

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Maureen Harrington, et al. v. Pinterest, Inc.

Case No. 5:20-cv-05290-EJD (N.D. Cal. Jan. 5, 2026) · No. 5:20-cv-05290-EJD · Decided January 5, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California grants Pinterest’s motion for summary judgment in a copyright infringement action concerning Pinterest notifications that linked users to images stored on Pinterest’s servers. The court holds that Pinterest’s conduct falls within the DMCA safe harbor under 17 U.S.C. § 512(c), finding that the alleged infringement occurred by reason of storage at the direction of a user and that the record lacked evidence of Pinterest’s actual or red-flag knowledge. The excerpt does not include the court’s analysis of all remaining issues or the order’s date.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Edward J. Davila
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	January 5, 2026
DOCKET	5:20-cv-05290-EJD
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pinterest moved for summary judgment on Harrington's direct copyright-infringement claim concerning Pinterest notifications that displayed or linked to Harrington's copyrighted photograph. The court granted the motion and directed the Clerk to close the case.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is proper when there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court must believe the nonmovant's evidence, draw justifiable inferences in the nonmovant's favor, and may not make credibility determinations or weigh evidence. Because Pinterest asserted an affirmative defense for which it would bear the burden at trial, it had to present undisputed evidence establishing every essential element of the DMCA safe-harbor defense; the court also applied Ninth Circuit authority assigning the copyright owner the burden to show actual or red-flag knowledge.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished federal district-court order; persuasive rather than binding precedent.
PARTIES	Maureen Harrington, et al. v. Pinterest, Inc.

TOPICS

copyright infringement dmca summary judgment civil procedure commercial litigation

PRACTICE AREAS

copyright law copyright infringement DMCA safe harbor civil procedure summary judgment
commercial litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Pinterest's display of Harrington's copyrighted photograph through an email notification occurred by reason of storage at the direction of a user under 17 U.S.C. § 512(c)(1).
2. Whether Pinterest lacked actual or red-flag knowledge of the alleged infringement under 17 U.S.C. § 512(c)(1)(A).
3. Whether Pinterest had the right and ability to control the alleged infringement or received a financial benefit directly attributable to it under 17 U.S.C. § 512(c)(1)(B).
4. Whether any genuine dispute of material fact precluded summary judgment on Pinterest's Section 512(c) DMCA safe-harbor defense.

HOLDINGS

1. Pinterest established that the alleged infringement occurred by reason of storage at the direction of a user because its automatic file-format standardization, creation of image variants, algorithmic presentation, and hyperlink-based notifications were narrowly directed toward facilitating access to user-uploaded content.
2. Pinterest established that the record lacked evidence that it had actual or red-flag knowledge of the alleged infringing display.
3. Pinterest did not have the right and ability to control the alleged infringing display within the meaning of Section 512(c)(1)(B).
4. Pinterest did not receive a financial benefit directly attributable to the display of Harrington's copyrighted photograph.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The email notifications here merely provide a link to Pinterest users of material uploaded by other Pinterest users, and therefore narrowly facilitates access to users’ posts by sharing them with other users.” (III.B.1)

“Therefore, because Pinterest carries the ultimate burden at trial, for purposes of summary judgment, Pinterest must present undisputed evidence showing that it did not have the right and ability to control the infringement and it did not receive a financial benefit attributable to the infringement.” (III.B.3.a)

“Based on the foregoing, the Court GRANTS Pinterest’s motion for summary judgment.” (IV)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Pinterest operates a social-media platform where users upload images and other content as Pins. Pinterest automatically standardizes uploaded files, creates image variants, and uses algorithms to display Pins to users, including through email, in-app, and mobile push notifications. On July 25, 2020, Pinterest sent Harrington an email notification containing a hyperlink that caused his copyrighted photograph of Waikiki Beach to be displayed through Pinterest's server. The record showed that the notifications contained hyperlinks rather than copies of the images and that Harrington had not sent Pinterest a takedown notice or other prior communication identifying the alleged infringement.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Harrington filed a copyright-infringement action on July 31, 2020, after Pinterest sent him an email notification containing a link that caused his copyrighted beach photograph to be displayed. After several motions to dismiss, stays pending the Davis litigation, and amendment of the allegations, Harrington narrowed the case to alleged infringement through notifications outside Pinterest's platform. The court previously declined to resolve the DMCA safe-harbor issue on a motion to dismiss because it was fact intensive. On the developed summary-judgment record, the court held that Pinterest qualified for the Section 512(c) safe harbor and entered judgment for Pinterest.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Davis v. Pinterest, Inc., 601 F. Supp. 3d 514 (N.D. Cal. 2023)
- Davis v. Pinterest, Inc., No. 22-15804, 2023 WL 5695992, at *1-*2 (9th Cir. Sept. 5, 2023)
- Hunley v. Instagram, LLC, 73 F.4th 1060, 1072 (9th Cir. 2023)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248, 256 (1986)
- Tolan v. Cotton, 572 U.S. 650, 651 (2014)
- Reeves v. Sanderson Plumbing Prods., Inc., 530 U.S. 133, 150 (2000)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323, 325 (1986)
- Nissan Fire & Marine Ins. Co. v. Fritz Cos., 210 F.3d 1099, 1102 (9th Cir. 2000)
- Mavrix Photographs, LLC v. LiveJournal, Inc., 873 F.3d 1045, 1052-56, 1063 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Ventura Content, Ltd. v. Motherless, Inc., 885 F.3d 597, 603-06, 609-10, 613, 615 (9th Cir. 2018)
- UMG Recordings, Inc. v. Shelter Cap. Partners LLC, 718 F.3d 1006, 1012, 1016, 1018, 1030 (9th Cir. 2013)

- Atari Interactive, Inc. v. Redbubble, Inc., 515 F. Supp. 3d 1089, 1096, 1101, 1114 (N.D. Cal. 2021)
- Columbia Pictures Indus., Inc. v. Fung, 710 F.3d 1020, 1045-46 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Capitol Recs., LLC v. Vimeo, Inc., 125 F.4th 409, 419 (2d Cir.), amended on reh'g in part, 151 F.4th 13 (2d Cir. 2025)

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