

Tentative Rulings for April 23, 2024
Department 502

For any matter where an oral argument is requested and any party to the hearing desires a remote appearance, such request must be timely submitted to and approved by the hearing judge. In this department, the remote appearance will be conducted through Zoom. If approved, please provide the department's clerk a correct email address. (CRC 3.672, Fresno Sup.C. Local Rule 1.1.19)

There are no tentative rulings for the following cases. The hearing will go forward on these matters. If a person is under a court order to appear, he/she must do so. Otherwise, parties should appear unless they have notified the court that they will submit the matter without an appearance. (See California Rules of Court, rule 3.1304(c).) *The above rule also applies to cases listed in this "must appear" section.*

The court has continued the following cases. The deadlines for opposition and reply papers will remain the same as for the original hearing date.

21CECG00296 *Mata v. Toyota Motor Sales U.S.S., Inc.* is continued to Wednesday, June 12, 2024, at 3:30 p.m. in Department 502

22CECG00615 *Smith v. Kennedy* is continued to Thursday, May 16, 2024, at 3:30 p.m. in Department 502

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Tentative Ruling

Re: **Miguel Parada v. Ron Godwin**
Superior Court Case No. 19CECG03825

Hearing Date: April 23, 2024 (Dept. 502)

Motion: By Defendant Ron Godwin for Summary Judgment

Tentative Ruling:

To grant. Defendant Ron Godwin is directed to submit a proposed judgment within five days of service of the minute order by the clerk.

Explanation:

Defendant Ron Godwin ("Defendant") seeks summary judgment of the First Amended Complaint ("FAC") of plaintiff Miguel Parada ("Plaintiff"). The FAC alleges two causes of action, for premises liability, and general negligence, based on Plaintiff's use of a recreational area on October 30, 2018, in the prison, wherein Plaintiff alleges having stepped into a gopher hole causing injury.

A trial court shall grant summary judgment where there are no triable issues of material fact and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. (Code Civ. Proc. §437c(c); *Schacter v. Citigroup* (2009) 47 Cal.4th 610, 618.) The issue to be determined by the trial court in consideration of a motion for summary judgment is whether or not any facts have been presented which give rise to a triable issue, and not to pass upon or determine the true facts in the case. (*Petersen v. City of Vallejo* (1968) 259 Cal.App.2d 757, 775.)

The moving party bears the initial burden of production to make a prima facie showing of the nonexistence of any triable issue of material fact; if he or she carries this burden, the burden shifts to plaintiff to make a prima facie showing of the existence of a triable issue. (*Aguilar v. Atlantic Richfield Co.* (2001) 25 Cal.4th 826, 849.) A defendant has met his burden of showing that a cause of action has no merit if he has shown that one or more elements of the cause of action cannot be established, or that there is a complete defense to that cause of action. (*Ibid.*) Once the defendant has met that burden, the burden shifts to the plaintiff to show a triable issue of one or more material facts exists as to the cause of action or a defense thereto. (*Ibid.*) All doubts as to the propriety of granting the motion are to be resolved in favor of the party opposing the motion. (*Hamburg v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.* (2004) 116 Cal.App.4th 497, 502.)

The elements of a premises liability and a negligence claim are the same: a legal duty of care, breach of that duty, and proximate cause resulting in injury. (*Kesner v. Super. Ct.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 1132, 1159.) Premises liability merely assumes a duty owed due to the attendant right to control and manage the premises, giving a sufficient basis for the affirmative duty to act. (*Ibid.*) Such assumed duty of an owner of the premises is to exercise ordinary care in the management of such premises in order to avoid exposing

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Tentative Ruling

Re: **Villanueva-Arellano v. Dine Branks Global, Inc.**
Superior Court Case No. 23CECG01365

Hearing Date: April 23, 2024 (Dept. 502)

Motion: Defendant Pancakes 659, Inc.'s Motion to Compel Statement of Damages and Request for Monetary Sanctions

Tentative Ruling:

To deny the request to compel as moot, and to deny the request for monetary sanctions.

Explanation:

In a complaint for personal injury, as here, the complaint cannot allege the amount of damages sought. (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.10, subd. (b).) But the defendant may, at any time, serve a request on plaintiff for a Statement of Damages (mandatory Jud. Counc. Form CIV-050) setting forth the nature and amount of damages being sought. (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.11, subd. (b).) Once such a demand is served, plaintiff has 15 days to serve the responsive statement. If that response is not served, defendant may file a noticed motion and petition the court to order plaintiff to serve the responsive statement (*Ibid.*)

Defendant Pancakes 659, Inc. served its request for a Statement of Damages on plaintiff on September 12, 2023. Plaintiff did not serve the Statement of Damages by the deadline, September 29, 2023. Despite defense counsel sending four letters to plaintiff's counsel to attempt to resolve this, the Statement of Damages still was not served. Thus, defendant had to resort to filing this motion. Plaintiff informs the court in her opposition that she finally served the Statement of Damages on April 9, 2024, i.e., just one day before her opposition brief was due. Thus, the request for an order compelling service of it is moot.

Defendant also requested that sanctions be ordered against plaintiff in the amount of \$1,125, to compensate for her attorney's time in preparing and filing this motion. However, as plaintiff points out, the statute does not provide authority for the court to order monetary sanctions. And since this procedure is not within the Discovery Act, those statutes providing for monetary sanctions for misuse of the discovery process are inapplicable.

Defendant argues that *Argame v. Werasophon* (1997) 57 Cal.App.4th 616 ("*Argame*") provides authority for the court to require plaintiff to reimburse the defendant "for costs incurred in making such a motion." (*Id.* at p. 618, fn. 3.) In the moving brief she characterizes this opinion as making it "clear" that it is "proper" for the court to do so, but in reply she concedes that the footnote in *Argame* is merely *dictum*. Defendant's latter observation is the correct one. "It is axiomatic that cases are not authority for propositions

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Tentative Ruling

Re: **Beatrice Garcia v. Giselle Salazar**
Superior Court Case No. 23CECG02405

Hearing Date: April 23, 2024 (Dept. 502)

Motion: (1) by Plaintiff Beatrice Garcia to Have Requests Deem Admitted in Plaintiff's Request for Admissions, Set One,

(2) by Plaintiff Beatrice Garcia to Compel Responses to Demand for Production, Set One,

(3) by Plaintiff Beatrice Garcia to Compel Answers to Special Interrogatories, Set One,

(4) by Plaintiff Angelita Gonzalez to Have Requests Deem Admitted in Plaintiff's Request for Admissions, Set One,

(5) by Plaintiff Angelita Gonzalez to Compel Responses to Demand for Production, Set One,

(6) by Plaintiff Angelita Gonzalez to Compel Answers to Special Interrogatories, Set One,

Tentative Ruling:

To grant. (Code Civ. Proc., §§ 2030.290, 2031.300.) Within 20 days of service of the order by the clerk, defendant Giselle Salazar shall serve objection-free responses to Special Interrogatories, Set One, and Request for Production of Documents, Set One, and produce all responsive documents.

The matters specified in plaintiff's Requests for Admission (Set One) are deemed admitted, unless defendant Giselle Salazar serves, before the hearing, a proposed response to the requests for admission that is in substantial compliance with Code of Civil Procedure section 2033.220.

To award sanctions against defendant Giselle Salazar in the amount of \$1,410.00, to be paid within 20 calendar days of the date of this order, with the time to run from the service of this minute order by the clerk. (Code Civ. Proc., §2030.290, subd. (c); Code Civ. Proc., §2031.300, subd. (c).)

Explanation:

According to the supporting declarations each of the six motions demonstrate that the subject discovery was served on November 15, 2023. (See Kane, Decls. ¶ 2.) Yet, no responses were ever received (*Id.* at ¶ 8), and no oppositions have been filed.

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Tentative Ruling

Re: **Jason Rubottom v. Julee May**
Superior Court Case No. 21CECG01815

Hearing Date: April 23, 2024 (Dept. 502)

Motion: Defendants Courtyard Management, LLC and Julee May
Demurrer to the Complaint and Motion to Strike

Tentative Ruling:

To grant the motion to strike, in its entirety. To sustain the demurrer to the first (Battery), third (Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress), and fourth (Fraudulent Concealment) causes of action. To grant leave to amend. Should plaintiff desire to amend, the First Amended Complaint shall be filed within ten (10) days from the date of this order. The new amendments shall be in **bold print**. Should plaintiff elect not to file an amended pleading within that time period, demurring defendants shall file responsive pleadings within twenty (20) days from the date of this order.

Explanation:

In deciding a demurrer, the court is guided by well-established principles that the test is whether the plaintiff has succeeded in stating a cause of action - the court does not concern itself with the issue of plaintiff's possible difficulty or inability in proving the allegations of their complaint. (*Gruenberg v. Aetna Ins. Co.* (1973) 9 Cal.3d 566, 572; *Highlanders, Inc. v. Olsan* (1978) 77 Cal.App.3d 690, 697.) The complaint is liberally construed (*Rodas v. Spiegel* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 513, 517; Code Civ. Proc., § 452), which "means that the reviewing court draws inferences favorable to the plaintiff, not the defendant." (*Perez v. Golden Empire Transit Dist.* (2012) 209 Cal.App.4th 1228, 1238.)

Plaintiff here plainly alleges he checked into the defendant hotel on June 24, 2019 and awoke the next day with bedbug bites on his skin. (Complaint, ¶¶ 14-15, 21.) By the time he checked out on June 27, plaintiff had over 100 bites. (¶ 17.) Assuming the truth of these facts, the reasonable inference is that plaintiff suffered the bites during the time he was checked in and staying at the defendant hotel.

Demurring defendant proposes the absence of a specific allegation that plaintiff personally observed bedbugs in his room should operate as a "presume[ption]" that such facts do not exist. (Points & Auth. at p. 10:7-11.) No specific authority is cited for such a proposition, aside from two cases which address *judgment, not pleading*, challenges. (*Id.* at p. 11, citing to *Minder v. Cielito Lindo Restaurant* (1977) 67 Cal.App.3d 1003, 1005 [post judgment appeal]; *Miranda v. Bomel Construction Company, Inc.* (2010) 187 Cal.App.4th 1326, 1328 [summary judgment].) In other words, assuming the truth of plaintiff's allegations, applying liberal pleading standards, and drawing reasonable inferences in plaintiff's favor, the absence of an allegation that plaintiff personally witnessed a bedbug bite his skin in his hotel room does not render the complaint insufficient, especially as to the nuisance and negligence causes of action.

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Tentative Ruling

Re: ***Garcia v. India Oven, Inc., et al.***
Superior Court Case No. 23CECG01606

Hearing Date: April 23, 2024 (Dept. 502)

Motions: Defendants Demurrer and Motion to Strike Portions of the Second Amended Complaint

Tentative Ruling:

To sustain the demurrers to the sixth and seventh causes of action, with leave to amend. (Code Civ. Proc., § 430.10, subd. (e).) To grant the motion to strike the portions of the complaint as it pertains to punitive damages, specifically page 17, lines 19-24; page 19, lines 6-11; and page 19, line 27, with leave to amend. (Code Civ. Proc., § 436; Civ. Code, § 3294.)

Plaintiff is granted 20 days' leave to file the third amended complaint. The time to file the third amended complaint will run from service by the clerk of the minute order. All new allegations in the third amended complaint are to be set in **boldface** type.

Explanation:

Demurrer

Retaliation/Discrimination

Defendants, India Oven, Inc., Gurdev Singh, and Gurdeep Singh demur to the sixth cause of action for wrongful termination in violation of public policy and to the seventh cause of action for retaliation in violation of the California Fair Employment and Housing Act ("FEHA"), on the grounds that plaintiff, Paula Garcia, has not alleged any fact showing that she engaged in a "protected activity" to support her retaliation claim and she has not alleged sufficient facts to state a disability discrimination claim.

Government Code section 12940, subdivision (h), states that it is an unlawful employment practice "[f]or any employer, labor organization, employment agency, or person to discharge, expel, or otherwise discriminate against any person because the person has opposed any practices forbidden under this part or because the person has filed a complaint, testified, or assisted in any proceeding under this part." (Gov. Code, § 12940, subd. (h).)

"Past California cases hold that in order to establish a prima facie case of retaliation under the FEHA, a plaintiff must show (1) he or she engaged in a 'protected activity,' (2) the employer subjected the employee to an adverse employment action, and (3) a causal link existed between the protected activity and the employer's action." (*Yanowitz v. L'Oreal USA, Inc.* (2005) 36 Cal.4th 1028, 1042, internal citations omitted.)

Defendants contend that the SAC fails to allege any new facts, and that the amended pleading reasserts plaintiff's contention that reporting her workplace injury and requesting for defendant's workers' compensation information constitutes a protected activity under FEHA. Notably, the SAC is substantially similar to the First Amended Complaint, and it appears the only new factual allegation pled is that plaintiff informed defendants that she would be seeking medical treatment, shortly after she fell, but before she was terminated. (SAC, ¶ 27.) However, plaintiff contends that she has sufficiently alleged that she requested for a reasonable accommodation for her disability.

While case law establishes that “[n]otifying one's employer of one's medical status, even if such medical status constitutes a 'disability' under FEHA, does not fall within the protected activity identified in subdivision (h) of [Government Code] section 12940...” (*Moore v. Regents of University of California* (2016) 248 Cal.App.4th 216, 247.), an alleged *request for an accommodation* is one of such protected activities. (Gov. Code, § 12940, subd. (m)(2).)

Plaintiff argues that the allegations indicating that she provided notice of her injuries and of her intent to seek medical treatment and to file a workers' compensation claim was sufficient to imply that she would be missing work for a period of time in connection with her workplace injury, and thus, sufficient to allege that she made a request for reasonable accommodation. However, even if the court were to accept such liberal construction of the operative complaint, generally, in order to establish a failure to accommodate claim, the plaintiff must first establish that she “suffers from a disability covered by FEHA[.]” (*Jensen v. Wells Fargo Bank* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 245, 256.) which plaintiff has not pled. The allegations show nothing more than the fact that plaintiff fell and intended to seek medical treatment. No facts are alleged to describe plaintiff's injuries resulting from the fall or that she was otherwise rendered unable to participate in a major life activity, such as her job, which if pled, could serve to help the court to understand plaintiff's argument that her communication of her intent to seek medical treatment was sufficient to establish the implication of a request for accommodation.

Accordingly, the SAC fails to plead facts sufficient to show that plaintiff engaged in a protected activity, i.e., requested for an accommodation, to support her FEHA retaliation cause of action. Alternatively, plaintiff contends that she has sufficiently pled a FEHA disability discrimination claim. However, as previously provided, she has not pled facts to show that she suffers from a disability covered by FEHA. Therefore, the demurrer to the seventh cause of action is sustained, with leave to amend.

Wrongful Termination

Ordinarily, the Workers' Compensation Appeal Board has exclusive jurisdiction over claims arising from violations of Labor Code section 132a, and “a violation of [Labor Code] section 132a cannot be the basis of a tort action for wrongful termination.” (*Dutra v. Mercy Medical Center Mt. Shasta* (2012) 209 Cal.App.4th 750, 755.) However, “Labor Code section 132a does not provide an exclusive remedy against disability discrimination and does not preclude an employee from pursuing remedies under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and common law wrongful termination remedies.”

