STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA GUILFORD COUNTY	IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION 25CV014049-400
VERONICA L. LONGVILLE, D.D.S., M.S., Plaintiff, v. LUIS M. BENITEZ NOGUERAS, D.M.D.; PERIO HOLDINGS, LLC; DRS. BENITEZ & LONGVILLE, PA DBA GREENSBORO PERIO, Defendants.	**ORDER ON JOINT MOTION TO SEAL**

1. After reaching a settlement to end this litigation, the parties have jointly moved to seal about twenty documents that were publicly filed months ago. (*See* ECF No. 31.) For the following reasons, the Court **DENIES** the motion.

2. This case arises out of disputes between co-owners of a dental practice. In June 2025, Veronica Longville filed suit and immediately sought a temporary restraining order. In a nutshell, Longville accused her co-owner, Luis Benitez Nogueras, of launching a surprise coup and locking her out of the practice. In response, Benitez attacked Longville's professionalism and accused her of inappropriate workplace behavior. The parties ultimately resolved the motion for temporary restraining order via consent order. Over the next few months, they mediated and settled their disputes. Now, in January 2026, the parties ask the Court to seal and heavily redact large portions of the record, including the complaint, amended complaint, and material related to the motion for temporary restraining order.

3. The presumption is that court filings are public records. *See Doe v. Doe*, 263 N.C. App. 68, 79–81 (2018). They must be "open to the inspection of the public," except as prohibited by law. N.C.G.S. § 7A-109(a); *see Virmani v. Presbyterian Health Servs. Corp.*, 350 N.C. 449, 463 (1999). Any party seeking to seal court filings bears "a heavy burden" to show that his or her "private interest in keeping the matter secret outweighs the public's interest in open courts." *Addison Whitney, LLC v. Cashion*, 2020 NCBC LEXIS 74, at *4 (N.C. Super. Ct. June 10, 2020). "The burden is even heavier when a litigant files material on the public record and then asks to seal it later." *Linx Legal, Inc. v. Whited*, 2020 NCBC LEXIS 93, at *3 (N.C. Super. Ct. Aug. 7, 2020).

4. Here, the parties' privacy interests pale in comparison with the public's interest. No trade secrets or competitively sensitive documents are at issue. Rather, the parties want to redact the disparaging allegations and evidence that each lobbed at the other, thus hoping to avoid embarrassing publicity and potential reputational harm. The Court has said it many times but will say it once more: "the risk of embarrassment or reputational harm . . . is not enough to warrant sealing." *Whalen v. Tuttle*, 2024 NCBC LEXIS 145, at *5 (N.C. Super. Ct. Nov. 19, 2024); *see also Howard v. IOMAXIS, LLC*, 2023 NCBC LEXIS 134, at *4 (N.C. Super. Ct. Oct. 30, 2023) ("information will not be sealed from the public simply because the information or allegations contained in court filings are sensitive or embarrassing" (citation omitted)); *Fleming v. Horner*, 2020 NCBC LEXIS 88, at *11 (N.C. Super. Ct. July 27,

2020) ("sealing is not warranted merely because allegations are potentially embarrassing or injurious to the reputation of a party").

5. And in any event, the cat is out of the bag. All the information at issue was filed publicly in June 2025 (or, for the amended complaint, September 2025). If the parties ever had a legitimate privacy interest in the filings, that was the time to try to protect it. Moving to seal after the fact is, to put it mildly, a hard sell. "[I]t is hard to conceive of any valid grounds to seal documents that a party knowingly put in the public record so long ago," and "courts usually do not have the ability or the desire to make what has thus become public private again." *Linx Legal*, 2020 NCBC LEXIS 93, at *3–4 (citation and quotation marks omitted); *see also Lovell v. Chesson*, 2019 NCBC LEXIS 76, at *6 (N.C. Super. Ct. Oct. 28, 2019); *Beroz v. Nuvotronics, Inc.*, 2018 NCBC LEXIS 249, at *6 (N.C. Super. Ct. Apr. 3, 2018).

6. The parties worry that their settlement forecloses any chance to show the truth or falsity of the competing allegations through discovery and adversarial presentation, meaning that the public might accept the allegations at face value. But all civil litigation carries a risk of slanted publicity. For parties that prefer to avoid public scrutiny, private arbitration is available. The parties in this case chose to litigate in a public forum, fully aware of the publicity that might entail. Commendably, they resolved their differences before exchanging even more public accusations and recriminations. And nothing is keeping them from taking additional measures to protect their reputations, whether through promises not to disparage one another going forward or through standard public relations efforts. But what the

parties may not do is scrub the record after the fact. To allow them to do so would undermine the Court's role as an open forum and invite administratively burdensome motions in scores of other cases.

7. Accordingly, in its discretion, the Court **DENIES** the joint motion to seal.

SO ORDERED, this the 29th day of January, 2026.

/s/ Adam M. Conrad
Adam M. Conrad
Special Superior Court Judge
for Complex Business Cases