

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Carlos Ayala v. Tapestry, Inc., et al.

Ayala · No. 24-cv-1052-BAS-BJW · Decided January 26, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of California grants Defendants’ motion for partial summary judgment in Carlos Ayala’s California wage-and-hour action against Tapestry, Inc. and related defendants. The court holds that Ayala was exempt from the California Labor Code as an executive employee, concluding that he could hire employees, exercised discretion and independent judgment, and performed primarily exempt duties. The court also addresses several disputes concerning the calculation and classification of Ayala’s work time.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Cynthia Bashant
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
DECIDED	January 26, 2026
DOCKET	24-cv-1052-BAS-BJW
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved for partial summary judgment on most of Plaintiff's California wage-and-hour claims, asserting that Plaintiff was exempt from the California Labor Code as an executive employee. The court granted the motion after oral argument; Plaintiff's reimbursement claim was not included in the motion and remained for trial.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is appropriate when the moving party shows that there is no genuine dispute of material fact and that it is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Because Defendants asserted an affirmative exemption defense on which they bore the burden of persuasion, they had to establish every essential element of the executive exemption beyond controversy. The evidence was viewed in the light most favorable to Plaintiff, with credibility determinations and weighing of evidence reserved for the factfinder.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

TOPICS

wage and hour

summary judgment

employment law

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

wage and hour

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Defendants established as a matter of law that Plaintiff satisfied the California executive-employee exemption, including the requirements concerning hiring authority or recommendations, discretion and independent judgment, and primary engagement in exempt duties.
2. Whether Plaintiff's brand-ambassador activities and competitor-shopping activities were exempt managerial work.
3. Whether summary judgment was proper for claims against Kate Spade, LLC and Stuart Weitzman IP, LLC, entities that did not employ Plaintiff.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff satisfied the element because he admitted that he hired sales associates without approval and that his hiring recommendations received substantial weight; the regulation's use of "or" does not require authority to both hire and fire.
2. Plaintiff satisfied the discretion-and-independent-judgment element as a matter of law.
3. Defendants established as a matter of law that Plaintiff primarily engaged in exempt duties during a workweek.
4. Plaintiff's brand-ambassador work and weekly competitor-shopping activities were directly and closely related to managerial duties and could be counted as exempt work.
5. Summary judgment was proper for Kate Spade, LLC and Stuart Weitzman IP, LLC because Plaintiff did not work for those entities and did not identify a triable claim against them.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"A court thus appropriately grants summary judgment if the moving party shows that there is no genuine issue of material fact and entitlement to judgment as a matter of law." (p. 2)

"The statute relies on the employee's authority to "hire or fire other employees," using the expansive conjunction "or."" (p. 4)

"Accepting Plaintiff's admissions and construing reasonable inferences in Plaintiff's favor, Defendants have established as a matter of law that Plaintiff primarily engaged in exempt duties in a workweek." (p. 13)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff worked for Coach, a Tapestry brand, from 2015 until June 2023 and served as store manager from December 2019 until his departure. He was the highest-ranking employee at the store, earned approximately

\$80,000 annually plus bonuses, directed the work of store employees, hired sales associates, managed store operations, and exercised responsibility over a store generating approximately six million dollars in annual revenue. His duties also included business strategy, employee supervision, brand-ambassador activities, communications, and competitor research.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed nine California Labor Code claims in state court in May 2024. Defendants removed the action to federal court based on diversity jurisdiction, and Plaintiff voluntarily dismissed his minimum-wage and unfair-competition claims. Defendants then moved for partial summary judgment, while Plaintiff separately moved for class certification; the court resolved summary judgment first and granted Defendants' motion.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323-25, 327 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248, 255 (1986)
- Nissan Fire & Marine Ins. Co. v. Fritz Cos., Inc., 210 F.3d 1099, 1102 (9th Cir. 2000)
- Geer v. Siemens Med. Sols. USA, Inc., No. 20-cv-05613-SVK, 2021 WL 4979426, at *5 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2021)
- So. Cal. Gas Co. v. City of Santa Ana, 336 F.3d 885, 888 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 586-87 (1986)
- Wright v. Schock, 742 F.2d 541, 543-44 (9th Cir. 1984)
- Ramirez v. Yosemite Water Co., Inc., 20 Cal. 4th 785, 795-95 (1999)
- Hodgers-Durgin v. de la Vina, 199 F.3d 1037, 1045 (9th Cir. 1999)
- United Parcel Serv. Wage & Hour Cases, 190 Cal. App. 4th 1001, 1021, 1024 (2010)
- Wellons v. PNS Stores, Inc., No. 18-cv-02913-RSH-DEB, 2022 WL 16902199, at *23 (S.D. Cal. Nov. 10, 2022)
- McKeen-Chaplin v. Provident Savings Bank, FSBI, 862 F.3d 847 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Baldwin v. Trailer Inns, Inc., 266 F.3d 1104, 1115 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Heyen v. Safeway Inc., 216 Cal. App. 4th 795, 819 (2013)
- Batze v. Safeway, Inc., 10 Cal. App. 5th 440, 478-479 (2017), as modified on denial of reh'g (May 3, 2017)
- Marlo v. United Parcel Serv., Inc., 639 F.3d 942, 948 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Dunbar v. Albertson's, Inc., 141 Cal. App. 4th 1422, 1426 (2006)
- Ortiz v. Amazon.com LLC, 389 F. Supp. 3d 728, 735 (N.D. Cal. 2019)
- Leatherbury v. C & H Sugar Co., 911 F. Supp. 2d 872, 884 (N.D. Cal. 2012), aff'd, 607 F. App'x 676 (9th Cir. 2015)

- Stilwell v. Caesars Ent. Corp., 2023 WL 2634502, at *5 (D. Nev. Mar. 24, 2023), appeal dismissed, No. 23-15585, 2023 WL 7179476 (9th Cir. Oct. 18, 2023)
- Johnson v. Mammoth Recreations, Inc., 975 F.2d 604, 610 (9th Cir. 1992)

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