

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Sonia Sayyedalhosseini v. Los Rios Community College District

Sayyedalhosseini · No. 2:23-cv-1571-DJC-JDP (PS) · Decided December 19, 2025

SUMMARY

The document contains findings and recommendations on Sonia Sayyedalhosseini’s motion to strike portions of Los Rios Community College District’s answer in a Title VII retaliation action. The magistrate judge recommends granting the motion in part by striking the unclean-hands defense and deeming several other defenses withdrawn, while denying the motion in all other respects. The recommendations were issued for review by the assigned district judge.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jeremy D. Peterson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	December 19, 2025
DOCKET	2:23-cv-1571-DJC-JDP (PS)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(f) to strike portions of defendant's answer, including denials, affirmative defenses, and the jury demand. The magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations recommending that the motion be granted in part and denied in part.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(f), the court may strike an insufficient defense or redundant, immaterial, impertinent, or scandalous matter. A motion to strike is generally disfavored and is not the vehicle for resolving the merits or evidentiary weight of challenged allegations or defenses. An affirmative defense need only provide fair notice of the defense.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Sonia Sayyedalhosseini v. Los Rios Community College District

TOPICS

pleadings

affirmative defenses

civil procedure

retaliation

title vii

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

employment law

civil rights

Title VII retaliation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether portions of defendant's answer denying the accuracy, credibility, or probative value of an EEOC determination should be stricken.
2. Whether defendant's denials, asserted nonretaliatory reasons for termination, and characterization of the claims as limited to a particular EEOC charge should be stricken.
3. Whether defendant's affirmative defenses should be stricken under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(f) for insufficient notice or other pleading defects.
4. Whether defendant's jury demand and prayer for relief should be stricken.

HOLDINGS

1. A motion to strike is not an appropriate vehicle for resolving the evidentiary weight, credibility, factual disputes, or merits of challenged allegations and defenses; those issues should generally be left for adjudication on the merits.
2. An affirmative defense need only give the opposing party fair notice of the defense; a defense should not be stricken merely because its legal or factual correctness is disputed or because it may ultimately fail.
3. The unclean-hands defense should be stricken because it failed to identify the factual basis on which it rested.
4. The defenses asserting legitimate reasons for the employment decision and that the decision would have occurred absent retaliatory motive were sufficiently pleaded and should not be stricken.
5. The jury demand should not be stricken because any party may demand a jury trial under the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The function of this rule “is to avoid the expenditure of time and money that must arise from litigating spurious issues by dispensing with those issues prior to trial” (at 1)

“If the court is in doubt as to whether the challenged matter may raise an issue of fact or law, the motion to strike should be denied, leaving an assessment of the sufficiency of the allegations for adjudication on the merits.” (at 2)

“In a Title VII retaliation action, the plaintiff must prove “that the unlawful retaliation would not have occurred in the absence of the alleged wrongful action or actions of the employer.”” (at 8)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged that Los Rios Community College District unlawfully terminated her employment in retaliation for a discrimination complaint filed with the EEOC by plaintiff and her husband. Defendant's answer denied portions of the complaint, offered nonretaliatory reasons for the termination, asserted that the claims were limited to a specified EEOC charge, and pleaded twenty-three affirmative defenses. Plaintiff moved to strike those portions of the answer and defendant's jury demand and prayer for relief.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed a Title VII retaliation action alleging that defendant terminated her employment in retaliation for an EEOC discrimination complaint filed by plaintiff and her husband. Defendant answered and asserted twenty-three affirmative defenses. Plaintiff moved to strike portions of the answer; defendant opposed and withdrew several defenses. The magistrate judge recommended striking the unclean-hands defense, deeming several other defenses withdrawn, and denying the motion in all other respects, subject to review by the assigned district judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1).

DISPOSITION

other

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

No remand was ordered. The recommendations were submitted to the assigned district judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Parties were given fourteen days after service to file objections.

CASES CITED

- Whittlestone, Inc. v. Handi-Craft Co., 618 F.3d 970, 973 (9th Cir. 2010)
- Fantasy, Inc. v. Fogerty, 984 F.2d 1524, 1527 (9th Cir. 1993)
- Champlaine v. BAC Home Loans Servicing, LP, 706 F. Supp. 2d 1029, 1039 (E.D. Cal. 2009)
- Wyshak v. City National Bank, 607 F.2d 824, 827 (9th Cir. 1979)
- Board of Trustees of the San Diego Electric Pension Trust v. Bigley Electric, Inc., No. 07-CV-634-IEG (LSP), 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 50892, at *7 (S.D. Cal. July 12, 2007)
- Xu v. City of Los Angeles, No. 2:23-cv-01575-FLA (SP), 2023 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 212828, at *4 (C.D. Cal. Oct. 18, 2023)
- Jarrow Formulas, Inc. v. Nutrition Now, Inc., 304 F.3d 829, 835 (9th Cir. 2002)
- University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center v. Nassar, 570 U.S. 338, 360 (2013)
- Murphy v. Trader Joe's, No. 16-cv-02222-SI, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7754, at *7-8 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 19, 2017)
- Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Martinez v. Yist, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991)

OPINION

Sonia Sayyedalhosseini v. Los Rios Community College District
PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

9 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10 11 SONIA SAYYEDALHOSSEINI, Case No. 2:23-cv-1571-DJC-JDP (PS) 12 Plaintiff,

13 v. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

14 LOS RIOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

DISTRICT,

15 Defendant. 16

17 18 Plaintiff brings this case alleging that defendant Los Rios Community College District 19 violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by unlawfully terminating her employment in 20 retaliation for a discrimination complaint that she and her husband filed with the U.S. Equal 21 Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”). ECF No. 42 at 14. Pending is her motion to 22 strike portions of defendant’s answer, ECF No. 64, which defendant has opposed, ECF No. 66, 23 and plaintiff has submitted a reply in support of, ECF No. 68. After review of the pleadings, I 24 recommend that the motion to strike be granted in part. 25 Under Rule 12(f) “[t]he court may strike from a pleading an insufficient defense or any 26 redundant, immaterial, impertinent, or scandalous matter.” The function of this rule “is to avoid 27 the expenditure of time and money that must arise from litigating spurious issues by dispensing 28 with those issues prior to trial” *Whittlestone, Inc. v. Handi-Craft Co.*, 618 F.3d 970, 973 1 (9th Cir. 2010) (quoting *Fantasy, Inc. v. Fogerty*, 984 F.2d 1524, 1527 (9th Cir. 1993)). Here, 2 plaintiff seeks to strike several portions of defendant’s answer to his complaint: (1) portions of the 3 complaint that “deny the accuracy, credibility[,] and probative value of the EEOC Determination 4 letter in Charge No. 555-2020-01236; (2) “misrepresentations” that attempt to justify plaintiff’s 5 termination by offering non-retaliatory reasons for the firing; (3) sections that characterize his 6 claims as being limited to EEOC Charge #555-2020-01236; (4) section V of the answer that 7 denies the portion of the amended complaint titled “acknowledgement and contradictions by Los 8 Rios administration;” (5) section VI of the answer that denies all allegations contained in the 9 complaint’s damages section; (6) all twenty-three of defendant’s affirmative defenses; and 10 (7) defendant’s demand for a jury trial. ECF No. 63-1. 11 I. Portions of the Complaint that Deny the Accuracy or Credibility of the EEOC Determination 12 Plaintiff argues that the court should strike portions of the answer that deny the accuracy, 13 probative value, or credibility of the EEOC’s findings in its determination letter issued with 14 respect to Charge No. 555-2020-01235. ECF No. 64-1 at 9. Questions of evidentiary weight 15 should not be resolved on a motion to strike, however. “If the court is in doubt as to whether the 16 challenged matter may raise an issue of fact or law, the motion to strike should be denied, leaving 17 an assessment of the sufficiency of the allegations for adjudication on the merits.” *Champlaie v. 18 BAC Home Loans Servicing, LP*, 706 F. Supp. 2d 1029, 1039 (E.D. Cal. 2009). 19 II. Misrepresentations Justifying Plaintiff’s Termination 20 The same rationale for denying plaintiff’s request to strike the previous section also 21 applies here.

Whether defendant's proffered rationales for termination are misrepresentations is a 22 question of the merits, not to be resolved on a motion to strike. 23 24 III. Sections that Characterize his Claims as Being Limited to EEOC Charge #555- 2020-01235 25 Plaintiff argues that portions of the answer that characterize her claims as being limited to 26 EEOC charge #555-2020-01235 should be struck, because she never conceded that events which 27 took place before or after that charge was filed were not part of this suit. As defendant notes, 28 1 however, plaintiff previously said as much in her opposition to defendant's motion to dismiss. 2 ECF No. 47 at 6 ("The [first amended complaint] focuses only on EEOC Charge # 555-2020- 3 01235."). Thus, I decline to strike this portion of the answer. 4 IV. Section V 5 Section V of the answer states only that defendant denies all allegations in the complaint's 6 "acknowledgement and contradictions by Los Rios administration" section, to the extent that 7 any factual allegations are made therein. ECF No. 60 at 5. Plaintiff argues that the denial is 8 "unsupported," ECF No. 64-1 at 15-16, but, once again, a motion to strike is not the appropriate 9 vehicle for adjudicating the merits or the facts. 10 V. Section VI 11 Plaintiff seeks to strike defendant's denial of allegations in the statement of demand, 12 relief, and requests. ECF No. 64-1 at 15. She argues that the remedies sought are made in good 13 faith and are legally permissible. *Id.* The answer, with respect to this section, states only "[t]o 14 the extent any factual allegations are made, Defendant denies each and every allegation contained 15 in this section." ECF No. 60 at 5. That is permissible, and I find no reason to strike this portion 16 of the answer. 17 VI. Affirmative Defenses 18 Defendant includes twenty-three affirmative defenses in its answer and, unsurprisingly, 19 plaintiff challenges each of them. 20 1. First Defense 21 Defendant concedes that its first defense, a failure to plead facts, is inapposite and 22 withdraws it. ECF No. 66 at 5. 23 2. Second Defense 24 Defendant's second defense, that plaintiff failed to mitigate damages, is sufficient. An 25 affirmative defense need only give plaintiff fair notice of the defense. *Wyshak v. City Nat'l Bank*, 26 607 F.2d 824, 827 (9th Cir. 1979). And "courts have typically held that a generalized statement, 27 such as the one used in the instant case, meets defendant's pleading burden with respect to the 28 affirmative defense of damage mitigation." *Bd. of Trs. of the San Diego Elec. Pension Trust v. 1 Bigley Elec., Inc.*, NO. 07-CV-634-IEG (LSP), 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 50892, *7 (S.D. Cal. July 2 12, 2007). 3 3. Third Defense 4 Defendant's third defense, that the statute of limitations expired before this action 5 commenced, also gives plaintiff sufficient notice of the defense. There is, as defendant notes, 6 only one type of claim at issue in this suit and, thus, one statute of limitations that might apply. 7 Whether it is true or legally correct is a separate question that need not be decided on a motion to 8 strike. See *Xu v. City of Los Angeles*, No. 2:23-cv-01575-FLA (SP), 2023 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 9 212828, at *4 (C.D. Cal. Oct. 18, 2023) ("[A] motion to strike affirmative defenses is not to 10 decide the merits and courts do not strike affirmative defenses simply because they will fail."). 11 4. Fourth Defense 12 Similarly, defendant's fourth defense, that plaintiff failed to comply with statutory 13 prerequisites before filing this suit, gives plaintiff sufficient notice. Plaintiff's motion to strike 14 understands, and defendant's opposition confirms, that the defense implicates the

question of 15 whether plaintiff complied with the prerequisites of Title VII before filing this suit. ECF No. 64- 16 1 at 18-19; ECF No. 66 at 7. 17 5. Fifth Defense 18 Defendant's fifth defense, waiver, is withdrawn pursuant to their opposition with leave to 19 reassert it in the future. ECF No. 66 at 7. 20 6. Sixth Defense 21 Defendant's sixth defense, unclean hands, should be struck because it fails to identify the 22 factual basis on which it rests. Thus, the motion is granted with respect to this defense. 23 7. Seventh Defense 24 Defendant's seventh defense asserts the doctrine of laches, and plaintiff argues that it does 25 not apply where a lawsuit was brought within the statute of limitations. ECF No. 64-1 at 20. As 26 defendant argues, however, laches is distinct from the statute of limitations. See *Jarrow 27 Formulas, Inc. v. Nutrition Now, Inc.*, 304 F.3d 829, 835 (9th Cir. 2002) ("Laches serves as the 28 1 counterpart to the statute of limitations, barring untimely equitable causes of action."). I decline 2 to strike this defense. 3 8. Eighth Defense 4 Defendant's eighth defense asserts the doctrine of estoppel, and it is withdrawn with leave 5 to reassert it in the future pursuant to the opposition. ECF No. 66 at 8. 6 9. Ninth & Tenth Defense 7 Defendant has withdrawn its ninth and tenth defenses, good faith and consent 8 respectively, with reservation that it may reassert them in the future. *Id.* 9 10. Eleventh Defense 10 Defendant's eleventh defense is failure to exhaust administrative remedies. As defendant 11 argues, plaintiff has, based on the claim at issue in this suit, notice that this defense applies to the 12 administrative remedies required to exhaust a Title VII claim. I decline to strike this defense. 13 11. Twelfth Defense 14 Defendant's twelfth defense is that plaintiff's claims, to the extent that they differ from the 15 administrative charge filed with the EEOC, are barred. Plaintiff takes issue with the merits of this 16 defense, but that is not a reason to strike the defense. She also argues that the defense does not 17 specify which claims are beyond the scope of her EEOC charge, but she has notice and appears to 18 understand that the defense would apply to any claims that fall outside EEOC charge #555-2020- 19 01235. 20 12. Thirteenth Defense 21 Defendant's thirteenth defense asserts all defenses available under Rules 12(b)(2), (4), (5), 22 and (6). Defendant withdraws this defense pursuant to its opposition but is not waiving its ability 23 to raise such defenses in the future. ECF No. 66 at 9. 24 13. Fourteenth Defense 25 Defendant has also withdrawn, with leave to assert it again in the future, its fourteenth 26 defense, asserting all the defenses and immunities available under the United States Code 27 Sections and Constitution. *Id.* 28 1 14. Fifteenth Defense 2 Defendant's fifteenth defense asserts that the defendant is entitled to attorney's fees under 3 the statutes plaintiff sues under, because the action is frivolous. This is sufficient to give plaintiff 4 notice of the defense and the argument upon which it rests. 5 15. Sixteenth Defense 6 Defendant has withdrawn its sixteenth defense, asserting that any symptoms of mental or 7 emotional distress or injury are the result of a pre-existing psychological disorder. 8 16. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Defenses 9 Defendant's seventeenth and eighteenth defenses challenge the constitutionality of 10 punitive damages and assert that any punitive damages must be commensurate with public fines 11 or penalties imposed for similar conduct. The merits of these arguments are, once again, not at 12 issue here and the defenses provide plaintiff ample notice. I decline to strike these defenses. 13 17.

Nineteenth Defense 14 Defendant withdraws its affirmative defense arguing that plaintiff fails to state facts 15 entitling him to punitive damages. ECF No. 66 at 11. It notes that it retains the right to challenge 16 punitive damages on summary judgment. Id. 17 18. Twentieth and Twenty-First Defenses 18 Defendant's twentieth and twenty-first defenses assert that legitimate reasons support the 19 challenged employment decision, and, even if "other factors" did motivate the decision, the 20 decision would have been made anyway. In a Title VII retaliation action, the plaintiff must prove 21 "that the unlawful retaliation would not have occurred in the absence of the alleged wrongful 22 action or actions of the employer." *University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center v. Nassar*, 23 570 U.S. 338, 360, (2013). And, in its answer, defendant offered other rationales for the firing. 24 Thus, I decline to strike these defenses. 25 19. Twenty-Second Defense 26 Defendant's twenty-second defense is that after-acquired evidence may bar or limit the 27 allegations and damages sought by the First Amended Complaint. The answer is non-specific by 28 nature because "the inquiry is whether discovery might plausibly reveal a terminable offense." 1 *Murphy v. Trader Joe's*, No. 16-cv-02222-SI, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7754, *7-8 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 2 19, 2017). I decline to strike this defense. 3 20. Twenty-Third Defense 4 Defendant withdraws its twenty-third defense, which reserves the right to assert 5 additional affirmative defenses, but does not waive the right to assert additional defenses in the 6 future as provided by law. ECF No. 65 at 12. 7 VII. Right to a Jury Trial 8 Next, plaintiff seeks to strike defendant's request for a jury trial. ECF No. 64-1 at 30. 9 She argues that such a demand is improper because he has waived his own right to a jury trial. Id. 10 Any party may demand a trial by jury, however. Fed. R. Civ. P. 38(b). Thus, I decline to strike 11 this portion of the answer. 12 VIII. Prayer for Relief 13 Finally, plaintiff asks that the court strike defendant's "prayer for relief" wherein it asks 14 that plaintiff take nothing by this suit, that judgment be entered in its favor, and that defendant be 15 awarded the costs of suits, including attorney's fees. ECF No. 64-1 at 30. Plaintiff argues that 16 her suit has merit but, again, that is not a reason to strike a portion of the answer. The merits will 17 be decided as this case progresses, and defendant is entitled to lodge its request for relief in its 18 answer. 19 Accordingly, it is hereby RECOMMENDED that: 20 1. Plaintiff's motion to strike, ECF No. 64, be GRANTED in part. 21 2. Defendant's sixth affirmative defense, unclean hands, be stricken. 22 3. Defendant's First, Fifth, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Twelfth, Thirteenth, Sixteenth, 23 Seventeenth, and Twenty-Third Affirmative Defenses be deemed withdrawn. 24 4. The motion is DENIED in all other respects. 25 These findings and recommendations are submitted to the United States District Judge 26 assigned to the case, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within fourteen days of 27 service of these findings and recommendations, any party may file written objections with the 28 court and serve a copy on all parties. Any such document should be captioned "Objections to 1 | Magistrate Judge's Findings and Recommendations," and any response shall be served and filed 2 | within fourteen days of service of the objections. The parties are advised that failure to file 3 | objections within the specified time may waive the right to appeal the District Court's order. See 4 | *Turner vy. Duncan*, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998); *Martinez*

v. Yist, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 5 | 1991). 6 7 IT IS SO ORDERED. Dated: _ December 19, 2025
Q_____.

9 JEREMY D. PETERSON

10 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

Retrieved from lawtools.ai · <https://lawtools.ai/cases/state/united-states-district-court-for-the-eastern-district-of-california-united-states-district-court-for/2025/sonia-sayyedalhosseini-v-los-rios-community-college-district-t73isb00>