

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Mashid Wadea v. Mercedes-Benz USA, LLC

Wadea · No. 24-cv-1587-JLS-DDL · Decided January 16, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of California denied Mercedes-Benz USA, LLC’s renewed motion to file Exhibits 5 and 6 under seal. Applying the good-cause standard, the Court found that Mercedes-Benz had not made a particularized showing of specific prejudice or harm from disclosure. The Court ordered Plaintiff to file the exhibits without redactions within 10 days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
DECIDED	January 16, 2026
DOCKET	24-cv-1587-JLS-DDL
DISPOSITION	denied
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved to file under seal Exhibits 5 and 6 to Plaintiff's opposition to Defendant's motion for a protective order. The court denied the renewed sealing motion and ordered Plaintiff to file the response and exhibits without redactions.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Requests to seal judicial records are evaluated under a strong presumption of public access. Depending on the relationship of the underlying motion to the merits, the movant must show either compelling reasons or, for matters only tangentially related to the merits such as discovery motions, good cause supported by a particularized showing of specific prejudice or harm.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

TOPICS

- civil procedure
- discovery dispute
- commercial litigation
- commercial

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- commercial litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Defendant established good cause to seal redacted versions of Exhibits 5 and 6 containing purportedly confidential business information.
2. Whether the court should order Plaintiff to file the response and Exhibits 5 and 6 on the public docket without redactions.

HOLDINGS

1. Defendant failed to establish good cause to seal any portion of Exhibits 5 and 6 because it did not make a particularized showing that specific prejudice or harm would result from public disclosure.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The public enjoys “a general right to inspect and copy public records and documents, including judicial records and documents.”” (at 1)

“Although less demanding than the “compelling reasons” standard, “good cause” nevertheless requires a “particularized showing that specific prejudice or harm will result” if the information is disclosed.” (at 2)

“Defendant’s assertion that disclosure could be used by its vendors and competitors to their advantage is broad and speculative, as is its argument that disclosure would chill communications or harm dealer relationships.” (at 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The exhibits were email communications between Mercedes-Benz employees concerning entities evaluating tire and wheel performance and warranty data, an analysis of consumer complaints, and a tire issue reported by an unnamed customer. Mercedes-Benz argued that disclosure could reveal business operations, affect competitive standing, influence vendor negotiations, chill dealer communications, and harm dealer relationships. The court found those assertions broad, speculative, and unsupported by a concrete explanation of how disclosure of the particular information would cause specific harm.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff initially moved to seal Exhibits 5 and 6 in their entirety. The court denied that motion without prejudice because portions of the exhibits were clearly not confidential and allowed Defendant to propose redactions. Defendant then renewed its motion to seal the exhibits, and the court denied the renewed motion for failure to establish good cause.

DISPOSITION

denied

CASES CITED

- Nixon v. Warner Communications, Inc., 435 U.S. 589, 597 (1978)
- Center for Auto Safety v. Chrysler Group, LLC, 809 F.3d 1092, 1096-97 (9th Cir. 2016)

- Kamakana v. City & County of Honolulu, 447 F.3d 1172, 1178 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Phillips ex rel. Estates of Byrd v. General Motors Corp., 307 F.3d 1206, 1210-11 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Beckman Industries, Inc. v. International Insurance Co., 966 F.2d 470, 476 (9th Cir. 1992)
- Grano v. Sodexo Management, Inc., No. 18-cv-1818-RSH-BLM, 2022 WL 3371621, at *2 (S.D. Cal. Aug. 16, 2022)
- Vasquez v. O'Reilly Auto Enterprises, LLC, No. 1:21-CV-01099-DAD-SAB, 2022 WL 1645145, at *4 (E.D. Cal. May 24, 2022)

OPINION

Wadeea

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6

7 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

8 SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

9 10 MASHID WADEEA, individually and on Case No.: 24-cv-1587-JLS-DDL behalf of all
others similarly situated, 11

ORDER DENYING MOTION TO

Plaintiff,

12 FILE DOCUMENTS UNDER SEAL

v. 13 [Dkt. No. 178]

MERCEDES-BENZ USA, LLC,

14 15 Defendant. 16 17 18 Before the Court is Defendant Mercedes-Benz USA's motion to file
under seal

19 Exhibits 5 and 6 to Plaintiff's response in opposition to Defendant's motion for a protective
20 order. Dkt. No. 178. For the reasons below, the motion is DENIED. 21 I.

22 FACTUAL BACKGROUND

23 On August 29, 2025, Plaintiff moved to file under seal in their entirety Exhibits 5 24 and 6 to
her opposition to Defendant's motion for protective order and all portions of her 25 opposition
referring to those Exhibits, explaining that the Exhibits were designated by 26 Defendant as
"Confidential – For Counsel Only" and "Confidential," respectively. Dkt.

27 No. 111. Defendant filed its notice of joinder to the motion on September 5, 2025. Dkt.

28 No. 119. Defendant argued that good cause to seal existed because the documents

1 contained "confidential business information" that could "harm [its] competitive standing 2 if
distributed." Id. at 2. 3 The Court found that good cause did not exist to seal the documents in their
entirety, 4 as some portions of the Exhibits were clearly not confidential business information.
Dkt.

5 No. 168 at 2. The Court denied the motion to seal without prejudice and gave Defendant

6 an opportunity to propose redactions to the Exhibits. Id. On December 5, 2025, Defendant 7

filed its renewed motion to file under seal, and on December 11, 2025, Plaintiff filed her 8 response in opposition. Dkt. Nos. 178, 186. 9 The Exhibits at issue are emails that Defendant contends reveal sensitive details 10 regarding its business operations. Defendant argues that public disclosure of certain 11 portions of the Exhibits would result in harm to its competitive standing and dealer 12 relationships. Dkt. No. 178 at 2-3. Plaintiff opposes the motion, arguing that the 13 documents contain “no information that any third party could use to gain an advantage over 14 MBUSA.” Dkt. No. 186 at 6. 15 II.

16 LEGAL STANDARDS

17 The public enjoys “a general right to inspect and copy public records and documents, 18 including judicial records and documents.” *Nixon v. Warner Commc’ns, Inc.*, 435 U.S. 19 589, 597 (1978). This longstanding principle “is based on the need for federal courts, 20 although independent—indeed, particularly because they are independent—to have a 21 measure of accountability and for the public to have confidence in the administration 22 of justice.” *Ctr. for Auto Safety v. Chrysler Grp., LLC*, 809 F.3d 1092, 1096 (9th Cir. 2016) 23 (citation omitted). Thus, when evaluating a request to seal judicial records, courts in this 24 Circuit start with “a strong presumption in favor of access” to those records. *Kamakana v. 25 City & Cty. of Honolulu*, 447 F.3d 1172, 1178 (9th Cir. 2006) (citation omitted). 26 The party requesting sealing bears the burden of overcoming this strong 27 presumption. *Id.* The showing required depends upon whether the underlying motion is 28 closely related to the merits of the case – in which case the party 1 must demonstrate “compelling reasons” to seal – or is only “tangentially related” to them, 2 which requires a less demanding showing of good cause. See *Ctr. for Auto Safety*, 809 F.3d 3 at 1097. Most courts apply the “good cause” standard to discovery motions. Although less 4 demanding than the “compelling reasons” standard, “good cause” nevertheless requires a 5 “particularized showing that specific prejudice or harm will result” if the information is 6 disclosed. See *Phillips ex rel. Estates of Byrd v. Gen Motors Corp.*, 307 F.3d 1206, 1210- 7 11 (9th Cir. 2002). “Broad allegations of harm, unsubstantiated by specific examples of 8 articulated reasoning,” do not satisfy the good cause standard. *Beckman Indus., Inc. v. Int’l 9 Ins. Co.*, 966 F.2d 470, 476 (9th Cir. 1992). “[C]ourts will seal records containing detailed 10 confidential business information” only “where the parties articulate a concrete, non- 11 speculative harm” that would result from disclosure. *Grano v. Sodexo Mgmt., Inc.*, No. 18- 12 cv-1818-RSH-BLM, 2022 WL 3371621, at *2 (S.D. Cal. Aug. 16, 2022). 13 III.

14 DISCUSSION

15 For similar reasons as those articulated in the Court’s order denying the motion to 16 seal without prejudice, Dkt No. 168, the Court finds that Defendant has failed to establish 17 good cause to seal the redacted versions of the Exhibits.

18 Exhibit 5 is an email exchange between Mercedes-Benz employees identifying the 19 entities that evaluate tire/wheel performance and warranty data and referencing an analysis 20 of consumer complaints of tire damage. Defendant alleges that if the redacted portions of

21 Exhibit 5 are publicly disclosed, “competitors could leverage MBUSA’s organizational
22 choices and decision criteria to compete with MBUSA, and vendors could use the 23
information to negotiate against MBUSA.” Dkt. No. 178 at 3. However, Defendant does 24 not
explain how competitors or vendors could use the information in Exhibit 5 in this 25 manner, nor
is the potential for such use apparent from the face of Exhibit 5. See Vasquez 26 v. O’Reilly Auto
Enters., LLC, No. 1:21-CV-01099-DAD-SAB, 2022 WL 1645145, at *4 27 (E.D. Cal. May 24,
2022) (denying motion to seal based on asserted need to “protect the 28 confidentiality of [party’s]
business processes and management decisions” where party did 1 not “make any ‘particularized
showings’ or provide any further elaboration” as to why 2 documents should be sealed).

3 Exhibit 6 is an email sent by one Mercedes-Benz employee to another discussing a
4 tire issue raised by an unnamed customer. Defendant alleges that Exhibit 6 “reveal[s] 5
information about the dynamics of customer reassurance and dealer-customer interactions, 6
MBUSA’s criteria for when and how potential product concerns are monitored rather than 7
opened as formal cases, and how dealer reports factor into MBUSA’s decisions,” 8 information
that competitors could hypothetically use to inform their own business 9 strategies. Dkt. No. 178
at 3. Defendant further argues that disclosure could “chill candid 10 dealer communications,
undermining MBUSA’s quality control operations and dealer 11 relationships.” Id. at 4. Again,
however, Defendant does not explain how public disclosure 12 of the information in Exhibit 6
referencing tire issues reported by a single customer could 13 adversely affect Defendant’s
business operations. Vasquez, 2022 WL 1645145, at *4. 14 Having reviewed Exhibits 5 and 6 in
their entirety, the Court finds Defendant has 15 not made a “particularized showing that specific
prejudice or harm will result” if Exhibits 16 5 and 6 are publicly available in unredacted form.
Phillips ex rel. Estates of Byrd, 307 F.3d 17 at 1210. As described above, Defendant’s assertion
that disclosure could be used by its 18 vendors and competitors to their advantage is broad and
speculative, as is its argument that 19 disclosure would chill communications or harm dealer
relationships. Therefore, the Court 20 concludes that Defendant has failed to show good cause for
sealing any portion of Exhibit 21 5 or 6. 22 /// 23 /// 24 /// 25 /// 26 /// 27 /// 28 /// I IV.

2 CONCLUSION

3 Defendant’s motion to file documents under seal [Dkt. No. 178] is DENIED. 4 || Plaintiff shall
file her Response in Opposition to Defendant’s Motion for Protective Order 5 [Dkt. No. 113]
without redactions to Exhibit 5 and Exhibit 6 on the public docket within 6 || 10 days of this Order.
7 IT ISSO ORDERED. 8 ||Dated: January 16, 2026 _— 9 Tb lho a United States Magistrate Judge
12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28