 and neutral speech were welcome. (*Id.* at 9.)

8 When Plaintiff stated the First Amendment protected her comments, Mayor Hall  
9 responded, "Do you want to be escorted out of here or are you going to stop talking?," but  
10 Plaintiff asked to finish her remarks. (*Id.* at 2.)

11 Mayor Hall then instructed the Surprise Police Department to detain Plaintiff and  
12 eject her from the room. (*Id.*) Defendant Steven Shernicoff, a City of Surprise police  
13 officer, carried out Hall's order, detaining and then arresting Plaintiff in the City Council  
14 chamber for criminal trespass in the third degree in violation of Arizona Revised Statutes  
15 § 13-1502(A)(1). (*Id.* at 2-3.) Shernicoff grabbed Plaintiff's arms and placed them behind  
16 her back, forcibly removed her from the chamber, forced her against a wall, forced her to  
17 the ground, and placed her in handcuffs. (*Id.* at 16-17.) Plaintiff sustained bruises and  
18 injuries to her wrists, arms, legs, back, and neck. (*Id.* at 17.) Plaintiff's 10-year-old  
19 daughter, who was with her at the meeting, was left in the City Council chamber, and  
20 Shernicoff refused to permit her to make a phone call or otherwise attempt to locate her  
21 daughter. (*Id.* at 17.)

22 Plaintiff was taken to a detention facility and searched by an unidentified officer.  
23 (*Id.*)

24 The Maricopa County Justice Court dismissed the criminal charges against Plaintiff  
25 with prejudice, calling the City's actions "objectively outrageous," a violation of free  
26 speech, and without probable cause. (*Id.* at 4, 18.) The City of Surprise withdrew its  
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28 <sup>2</sup> The Surprise Mayor is the presiding officer of the City Council and its meetings. (Doc.  
32 at 5.)

1 policy, without comment, only after Plaintiff filed this lawsuit and moved for a preliminary  
2 injunction. (*Id.*)

3 A week after the arrest, City of Surprise Chief of Police Piña appeared in a video  
4 statement shared with the City of Surprise Police Department’s officers and staff. (*Id.* at  
5 19.) In his video, Chief Piña remarked that “everybody in the world” was criticizing the  
6 department, but said the department’s conduct was “in alignment with what our policy is  
7 and what our philosophy is, which is to take the next steps to make certain that we are in a  
8 position of power to show that we, and specifically Officer Shernicoff, acted with absolute  
9 speed to carry out the mission as directed that evening.” (*Id.*) Chief Piña stated that Officer  
10 Shernicoff “has our support as an executive team, my support as police chief, and that goes  
11 all the way up to our city management.”

12 In Count One, Plaintiff alleges a First Amendment claim against Defendant Hall for  
13 enforcing the Surprise City Council’s policy based on viewpoint and content  
14 discrimination. In Count Two, Plaintiff alleges a First Amendment retaliation claim  
15 against Defendant Hall for ordering her arrest in retaliation for her exercising her right to  
16 criticize public officers during the public comment period of a city council meeting and/or  
17 in retaliation for her previous criticisms of Defendant Hall and other government  
18 employees. In Count Three, Plaintiff alleges a First Amendment claim against Defendant  
19 Shernicoff for arresting and detaining her for nondisruptive political remarks made within  
20 her allotted time during the public comment section of the City Council meeting. In Count  
21 Four, Plaintiff alleges a Fourth Amendment false arrest claim against Defendants Hall and  
22 Shernicoff for arresting her for her speech without probable cause. In Count Five, Plaintiff  
23 alleges a claim of retaliatory arrest against Defendant Hall for Hall directing Shernicoff to  
24 arrest Plaintiff in retaliation for the exercise of her First Amendment right to criticize City  
25 of Surprise public officials. In Count Six, Plaintiff alleges a *Monell* claim against the City  
26 of Surprise for enacting the policy that resulted in Plaintiff’s arrest for the exercise of her  
27 First Amendment rights. In Count Seven, Plaintiff alleges a state-law claim of assault  
28 against Defendant Shernicoff for acting with intent to cause harmful and offensive contact

1 with Plaintiff's person when he detained and arrested her. In Count Eight, Plaintiff alleges  
 2 a state-law claim of battery against Defendant Shernicoff when he caused harmful and  
 3 offensive contact with Plaintiff during her arrest. In Count Nine, Plaintiff alleges a state-  
 4 law claim of intentional infliction of emotional distress against Defendants Shernicoff and  
 5 Hall based on Shernicoff's and Hall's conduct in detaining and arresting Plaintiff, using  
 6 force to remove Plaintiff from a public meeting, using force against Plaintiff in front of her  
 7 minor daughter, and preventing Plaintiff from calling or otherwise locating her daughter  
 8 while in police custody, which was so extreme and outrageous as to go beyond all possible  
 9 bounds of decency, and was such that it can be considered atrocious and utterly intolerable  
 10 in a civilized community. In Count Ten, Plaintiff alleges a Fourth Amendment excessive  
 11 force claim against Defendant Shernicoff for using unnecessary force during Plaintiff's  
 12 arrest. In Count Eleven, Plaintiff alleges a state-law violation of Arizona's Open Meeting  
 13 Law, Arizona Revised Statutes § 38-431, against the City of Surprise for enacting the  
 14 policy and enforcing it against Plaintiff. Plaintiff seeks declaratory relief as to Count  
 15 Eleven to require "compliance with, or the prevention of violations of," the Open Meeting  
 16 Law and "to determine the applicability of" the Open Meeting Law "to matters or legal  
 17 actions of" Defendants.

## 18 **II. Legal Standard**

19 Dismissal of a complaint, or any claim within it, for failure to state a claim under  
 20 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) may be based on either a "'lack of a cognizable  
 21 legal theory' or 'the absence of sufficient facts alleged under a cognizable legal theory.'"  
 22 *Johnson v. Riverside Healthcare Sys., LP*, 534 F.3d 1116, 1121-22 (9th Cir. 2008) (quoting  
 23 *Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Dep't*, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir. 1990)). In determining  
 24 whether a complaint states a claim under this standard, the allegations in the complaint are  
 25 taken as true and the pleadings are construed in the light most favorable to the nonmovant.  
 26 *Outdoor Media Group, Inc. v. City of Beaumont*, 506 F.3d 895, 900 (9th Cir. 2007). A  
 27 pleading must contain "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is  
 28 entitled to relief." Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). To survive a motion to dismiss, a complaint

1 must state a claim that is “plausible on its face.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678  
 2 (2009); *see Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). “A claim has facial  
 3 plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the  
 4 reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 556  
 5 U.S. at 678.

### 6 **III. Discussion**

#### 7 **A. Notice of Claim**

8 Defendants assert that the state-law claims in Counts Seven, Eight, and Nine must  
 9 be dismissed because Plaintiff did not serve a Notice of Claim on Hall or Shernicoff before  
 10 filing her state law claims in the First Amended Complaint, and serving a notice of claim  
 11 after filing a lawsuit defeats the purposes of Arizona’s Notice of Claim statute.

12 In Response, Plaintiff asserts that it is undisputed that she served a timely notice of  
 13 claim within 180 days of her arrest and that the Notice of Claim contained the requisite  
 14 information about her claims and a settlement offer. Plaintiff asserts that she was not  
 15 required to file a lawsuit until after serving the Notice of Claim, but rather Arizona allows  
 16 the commencement of claims even when the notice of claim procedures are still playing  
 17 out.

18 On September 3, 2024, Plaintiff filed this action solely alleging violations of federal  
 19 law. On November 13, 2024, Plaintiff filed a Notice of Claim with the City, sharing a  
 20 description of her claims and a settlement offer. Plaintiff filed her First Amended  
 21 Complaint on January 17, 2025 and added state law tort claims against Defendants  
 22 Shernicoff and Hall. Plaintiff served Notices of Claim on Defendant Hall on January 19,  
 23 2025 and on Defendant Shernicoff on February 13, 2025. Plaintiff filed her Second  
 24 Amended Complaint on April 22, 2025.<sup>3</sup>

25 Persons who have claims against a public entity, public school or a public  
 26 employee shall file claims with the person or persons authorized to accept  
 27 service for the public entity, public school or public employee as set forth in  
 the Arizona rules of civil procedure within one hundred eighty days after the

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28 <sup>3</sup> Although Plaintiff served the City with a timely Notice of Claim, Plaintiff does not allege  
 vicarious liability state law claims against the City in the Second Amended Complaint.

1 cause of action accrues. The claim shall contain facts sufficient to permit the  
2 public entity, public school or public employee to understand the basis on  
3 which liability is claimed. The claim shall also contain a specific amount for  
4 which the claim can be settled and the facts supporting that amount. Any  
claim that is not filed within one hundred eighty days after the cause of action  
accrues is barred and no action may be maintained thereon.

5 Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 12-821.01. “The purpose of the notice is to allow the public  
6 employee and his employer to investigate and assess their liability, to permit the possibility  
7 of settlement *prior to litigation* and to assist the public entity in financial planning and  
8 budgeting.” See, e.g., *Crum v. Superior Ct. In & For Cnty. of Maricopa*, 922 P.2d 316,  
9 317 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1996) (emphasis added).

10 While Arizona Revised Statutes § 12-821.01(A) contains no explicit requirement  
11 that a Notice of Claim be served before a lawsuit is filed, Arizona courts, including the  
12 Arizona Supreme Court, have repeatedly stated that a notice of claim must be filed *before*  
13 suing for damages. See, .e.g., *Falcon ex rel. Sandoval v. Maricopa Cnty.*, 144 P.3d 1254,  
14 1255 (Ariz. 2006); *Backus v. State*, 220 Ariz. 101, 103, 203 P.3d 499, 501 (2009) (“Before  
15 suing a public entity, a claimant must file a notice of claim in compliance with Arizona  
16 Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) section 12–821.01.A (2003).”); *Deer Valley Unified Sch. Dist.*  
17 *No. 97 v. Houser*, 214 Ariz. 293, 294, 152 P.3d 490, 491 (2007) (“Before initiating an  
18 action for damages against a public entity, a claimant must provide a notice of claim to the  
19 entity in compliance with Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) section 12–821.01 (2003).”);  
20 *Haizlip v. City of Scottsdale*, No. 1 CA-CV 09-0163, 2010 WL 364168, at \*1 (Ariz. Ct.  
21 App. Feb. 2, 2010) (“Before suing a public entity or a public employee for damages, a  
22 plaintiff must file a notice of claim “with the person or persons authorized to accept service  
23 for the public entity or public employee as set forth in the Arizona rules of civil procedure  
24 within one hundred eighty days after the cause of action accrues.”).

25 Plaintiff sets forth various policy reasons why a claimant should be permitted to file  
26 a Notice of Claim *after* a lawsuit is filed, but this Court is bound by the decisions of the  
27 Arizona Supreme Court when deciding an issue of Arizona state law. See, e.g., *In re*  
28 *Kirkland*, 915 F.2d 1236, 1238 (9th Cir. 1990) (When state law provides the rule of

1 decision, “a federal court is bound by the decision of the highest state court.”). Plaintiff’s  
 2 best argument that this rule should not apply is the Arizona Court of Appeals’ reasoning in  
 3 *Boyd v. State*, 540 P.3d 1228, 1234–35 (Ariz. Ct. App. 2023), that the Arizona Supreme  
 4 Court would not require a Plaintiff to wait 60 days after serving a notice of claim to file a  
 5 lawsuit. But, even in *Boyd*, the Arizona Court of Appeals stated the Plaintiff’s “only  
 6 obligation to meet § 12-821.01(A)’s filing requirements was to file his notice of claim  
 7 *before* filing his complaint.” 540 P.3d at 1233 (emphasis added). Accordingly, because  
 8 Plaintiff failed to fully comply with Arizona Revised Statutes § 12-821.01, her state law  
 9 claims against Defendants Hall and Shernicoff must be dismissed.

#### 10 **B. Open Meeting Law**

11 Defendants assert that Plaintiff’s claim against the City in Count Eleven should be  
 12 dismissed because Arizona’s Open Meeting Law does not establish a statutory right for the  
 13 public to participate in the discussion, or the ultimate decision, of the public body, technical  
 14 violations and minor deviations from requirements of the open meeting law should not  
 15 render action by a public body null and void so long as there is substantial compliance,  
 16 Plaintiff cannot assert a private cause of action unless she seeks to enforce a mandatory  
 17 statutory requirement, Plaintiff is not entitled to damages under the statutory scheme, and  
 18 only claims brought by the attorney general may result in equitable relief or civil penalties  
 19 against the offending public body, not claims brought by individual citizens. Defendants  
 20 assert that Plaintiff is not entitled to declaratory or injunctive relief because the policy  
 21 Plaintiff challenges has been rescinded and the former Mayor holds no position on the City  
 22 Council, and Plaintiff therefore lacks standing for declaratory, injunctive, or equitable  
 23 relief.

24 In Response, Plaintiff asserts that she alleged that Defendants violated Arizona’s  
 25 Open Meeting Law in three distinct ways, allowing her to seek declaratory and injunctive  
 26 relief along with statutory attorney fees. Plaintiff asserts that the Open Meeting Law  
 27 expressly limits the regulations a public body may impose on public comments, allowing  
 28 only “reasonable time, place and manner restrictions.” Plaintiff asserts that she plausibly



1 alleged that the City of Surprise violated the Open Meeting Law by (1) maintaining a  
 2 viewpoint-discriminatory policy that exceeded its authority to impose time, place, or  
 3 manner restrictions on “call-to-the public” segments; (2) enforcing that policy against  
 4 Plaintiff to silence her remarks; and (3) removing her from a public meeting, thereby  
 5 preventing her from exercising her right to “attend and listen to” the proceedings. Plaintiff  
 6 asserts that these claims are not mooted by the voluntary cessation of the policy. Plaintiff  
 7 asserts that the open meeting law expressly provides that “any person affected by an alleged  
 8 violation” of the open meeting law may seek a “determin[ation]” about the “applicability”  
 9 of the open meeting law to the “actions of [a] public body.”

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 11 A public body may make an open call to the public during a public meeting,  
 12 subject to reasonable time, place and manner restrictions, to allow  
 13 individuals to address the public body on any issue within the jurisdiction of  
 14 the public body. At the conclusion of an open call to the public, individual  
 15 members of the public body may respond to criticism made by those who  
 have addressed the public body, may ask staff to review a matter or may ask  
 that a matter be put on a future agenda. However, members of the public  
 body shall not discuss or take legal action on matters raised during an open  
 call to the public unless the matters are properly noticed for discussion and  
 legal action.

16 Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 38-431.01(I).

17 Any person affected by an alleged violation of this article, the attorney  
 18 general or the county attorney for the county in which an alleged violation of  
 19 this article occurred may commence a suit in the superior court in the county  
 20 in which the public body ordinarily meets, for the purpose of requiring  
 compliance with, or the prevention of violations of, this article, by the public  
 body as a whole, or to determine the applicability of this article to matters or  
 legal actions of the public body.

21 Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 38-431.07(A).

22 Here, Plaintiff alleges that during an open call to the public, she was not permitted  
 23 to speak pursuant to reasonable time, place and manner restrictions. Defendants argue that  
 24 the open call to the public is permissive. While this is true, the statute is clear that if an  
 25 open call to the public is held, it must be subject to reasonable time, place, and manner  
 26 restrictions. Plaintiff alleges facts showing that she was not permitted to address the public  
 27 body subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions. Moreover, Defendants’  
 28 argument that Plaintiff cannot sue based on this violation is contravened by the plain



1 language of § 38-431.07(A) allowing any person affected by an alleged violation of the  
 2 public meeting law to commence a suit for the purpose of requiring compliance with, or  
 3 the prevention of violations of the public meeting law by the public body as a whole, or to  
 4 determine the applicability of the public meeting law to matters or legal actions of the  
 5 public body. Defendants' argument that violations of Arizona's Open Meeting Law may  
 6 be duplicative of Plaintiff's First Amendment claims are without import as there is no  
 7 requirement that claims be entirely separate in order to state a claim.

8 Defendants' argument that Plaintiff's claim is moot because the policy under which  
 9 Plaintiff was not permitted to speak has been rescinded is premature and does not address  
 10 the necessary requirements for determining whether a claim is mooted by the voluntary  
 11 cessation of a policy. *See, e.g., Rosebrock v. Mathis*, 745 F.3d 963, 971 (9th Cir. 2014)  
 12 (while it is presumed that "a government entity is acting in good faith when it changes its  
 13 policy, . . . when the Government asserts mootness based on such a change it still must  
 14 bear the heavy burden of showing that the challenged conduct cannot be reasonably be  
 15 expected to start up again." A court should not find mootness "where the new policy could  
 16 be easily abandoned or altered in the future.") (internal citation omitted).

17 Accordingly, Plaintiff states a claim upon which relief may be granted in Count  
 18 Eleven, and Defendants' Motion to Dismiss that claim will be denied.

19 **IT IS ORDERED:**

20 (1) The reference to the Magistrate Judge is **WITHDRAWN** as to Defendants' Partial  
 21 Motion to Dismiss Plaintiff's Second Amended Complaint for Civil Rights  
 22 Violations (Doc. 34).

23 (2) Defendants' Partial Motion to Dismiss Plaintiff's Second Amended Complaint for  
 24 Civil Rights Violations (Doc. 34) is **GRANTED IN PART** and **DENIED IN**  
 25 **PART** as follows:

26 (a) The Motion is **GRANTED** as to Defendants Hall and Shernicoff, and  
 27 Defendants Hall and Shernicoff are dismissed with prejudice<sup>4</sup> from  
 28

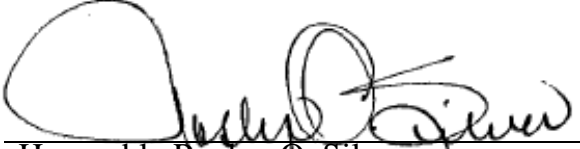
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<sup>4</sup> Arizona Courts consider a procedural dismissal for failure to comply with Arizona's

1 Counts Seven, Eighth, and Nine for failure to comply with Arizona  
2 Revised Statutes section § 12-821.01(A); Counts Seven, Eight, and  
3 Nine are otherwise dismissed without prejudice.

4 (b) The Motion is otherwise **DENIED**.

5 Dated this 6th day of January, 2026.

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9 Honorable Roslyn O. Silver  
Senior United States District Judge

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28 Notice of Claim statute to be “with prejudice.” *See Banner Univ. Med. Ctr. Tucson*  
*Campus, LLC v. Gordon*, 502 P.3d 30, 31 (2022).