

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Huerta v. CSI Electrical Contractors, Inc.

Huerta · No. 18-cv-06761-BLF · Decided July 23, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California dismissed without prejudice Plaintiff’s California Unfair Competition Law claim for lack of equitable jurisdiction. The court held that Plaintiff had an adequate remedy at law through claims under the California Labor Code and declined to partially remand the UCL claim or defer dismissal until the end of the litigation.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Beth Labson Freeman
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	July 23, 2025
DOCKET	18-cv-06761-BLF
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The district court considered the parties' briefing concerning the effect of Sonner on Huerta's California Unfair Competition Law claim and dismissed that claim without prejudice.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	George Huerta v. CSI Electrical Contractors, Inc.

TOPICS

- subject matter jurisdiction
- equitable relief
- civil procedure
- remedies
- consumer protection

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- remedies
- consumer protection
- employment law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court had equitable jurisdiction over Huerta's UCL claim when he had an adequate legal remedy through direct California Labor Code claims.

2. Whether the court should partially remand the UCL claim under 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c).
3. Whether dismissal of the UCL claim should be deferred until trial or termination of the action.

HOLDINGS

1. A federal court lacks equitable jurisdiction to hear a UCL claim seeking equitable relief when the plaintiff has an adequate remedy at law; Huerta had such a remedy through direct California Labor Code claims.
2. The court had authority to dismiss the UCL claim without prejudice to refiling the same claim in state court.
3. The court declined to partially remand the UCL claim because the authority permitting such a remand was unclear and Huerta had not shown that dismissal would cause forfeiture of the claim.
4. The court declined to defer dismissal of the UCL claim until after trial or termination of the action.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Under those federal principles, a plaintiff “must establish that she lacks an adequate remedy at law before securing equitable restitution for past harm under the UCL.”” (at 1)

““Equitable jurisdiction is distinct from subject matter jurisdiction[.]”” (at 2)

“Given the lack of clear authority permitting partial remand of Plaintiff’s UCL claim, and Plaintiffs lack of preference, the Court finds it most appropriate to dismiss the UCL claim without prejudice.” (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Huerta's UCL claim was grounded on alleged violations of the California Labor Code. The same alleged violations were also asserted through direct California Labor Code claims, providing an asserted legal remedy. Huerta did not argue that dismissal of the UCL claim would cause forfeiture of the claim in state court and stated that he did not care whether the court partially remanded or dismissed the claim without prejudice.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Huerta asserted legal claims under the California Labor Code and a UCL claim in federal court. The parties agreed that the court lacked equitable jurisdiction over the UCL claim but disagreed whether the claim should be partially remanded, dismissed without prejudice, or left pending until the end of the litigation. The court dismissed the UCL claim without prejudice and discharged its order to show cause.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Sonner v. Premier Nutrition Corp., 971 F.3d 834 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Guzman, 49 F.4th at 1310, 1314-15

- Lee v. American National Insurance Co., 260 F.3d 997, 1006-07 & n.8 (9th Cir. 2001)
- California v. N. Tr. Corp., No. CV 12-01813 DMG (FMOx), 2013 WL 1561460, at *6 (C.D. Cal. Apr. 10, 2013)
- Kim, No. 196919, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 13, 2023)
- Johnson v. Nissan N. Am., Inc., No. 3:17-CV-00517-WHO, 2022 WL 2869528, at *17 (N.D. Cal. July 21, 2022)

OPINION

Huerta v. First Solar, Inc., a Delaware corporation

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3

4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

6 SAN JOSE DIVISION

7 8 GEORGE HUERTA, an individual, on Case No. 18-cv-06761-BLF behalf of himself and all
others similarly 9 situated and as a representative plaintiff,

ORDER DISMISSING PLAINTIFF'S

10 Plaintiff, UCL CLAIM WITHOUT PREJUDICE 11 v.

12 CSI ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS,

INC.,

13 Defendant. 14

15 16 17 At the Court's request, the parties have submitted briefing on the effect of Sonner v. 18
Premier Nutrition Corp., 971 F.3d 834 (9th Cir. 2020), on Plaintiff's Fourth Cause of Action for 19
violation of California's Unfair Competition Law ("UCL"), California Business & Professions 20
Code § 17200 et seq. In Sonner, the Ninth Circuit held that federal courts must apply equitable 21
principles deriving from federal common law to claims for equitable relief brought under state 22
law, including "the principle precluding courts from awarding equitable relief when an adequate
23 legal remedy exists[.]" Sonner, 971 F.3d at 842. Under those federal principles, a plaintiff
"must 24 establish that she lacks an adequate remedy at law before securing equitable restitution
for past 25 harm under the UCL." Id. at 844. In Guzman, the Ninth Circuit clarified that a district
court lacks 26 "equitable jurisdiction" to hear a plaintiff's UCL claim if the plaintiff had an
adequate legal 27 remedy, even when the plaintiff was time-barred from pursuing that legal
remedy. Guzman v. 1 In the present case, the parties agree that this Court lacks equitable
jurisdiction over 2 Plaintiff's UCL claim. The Court is of the same view. Plaintiff's UCL claim is
grounded in 3 Defendant's alleged violation of the California Labor Code. Plaintiff has an
adequate remedy at 4 law for those alleged violations, that is, claims brought directly under the
California Labor Code, 5 which are asserted in this lawsuit. 6 The parties disagree as to how the
Court should proceed regarding Plaintiff's UCL claim. 7 Plaintiff requests that the Court either

order a partial remand of the UCL claim or dismiss the UCL claim without prejudice, stating that “Plaintiff does not care” which of those options the Court chooses.¹ Pl.’s Reply at 2, ECF 229. Defendant argues that a partial remand of the UCL claim would not be appropriate, and that the Court’s only course is to dismiss the UCL claim without prejudice. See Def.’s Response at 1, ECF 227. However, Defendant suggests that the Court defer dismissing the UCL claim until after trial or termination of the action, so that Plaintiff does not “unnecessarily and wastefully fil[e] a duplicative action in state court[.]” Id. at 3. The Court first discusses its authority to dismiss the UCL claim without prejudice, then its authority to grant a partial remand of the UCL claim, and finally Defendant’s suggestion that it defer acting on the UCL claim until the end of the case. This Court clearly has authority to dismiss the UCL claim without prejudice to Plaintiff’s refiling the same claim in state court. In *Guzman*, as here, both legal and equitable claims were asserted. See *Guzman*, 49 F.4th at 1310. The Ninth Circuit held that the district court erred in granting summary judgment for the defendant on the UCL claim asserted by the plaintiff, *Albright*, and that the district court should have dismissed the UCL claim without prejudice to refiling the same claim in state court. Id. at 1314. The *Guzman* court observed that “a California court might allow *Albright* to pursue his UCL claim.” Id. at 1315. It is unclear whether the Court has authority to order a partial remand of the UCL claim for lack of equitable jurisdiction. “The remand statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c), requires a district court 1 Plaintiff appears to have abandoned his suggestion that the Court remand the entire case based on 27 its lack of equitable jurisdiction over the UCL claim. A district court cannot remand the entire 1 to remand a removed ‘case’ to state court ‘[i]f at any time before final judgment it appears that the 2 district court lacks subject matter jurisdiction.’” *Lee v. Am. Nat’l Ins. Co.*, 260 F.3d 997, 1006 3 (9th Cir. 2001) (quoting 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c)). It is not apparent that § 1447(c)’s direction to 4 remand a “case” encompasses remand of a single claim within a case, and that question has not 5 been decided by the Supreme Court or the Ninth Circuit. In *Lee*, the Ninth Circuit indicated that 6 the Supreme Court had “left open the possibility that § 1447(c) might permit a district court to 7 retain claims over which the court has subject matter jurisdiction, but remand those over which it 8 lacks jurisdiction.” Id. at 1007 n.8. The Ninth Circuit suggested that “[i]n some cases, a plaintiff 9 might forfeit an otherwise viable state-law claim . . . a result which might militate in favor of 10 remanding, rather than dismissing, nonjusticiable state-law claims.” Id. at 1006-07. Because the 11 plaintiff had sought remand of the entire case, and had not sought a partial remand, the *Lee* court 12 had “no occasion in this case to decide whether such a partial remand would be appropriate.” Id. 13 at 1007 & n.8. 14 Even assuming that § 1447(c) permits remand of a single claim for lack of subject matter 15 jurisdiction, “[e]quitable jurisdiction is distinct from subject matter jurisdiction[.]” *Guzman*, 49 16 F.4th at 1314. “Subject matter jurisdiction regards whether the claim falls within the limited 17 jurisdiction conferred on the federal courts by Congress, while equitable jurisdiction regards 18 whether consistently with the principles governing equitable relief the court may exercise its 19 remedial powers.” Id. (internal quotation marks and citation

omitted). 20 Some district courts have ordered a partial remand of UCL claims based on lack of 21 equitable jurisdiction where it appeared the plaintiff might forfeit the UCL claims if they were 22 dismissed without prejudice. See, e.g., *California v. N. Tr. Corp.*, No. CV 12-01813 DMG 23 (FMOx), 2013 WL 1561460, at *6 (C.D. Cal. Apr. 10, 2013) (“The Court concludes that, here, 24 Plaintiff does face a threat of being forced to forfeit its claims, and therefore partial remand is 25 appropriate.”). In *Kim*, the district court expressed skepticism whether § 1447(c) permits partial 26 remand of equitable state law claims, and found that even if it does, partial remand was not 27 warranted in the case before it because the plaintiff had not shown that her state law claims were 1 196919, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 13, 2023) (“Plaintiff has not demonstrated that her equitable claims 2 || are time-barred or otherwise unavailable in state court.”). 3 In the present case, Plaintiff has not argued that his UCL claim would be forfeited absent 4 || remand. To the contrary, Plaintiff has stated expressly that he does not care whether the Court 5 orders partial remand of his UCL claim or dismisses it without prejudice. Given the lack of clear 6 || authority permitting partial remand of Plaintiff’s UCL claim, and Plaintiffs lack of preference, the 7 Court finds it most appropriate to dismiss the UCL claim without prejudice. 8 The Court sees no reason to wait until the end of this litigation before dismissing Plaintiff’s 9 UCL claim. None of the cases cited by the parties requires such a delay. In *Johnson*, cited by 10 || Defendant in support of its suggestion that the Court wait to dismiss the UCL claim, the purpose 11 of the delay was to protect the plaintiffs. See *Johnson v. Nissan N. Am., Inc.*, No. 3:17-CV-00517- 12 || WHO, 2022 WL 2869528, at *17 (N.D. Cal. July 21, 2022) (“I recognize that some courts have 13 dismissed equitable claims at earlier junctions in the case, but that risks depriving the plaintiffs of 14 || remedies to which they may be entitled.”). *Johnson* provides no support for Defendant’s assertion 3 15 that delaying dismissal of the UCL claim is necessary to prevent Plaintiff from filing an a 16 unnecessary, wasteful, and duplicative action in state court. 3 17 Accordingly, the Court HEREBY ORDERS as follows: 18 (1) Plaintiff’s Fifth Cause of Action, brought under California’s UCL, is DISMISSED 19 WITHOUT PREJUDICE for lack of equitable jurisdiction; and 20 (2) The Order to Show Cause (ECF 224) is DISCHARGED. 21 IT IS SO ORDERED. 22 23 Dated: July 23, 2025

BETH LABSON FREEMAN

25 United States District Judge 26 27 28