

**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

OPINION

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