

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA**

O'Brien v. Garza

O'Brien · No. 2:22-cv-1730-TLN-JDP (P) · Decided March 6, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California grants plaintiff's motion to modify the scheduling order and motion to subpoena non-party documents, while denying his motion to compel. The court finds good cause to extend discovery deadlines, authorizes subpoenas for documents held by California Medical Facility offices, and concludes that the requested reports, personnel records, and certain text messages are protected by official-information, privacy, attorney-client, or common-interest protections.

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 9 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA 10 11 KORY T. O'BRIEN Case No. 2:22-cv-1730-TLN-JDP (P) 12 Plaintiff, 13 v.
ORDER 14 R. GARZA, et al., 15 Defendants. 16 17 18 Plaintiff has three motions pending: a
motion to modify the scheduling order, ECF No. 44; 19 a motion to subpoena non-party
documents, ECF No. 45, and a motion to compel, ECF No. 46.

20 Defendants have opposed the motion to compel. ECF No. 47. I will grant plaintiff's motions to
21 modify the scheduling order and to subpoena non-party documents and deny his motion to 22
compel. 23 Background 24 In September 2022, plaintiff filed his first complaint in this case. ECF
No. 1. I issued the 25 first scheduling order in April 2023. ECF No. 19.

In August 2023, I granted plaintiff's motion to 26 modify the scheduling order and to stay
discovery. ECF No. 23. In August 2023, plaintiff filed 27 an amended complaint. ECF No. 25. I
screened the amended complaint in January 2024, finding 28 that plaintiff alleged cognizable First
and Eighth Amendment claims and state claw tort claims 1 against defendants Garza and Baker,
correctional officers at California Medical Facility.

ECF 2 No. 39. Defendants filed their answer in May 2024. ECF No. 41. 3 On July 10, 2024, I
issued an amended scheduling order. ECF No. 43. I ordered that the 4 deadline for completion of
all discovery, including filing all motions to compel discovery, be set 5 at October 11, 2024, and
warned that, absent good cause, discovery motions would not be 6 considered after the deadline.

Id. I set September 13, 2024, as the deadline for all discovery 7 requests, and April 4, 2025,¹ as
the deadline for dispositive motions. Id. 8 On September 6, 2024, plaintiff filed a motion to

modify the scheduling order, ECF No. 9 44, and a motion to subpoena non-party documents, ECF No. 45. He filed a motion to compel on 10 October 17, 2024, ECF No. 46. I will address each in turn.

11 Motion to Modify 12 First, plaintiff moves to modify the scheduling order. ECF No. 44. He requests a 90-day 13 extension on all current deadlines because he was in crisis bedding from August 2, 2024, he had 14 rotator cuff surgery scheduled for September 1, 2024, and he received defendants' response to his 15 first discovery requests on August 29, 2024. Id. at 1.

He argues that good cause exists to modify 16 the scheduling order because he made diligent efforts to complete discovery. Id. He asserts that 17 he conferred with defendants on July 31 and August 1, 2024, regarding discovery issues, and that 18 defendants would not be biased or prejudiced by a modification to the scheduling order. Id. at 2- 19 3. He asserts that defendants did not object to the requested extensions, Id. at 3, and defendants 20 have not opposed plaintiff's motion.

21 A court's scheduling order "may be modified only for good cause and with the judge's 22 consent." Fed. R. Civ. P. 16(b)(4). The good cause inquiry focuses on the diligence of the party 23 seeking the modification. *Johnson v. Mammoth Recreations, Inc.*, 975 F.2d 604, 608 (9th Cir. 24 1992).

Thus, the "court may modify the pretrial schedule if it cannot reasonably be met despite 25 the diligence of the party seeking the extension." Id. 26 27 1 I originally set the dispositive motion deadline at April 4, 2024, ECF No. 43, but reset 28 the date, ECF No. 48. 1 I will grant plaintiff's motion to modify the scheduling order because good cause exists, 2 and it appears that plaintiff has been diligent in attempting to comply with the current order.

The 3 parties have 30 days from the issuance of this order to serve any additional discovery requests; 60 4 days from the issuance of this order to file discovery motions, including any motions to compel; 5 and 90 days from the issuance of this order to file any dispositive orders. 6 Motion to Subpoena Non-Party Documents 7 Plaintiff also moves to subpoena non-parties allegedly in possession of discovery 8 materials.

ECF No. 45. He argues that defendants' answers to his interrogatories demonstrate 9 that non-parties possess documents that he needs to present his case. Id. He argues that his 10 claims hinge on timelines, and that he needs documents to establish the timeline of events 11 underlying his claim. Id. at 2. He asserts that he met and conferred with defendants twice, but 12 that defendants have been unable to procure the documents plaintiff requested because the 13 documents are in the possession of either the California Medical Facility's Litigation Coordinator 14 or California Medical Facility's Office of Grievances.

Id.; see also ECF No. 45-1, 45-2. 15 Defendants do not oppose this motion. 16 To obtain discovery from a non-party, plaintiff must seek issuance of a subpoena and 17 demonstrate that the information sought cannot be obtained from defendants through discovery. 18 See Fed. R. Civ. P. 45(d)(1). Courts must ensure that the party serving the subpoena has taken 19 reasonable steps to avoid imposing an undue burden or expense on the person or entity to be 20 served with the subpoena.

See Fed. R. Civ. P. 45(d)(1). 21 I will grant plaintiff's motion to subpoena non-party documents. Plaintiff seeks 22 information relevant to his claims, and he has attempted to obtain this information from 23 defendants without success. ECF No. 45. Defendants informed plaintiff they cannot obtain these 24 documents, but that the documents could be obtained from the Litigation Coordinator of the 25 California Medical Facility or the California Medical Facility's Office of Grievances.

See ECF 26 No. 45-1, 45-2. As such, I will direct the Clerk of Court to provide plaintiff, along with this 27 order, with four signed but otherwise blank subpoena forms. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 45(a) (3). 28 1 Motion to Compel 2 On October 17, 2024—six days after the deadline to file all discovery motions, including 3 motions to compel—plaintiff filed a motion to compel the production of documents.

ECF No. 46. 4 He notes that defendants provided responses to plaintiff's first set of production of documents, 5 but that defendants invoked the "official-information, deliberate-process" privileges against 6 specific requests. Id. at 1. Plaintiff contends that defendants cannot rely on the official- 7 information and deliberate-process privileges or on defendants' right to privacy in their personnel 8 records because the requested information would not compromise the safety of the institution, 9 defendants, or other inmates.

Id. at 6. 10 Plaintiff takes issue with defendants' responses to a few specific requests for production, 11 namely, (1) plaintiff's requests for production to Garza asking that Garza produce an Allegation 12 Inquiry report, a Confidential Fact Gathering Report, and "all electronically stored information of 13 communications between [Garza] and... Baker, or any other individual, that are located on 14 [Garza's] cell phone," Id. at 2-5, 7, 15-17, and (2) plaintiff's requests for production to Baker 15 asking Baker to produce the same Confidential Fact Gathering report and Allegation Inquiry, Id. 16 at 5-6, 23-24.

17 Garza objected to plaintiff's interrogatories on varying grounds, including that they were 18 impermissibly vague and ambiguous, improperly referred to another discovery response, sought 19 information that was confidential under state regulations, and invaded Garza's privacy rights. Id. 20 at 11-20. Garza also objected that plaintiff sought information protected by the "official- 21 information and deliberate-process privileges." See generally id. As to plaintiff's request for text

22 messages between Garza and Baker, Garza also objected on the basis that such disclosure was
23 protected under attorney-client privilege.

Id. at 19. Baker raised the same objections. See 24 generally id. at 23-26. 25 Defendants provided
a privilege log explaining that they were withholding documents 26 related to the Confidential
Fact Gathering Reports and Allegation Inquiries under the official- 27 information and deliberate-
process privileges, the peace officers' right of privacy in their 28 personnel records, and for the
confidentiality of non-party inmates' case records and medical 1 information.

Id. at 10. As for the request for text messages, Garza produced a privilege log, 2 noting that he
was withholding some of the requested documents based on attorney-client 3 privilege and the
common-interest doctrine. Id. at 9. 4 Defendants also produced a declaration from B. Ebert, a
Correctional Counselor and 5 Litigation Coordinator at California Medical Facility.

Id. at 30. In his declaration, Ebert 6 explained that he had reviewed the privilege log and that the
documents identified by defendants 7 related to the Confidential Fact Gathering Reports and
Allegation Inquiries were generated by the 8 California Department of Corrections and
Rehabilitation ("CDCR") and, at all times, had been 9 kept confidential. Id. at 31.

Ebert stated that staff-misconduct allegations made by inmates were 10 considered confidential
because they contained personal and private information about staff and 11 inmates. Id.
Additionally, these documents were prepared as part of an investigation, and the 12 documents
reflected the evaluation, deliberation, and investigative sources and methods used by 13 the prison
in evaluating the allegations.

Id. Ebert explained that allowing the disclosure of these 14 records has the potential to identify
third parties not subject to the current suit, which would place 15 those individuals in danger and
have the potential to deter inmate-witnesses from providing 16 information in the future for fear
of disclosure. Id. Additionally, the disclosure of defendants' 17 personnel files would implicate
their safety, as it would give an inmate access to confidential 18 information that could improperly
be used against the defendant and the morale of officers would 19 be impacted.

Id. at 32. Ebert stated that the release of these materials, even under a protective 20 order, would
have the potential to jeopardize institutional safety. Id. 21 Defendants oppose plaintiff's motion to
compel. ECF No. 47.

First, they argue that the 22 motion should be denied as untimely because it was filed after the
deadline set in the scheduling 23 order. Id. at 3. They then argue that plaintiff failed to meet and
confer before filing his motion, 24 in violation of federal rules, and that the motion should be
denied on that ground, as well. Id. at 25 3-4. Defendants next contend that the official-information
privilege protects the Confidential 26 Fact Gathering Report from disclosure.

Id. at 4. They argue that they met the burden under *Kelly* 27 v. City of San Jose of demonstrating that official-information privilege protected the documents 28 from disclosure. 114 F.R.D. 653, 660 (N.D. Cal. 1987), at 4-7. Defendants also argue that 1 attorney-client privilege protects the disclosure of Garza's text messages between himself and 2 Baker, as the common-interest doctrine applies to their circumstances and the texts being sought 3 directly implicate attorney-client common-interest communications.

Id. at 7-9. Defendants 4 provided declarations and screenshots of the withheld text messages, demonstrating that the 5 withheld messages directly spoke to communications between parties related to the information 6 their attorney communicated to them. See ECF No. 47-1, 47-2. 7 Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 34, "[t]he party to whom [a request for production] 8 is directed must respond in writing within 30 days after being served." Fed.

R. Civ. P. 9 34(b)(2)(A). The responding party may state an objection to any request but must offer a specific 10 rationale for doing so. In responding to a request to produce documents, the responding party 11 must affirmatively state whether any responsive materials are being withheld on the basis of the 12 proffered objection. Fed. R. Civ. P. 34(b)(2)(C).

13 Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 37, "a party seeking discovery may move for an 14 order compelling an answer, designation, production, or inspection." Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(a)(3)(B). 15 The party seeking to compel discovery has the initial burden of establishing that its requests are 16 relevant, see Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(b)(1), but "[t]he party who resists discovery has the burden to 17 show that discovery should not be allowed, and has the burden of clarifying, explaining, and 18 supporting its objections." See *Blemaster v. Sabo*, No. 2:16-CV-04557 JWS, 2017 WL 4843241, 19 at *1 (D.

Ariz. Oct. 25, 2017) (quoting *DIRECTV, Inc. v. Trone*, 209 F.R.D. 455, 458 (C.D. Cal. 20 2002)). 21 Under the official-information privilege, defendants must provide an affidavit from a 22 knowledgeable official indicating that: 23 [T]he agency has maintained the confidentiality of the documents at issue; (2) a 24 statement that the official has personally reviewed the documents; (3) a specific identification of the governmental or privacy interests that would be compromised 25 by production; (4) a description of how disclosure subject to a carefully crafted protective order would create a substantial risk of harm to these interests; and (5) a 26 projection of how much harm would be done to these interests if the disclosure were made.

27 28 1 *Kelly*, 114 F.R.D. at 670. 2 As an initial matter, because I am granting plaintiff's motion to modify the scheduling 3 order, I will not deny the motion to compel as untimely. Nevertheless, the motion will be denied 4 because defendants have properly satisfied their burden of demonstrating that the documents 5 being sought are protected from disclosure.

First, defendants have, as required, provided a 6 declaration from Ebert, a litigation coordinator and correctional counselor, addressing the Kelly 7 requirements. ECF No. 46 at 33-34. They have also, as required, provided a privilege log. Id. at 8 26-28.

Thus, defendants have made the requisite showing that the disclosure of the requested 9 documents—the Confidential Fact Gathering Report, the Allegation Inquiry, and defendants’ 10 personnel records—should not be compelled, and plaintiff’s motion does not demonstrate 11 otherwise. 12 As to the documents allegedly protected under the attorney-client privilege, the “attorney- 13 client privilege protects confidential communications between attorneys and clients, which are 14 made for the purpose of giving legal advice.” *United States v. Sanmina Corp.*, 968 F.3d 1107, 15 1116 (9th Cir.

2020) (9th Cir. 2011) (citing *Upjohn Co. v. United States*, 449 U.S. 383, 389 16 (1981)). It “exists to protect not only the giving of professional advice to those who can act on it 17 but also the giving of information to the lawyer to enable him to give sound and informed 18 advice.” *Upjohn*, 449 U.S. at 390.

The “party asserting the attorney-client privilege has the 19 burden of establishing the relationship and the privileged nature of the communication,” and “if 20 necessary, [of] segregat[ing] the privileged information from the non-privileged information.” 21 *United States v. Ruehle*, 583 F.3d 600, 608-09 (emphasis omitted). “Because it impedes full and 22 free discovery of the truth, the attorney-client privilege is strictly construed.” Id. at 607.

The 23 attorney-client privilege exists: 24 (1) Where legal advice of any kind is sought (2) from a professional legal adviser 25 in his capacity as such, (3) the communications relating to that purpose, (4) made in confidence (5) by the client, (6) are at his instance permanently protected (7) 26 from disclosure by himself or by the legal adviser, (8) unless the protection be waived.

27 28 1 | *In re Grand Jury Investigation*, 974 F.2d 1068, 1071 n.2 (9th Cir. 1992). The party asserting the 2 | privilege bears the burden of establishing each element. *Ruehle*, 583 F.3d at 608. 3 Attorney-client privilege extends to communications between individuals with a common 4 | interest who communicate amongst themselves for the purposes of preparing a joint strategy.

5 || *Nidec Corp. v. Victor Co. of Japan*, 249 F.R.D. 575, 578 (N.D. Cal. 2007). Although not a 6 | “privilege” in and of itself, the common interest doctrine is an exception to the rule on waiver and 7 | applies where (1) the communication is made by separate parties to the proceeding where the 8 || parties have a common legal interest; (2) the communication is mean to further their efforts; and 9 | (3) the privilege has not been waived.

Id. 10 Defendants have made the requisite showing that the texts messages between them, listed 11 | as withheld in the privilege log, implicate the attorney-client privilege and common-interest 12 | doctrine. See ECF No. 47-1, 47-2.

As such, I will not order that the identified text messages be 13 | compelled. 14 Conclusion 15 Accordingly, it is ORDERED that: 16 1. Plaintiff's motion to modify the scheduling order, ECF No. 44, is GRANTED. 17 || The parties have 30 days from the issuance of this order to serve any additional discovery 18 || requests; 60 days from the issuance of this order to file discovery motions, including any motions 19 | to compel; and 90 days from the issuance of this order to file any dispositive orders.

20 2. Plaintiff's motion to subpoena non-party documents, ECF No. 45, is GRANTED. 21 3. Plaintiff's motion to compel, ECF No. 46, is DENIED. 22 4. The Clerk of Court is directed to provide plaintiff with four signed but otherwise 23 | blank subpoena forms with this order. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 45(a)(3). 24 95 IT IS SO ORDERED. 26 | q Sty — Dated: _ March 5, 2025 ow — 27 JEREMY D.,

PETERSON UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE