

Tentative Rulings for July 13, 2023
Department 403

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.

21CECG00839 *Anita Mosqueda v. Fresno Community Hospital and Medical Center*
is continued to Thursday, August 3, 2023, at 3:30 p.m. in Department
403

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Tentative Ruling

Re: ***Fries v. Willow Creek Post Acute, LLC, et al.***
Superior Court Case No. 22CECG00933

Hearing Date: July 13, 2023 (Dept. 403)

Motion: Plaintiffs' Motion for Clarification and Reconsideration
Pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure sections 1008(a) and
1008(c)

Tentative Ruling:

To deny plaintiffs' motion for clarification and reconsideration of its order after the pretrial discovery conference held on March 24, 2023. To deny defendant's request for monetary sanctions against plaintiffs and their attorneys.

Explanation:

Under Code of Civil Procedure section 1008, subdivision (a), a party moving for reconsideration of a court order must show that there are "new or different facts, circumstances, or law" that justify reconsideration of the order. (Code Civ. Proc. § 1008, subd. (a).) "The party making the application shall state by affidavit what application was made before, when and to what judge, what order or decisions were made, and what new or different facts, circumstances, or law are claimed to be shown." (Code Civ. Proc. § 1008, subd. (a).) Failure to submit an affidavit that complies with the requirements of section 1008(a) renders the motion invalid and deprives the court of jurisdiction to hear the motion. (*Branner v. Regents of University of California* (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 1043, 1048.)

Also, "[a] party seeking reconsideration also must provide a satisfactory explanation for the failure to produce the evidence at an earlier time." (*New York Times Co. v. Superior Court* (2005) 135 Cal.App.4th 206, 212, internal citations omitted.) "Case law after the 1992 amendments to section 1008 has relaxed the definition of 'new or different facts,' but it is still necessary that the party seeking that relief offer some fact or circumstance not previously considered by the court." (*Id.* at pp. 212-213, internal citations omitted.)

"Courts have construed section 1008 to require a party filing an application for reconsideration or a renewed application to show diligence with a satisfactory explanation for not having presented the new or different information earlier." (*Even Zohar Construction & Remodeling, Inc. v. Bellaire Townhouses, LLC* (2015) 61 Cal.4th 830, 839, citing *California Correctional Peace Officers Assn. v. Virga* (2010) 181 Cal.App.4th 30, 46-47 & fns. 14-15 and *Garcia v. Hejmadi* (1997) 58 Cal.App.4th 674, 688-690.) "Section 1008's purpose is ""to conserve judicial resources by constraining litigants who would endlessly bring the same motions over and over, or move for reconsideration of every adverse order and then appeal the denial of the motion to reconsider.'" To state that purpose strongly, the Legislature made section 1008 expressly jurisdictional..." (*Id.* at pp. 839-840.) Thus, failure to comply with the requirement of demonstrating new facts,

circumstances, or law requires denial of a motion for reconsideration. (*Le Francois v. Goel* (2005) 35 Cal.4th 1094, 1104.)

Here, plaintiffs move for reconsideration of the court's order after the pretrial discovery conference, in which the court denied plaintiffs' request to compel defendant to provide further responses to special interrogatories 26 and 27. (Court's Minute Order of March 24, 2023.) Plaintiffs claim that it is unclear whether the court intended to allow them to file a motion to compel further responses to the special interrogatories, and if the court did deny the request to file a motion to compel, then plaintiffs contend that the court should reconsider its order based on "new or different law" supporting its motion.

However, the court's order after the pretrial discovery conference was clear and unambiguous. It clearly stated that no further responses were being compelled as to special interrogatories 26 and 27. "The parties having stipulated that the court may issue an order adjudicating the merits of the discovery dispute, the Court now rules as follows: ... The court finds special interrogatories 26 and 27 overbroad. Plaintiff has not demonstrated a compelling need to obtain third party information. No responses to 26 or 27 are ordered." (Court's Minute Order of March 24, 2023.) Thus, the court's order needs no clarification, as it expressly denied the plaintiffs' request to compel further responses to the disputed special interrogatories.

Nor have plaintiffs shown that the court should reconsider its order, as they have not pointed to any new facts, circumstances, or law that would justify reconsideration of the order. As discussed above, section 1008(a)'s requirement to show new facts, circumstances or law to support a motion for reconsideration is mandatory and jurisdictional, and failure to meet the requirement mandates denial of the motion for reconsideration. (*Le Francois v. Goel, supra*, 35 Cal.4th at p. 1104.) Also, the party moving for reconsideration must show that it was diligent in presenting any new facts or evidence, and that it had a satisfactory excuse for not presenting the new facts sooner. (*Even Zohar Construction & Remodeling, Inc. v. Bellaire Townhouses, LLC, supra*, 61 Cal.4th at p. 839.)

Here, plaintiffs have not pointed to any new facts, circumstances, or law that would support their request to reconsider the order. Plaintiffs claim that there is "new or different law" to support their motion, citing to *Williams v. Superior Court* (2017) 3 Cal.5th 531, in which the California Supreme Court held that a party moving for the release of third party witness identifying information does not have to make a showing of a compelling need for the information. (*Id.* at pp. 558-560.) They contend that they were unable to cite to *Williams* in their pretrial discovery conference brief because they were limited to only a "brief summary of the dispute, including the facts and legal arguments at issue." They also claim that, if they are allowed to fully brief the issue, they would cite *Williams* to support their position that other residents' identities should be disclosed to them to help them establish that defendant's facility was understaffed.

Yet *Williams* was decided in July of 2017, about six years ago, and long before plaintiffs filed their pretrial discovery conference brief. Therefore, *Williams* is not "new law" for the purpose of section 1008, as it was decided years before plaintiffs filed their request for a pretrial discovery conference and plaintiffs could have presented it when they filed their initial pretrial discovery conference request. (*Baldwin v. Home Savings of America* (1997) 59 Cal.App.4th 1191, 1196.)

Also, to the extent that plaintiffs claim that *Williams* represents “different law”, they have not offered any explanation for their failure to cite to *Williams* in their pretrial discovery conference brief, other than claiming that they were limited by the requirement that they offer only a “brief summary” of the dispute. Again, however, a party moving for reconsideration must show that they have a reasonable explanation for their failure to present the new or different facts or law sooner. (*Baldwin, supra*, at pp. 1198-1199.) “Without a diligence requirement the number of times a court could be required to reconsider its prior orders would be limited only by the ability of counsel to belatedly conjure a legal theory different from those previously rejected, which is not much of a limitation.” (*Id.* at p. 1199.) Here, plaintiffs have not explained why they could not have cited to *Williams* in their brief in support of the pretrial discovery conference request. Such a citation would not have required more than a single sentence, or even a parenthetical citation. Also, they could have orally argued before the court during the conference that *Williams* allowed them to obtain the identities of other residents’ representatives, even if they did not cite to *Williams* in their written brief. Therefore, plaintiffs have not given a satisfactory explanation for their failure to cite to *Williams* earlier, and as a result the court will not grant reconsideration of its order based on “new or different” law.

Plaintiffs also argue that the court's order was improperly granted because there was no stipulation to allow the court to rule on the merits of the discovery dispute. Plaintiffs submit the declaration of the attorney who appeared on their behalf at the discovery conference, Roger Stewart, who states that he was not asked to and never stipulated to have the court hear the merits of the dispute at the conference. (Stewart decl., ¶ 4.)

However, plaintiff's argument does not support a motion for reconsideration which, as discussed above, requires a showing of new or different facts, circumstances, or law. Even if there was no formal stipulation to have the court hear the merits of the dispute, this would not constitute new or different facts, circumstances, or law as required by section 1008.

In any event, Local Rule 2.1.17 does not require a formal, written stipulation to allow the court to make an order after a pretrial discovery conference. Here, while Mr. Stewart may not have executed a formal written or oral stipulation to allow the court to hear the merits of the dispute, he consented to have the court hear the matter when he appeared at the conference and failed to object to the court's order at the time. Therefore, the court finds that the lack of a formal written or oral stipulation does not render the order defective.

Plaintiffs also cite to section 1008, subdivision (c), to support their motion for reconsideration. Section 1008, subdivision (c), states that, “If a court at any time determines that there has been a change of law that warrants it to reconsider a prior order it entered, it may do so on its own motion and enter a different order.” (Code Civ. Proc., § 1008, subd. (c).) Again, however, plaintiffs fail to point to any change in the law that would justify the court reconsidering its order. *Williams* does not constitute a “change in the law” that occurred after the court made its order in March of 2023. Indeed, *Williams* was decided in July of 2017, almost six years before the court made its order. Therefore, plaintiffs have failed to show that the court should reconsider its order based on a change in the law, and the court intends to deny the motion for reconsideration.

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Tentative Ruling

Re: **Ringgold v. AAA Tree Service, LLC**
Superior Court Case No. 22CECG01431

Hearing Date: July 13, 2023 (Dept. 403)

Motion: Defendant's Demurrer to First Amended Complaint

Tentative Ruling:

To sustain defendant AAA Tree Service, LLC's demurrer to the third cause of action for fraud, with leave to amend, for failure to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action. Plaintiffs shall serve and file their second amended complaint within 10 days of the date of service of this order. All new allegations shall be in **boldface**.

Explanation:

Plaintiffs' third cause of action alleges that defendant AAA Tree Service, LLC made a fraudulent promise without the intent to perform it. "'Promissory fraud' is a subspecies of the action for fraud and deceit. A promise to do something necessarily implies the intention to perform; hence, where a promise is made without such intention, there is an implied misrepresentation of fact that may be actionable fraud.' The elements of promissory fraud (i.e., of fraud or deceit based on a promise made without any intention of performing it) are: (1) a promise made regarding a material fact without any intention of performing it; (2) the existence of the intent not to perform at the time the promise was made; (3) intent to deceive or induce the promisee to enter into a transaction; (4) reasonable reliance by the promisee; (5) nonperformance by the party making the promise; and (6) resulting damage to the promise[e]." (*Behnke v. State Farm General Ins. Co.* (2011) 196 Cal.App.4th 1443, 1453, citations omitted.)

Also, when alleging a claim for fraud, the plaintiffs must allege specific facts to support all of the elements of the cause of action. (*Lazar v. Superior Court* (1996) 12 Cal.4th 631, 645.) "In California, fraud must be pled specifically; general and conclusory allegations do not suffice. 'Thus "'the policy of liberal construction of the pleadings ... will not ordinarily be invoked to sustain a pleading defective in any material respect.'" This particularity requirement necessitates pleading *facts* which "show how, when, where, to whom, and by what means the representations were tendered.'" A plaintiff's burden in asserting a fraud claim against a corporate employer is even greater. In such a case, the plaintiff must 'allege the names of the persons who made the allegedly fraudulent representations, their authority to speak, to whom they spoke, what they said or wrote, and when it was said or written.' (*Ibid*, citations omitted, italics in original.)

Here, plaintiffs have alleged in conclusory fashion the elements of their promissory fraud claim. However, they have not alleged any specific facts to support their claim against AAA Tree Service, which is a corporate defendant. They do not allege who made the promise, their authority to speak, what they said, when the promise was made, by what means it was made, to whom it was made, or where it was made. They simply

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Tentative Ruling

Re: ***Claudia Cox v. Centene Corporation***
Superior Court Case No. 21CECG00944

Hearing Date: July 13, 2023 (Dept. 403)

Motion: By Plaintiff Claudia Cox to Compel Defendant Health Net of California Inc.'s Further Responses to Request for Production, Set Two, and for Monetary Sanctions

Tentative Ruling:

To deny.

Explanation:

Meet and Confer

The parties engaged in what appears to be two phone calls and multiple email exchanges between February 14, 2023 and the filing of this motion. (See Whelan Decl.; Jenkins Decl.) While there has been much discussion between counsel, it is apparent that the parties had arrived at an impasse. The court finds that the parties have sufficiently engaged in the meet and confer process.

Merits

Request Numbers 40, 42, and 43—Waiver of Privilege

The primary issue with these requests appears to be the existence of an “ADA List” which is referenced in defendant's produced documents, but was not itself produced. Defendant asserts that there is no “ADA List” but that there is an “Impacted List”. Noteworthy, the document produced by defendant, titled “HRBP RIF Update” dated January 26, 2021 implies that there are two lists: 1) the impacted employees for pending charges, lawsuits, ER claims, visa sponsorships, and accommodations and 2) the ADA list. (Whelan Decl., Exh. F.) Defendant additionally asserts that the “Impacted List” is privileged based on attorney-client and work product privileges. Plaintiff does not appear to challenge that the list(s) would qualify under the attorney-client privilege or the work product doctrine. In fact, it appears that plaintiff concedes this point. However, plaintiff argues that these privileges are waived because defendants put the list(s) at issue in their defense.

The court in *Kaiser Foundation Hospitals v. Superior Court “Kaiser”* (1998) 66 Cal.App.4th 1217, 1219-1220 held that

“if an employer has produced the substance of relevant in-house investigations performed by nonattorney personnel and seeks only to protect specific communications between

those personnel and the employer's attorneys, the protections afforded by the law for communications between attorneys and their clients are not waived by the employer's pleading of the adequacy of its prelitigation investigation as a defense to an action for employee discrimination or harassment."

Kaiser largely addressed this issue in the context of the analysis of *Wellpoint Health Networks, Inc. v. Superior Court "Wellpoint"* (1997) 59 Cal.App.4th 110. *Kaiser* and *Wellpoint* were factually distinguishable, especially the context of who conducted the prelitigation investigation. (*Kaiser, supra*, 66 Cal.App.4th 1217, 1223.) In *Kaiser*, the investigation was conducted by a nonattorney, *Kaiser* had produced much of its investigation documents with a written stipulation that such did not waive the attorney-client privilege, produced a privilege log, and asserted the privilege only as to specified communications between the employees and counsel. (*Id.* at p. 1225.) The court in *Kaiser* clarified that *Wellpoint* does **not** hold that if a defendant claims it has investigated harassment and taken appropriate actions, then all privileges regarding communications about that investigation are waived. (*Id.* at p. 1223.) What ultimately matters is the "dominant purpose behind" the potentially privileged documents and whether the purpose was to further the attorney-client relationship. (*Id.* at p. 1226.) Therefore, the subject matter of the document in question matters. (*Ibid.*) When a defendant places the adequacy of its internal investigation at issue, it does not necessarily waive attorney-client privilege. (*Id.* at p. 1227.) In *Kaiser*, the court found the nonattorney internal investigation, where the only documents withheld from discovery were specified attorney-client communications and work product, then the privileges were not waived "unless a substantial part of any particular communication has already been disclosed to third parties." (*Id.* at p. 1228.)

Kaiser and *Wellpoint* are both distinguishable from this matter in one regard. The internal investigations in each were regarding employee misconduct. Here, the investigation at issue is different. This investigation was to determine who the defendants would layoff, with human resources sending some kind of list to in-house counsel, presumably to vet the list and identify individuals that defendants could not layoff. Thus, this was not an investigation into misconduct and it took place on a much larger scale. However, *Kaiser* and *Wellpoint* do provide guidance here.

This case is more akin to *Kaiser*. Here, it appears that a nonattorney created the list in question. (Jenkins Decl., Exh. I.) Here, defendants have not asserted privileges as to the process they used for the reduction in force ("RIF"). They have produced documents regarding this process and the criteria used to select who would be laid off. (*Id.* at ¶ 3.) Defendants only assert the privilege as to the list. Defendant asserts that human resources made a list of individuals who may present risks in the RIF process, called the "Impact List" and those individuals would "potentially be elevated for review by the legal team". (*Id.* at ¶ 4.) On March 3, 2023, they produced the privilege log regarding the "Impacted List" which explains that it was created on January 26, 2021 by the Chief Provider Contracting Officer and sent to the Senior Director of Human Resources

