

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Austin v. Kia Corporation

Austin · No. 24-cv-04188-AMO · Decided September 22, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California granted Epiq Class Action and Claim Solutions, Inc.’s motion to dismiss George Jarvis Austin’s first amended complaint, which Kia Corporation joined. The court held that Austin’s claims concerning his class-action settlement reimbursement were subject to the settlement’s arbitration provision or were inadequately pleaded under Rules 8, 9, and 12(b)(6), and that his claims against judicial defendants were barred by judicial immunity. Dismissal of equal protection and due process claims against Kia and Epiq was with prejudice, while the remaining claims were dismissed with leave to amend by October 22, 2025.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Araceli Martinez-Olguin
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	September 22, 2025
DOCKET	24-cv-04188-AMO
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff's self-represented first amended complaint asserted claims arising from the alleged discriminatory distribution of class action settlement funds. Epiq moved to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), Kia joined the motion, and the court dismissed the first amended complaint, in part with prejudice and otherwise with leave to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court accepts factual allegations as true and construes the pleadings in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, but disregards conclusory allegations, unwarranted factual deductions, and unreasonable inferences. The complaint must contain sufficient nonconclusory factual content to make the claim plausibly suggestive of entitlement to relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

PARTIES

George Jarvis Austin v. Kia Corporation, Epiq Class Action and Claim Solutions, Inc., Judicial Defendants

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

arbitration

civil procedure

civil rights

consumer protection

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

arbitration

civil rights

consumer protection

contracts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Austin's claims challenging the final determination of his class settlement claim were subject to the settlement agreement's arbitration provision.
2. Whether the first amended complaint satisfied Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8 and plausibly stated claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1981, the Lanham Act, fraud, fraudulent inducement, and negligence.
3. Whether Austin had standing to assert a Lanham Act false-advertising claim.
4. Whether the judicial defendants were absolutely immune from Austin's claims based on the conduct alleged.
5. Whether dismissal should be with prejudice or with leave to amend.

HOLDINGS

1. To the extent Austin sought to challenge the final determination of his settlement claim, the settlement agreement required him to pursue that challenge through arbitration.
2. The first amended complaint violated Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8 because it did not clearly identify which causes of action were asserted against which defendants or the factual basis for those claims.
3. Austin failed to state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1981 because he did not plausibly allege intentional discrimination or discriminatory animus.
4. Austin lacked standing to assert his Section 43(a) Lanham Act claim because he did not allege injury to a commercial interest in reputation or sales.
5. Austin failed to state fraud and fraudulent-inducement claims because the allegations were conclusory and did not satisfy Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 9(b).
6. Austin failed to state a negligence claim because he did not allege nonconclusory facts establishing a legal duty, breach, or causation.
7. The judicial defendants were absolutely immune from the claims alleged because Austin identified no conduct performed outside their judicial capacities.
8. Dismissal of equal protection and due process claims against Kia and Epiq was with prejudice, while the remaining claims were dismissed with leave to amend because amendment could not be deemed futile.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To overcome a motion to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), the factual allegations in the plaintiff’s complaint “ ‘must . . . suggest that the claim has at least a plausible chance of success.’ ”” (at 2)

“The FAC fails to plausibly allege any claim upon which relief can be granted.” (at 4)

“A prima facie section 1981 case . . . requires proof of intentional discrimination” (at 5)

“Federal judges are absolutely immune from civil liability for acts performed in their judicial capacity, and their immunity extends not only to actions for damages but also for declaratory, injunctive, and other equitable relief.” (at 8)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Austin was a class member in a Kia product-liability class action settlement and alleged that Kia and settlement administrator Epiq fraudulently and discriminatorily reduced the reimbursement paid on his claim. He also asserted claims based on Kia advertising and sought relief against fifteen district judges, alleging that they engaged in nonjudicial acts and conspired to predetermine outcomes in his cases. The settlement agreement contained an arbitration procedure for class members dissatisfied with the final determination of their claims.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Austin initiated the action on July 11, 2024, and filed the operative first amended complaint against Kia, Epiq, and fifteen judges in the district. Epiq moved to dismiss, Kia joined, and the court decided the motion without oral argument. The court granted the motion, dismissed equal protection and due process claims against Kia and Epiq with prejudice, and dismissed the remaining claims with leave to amend by October 22, 2025.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- *Manzarek v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co.*, 519 F.3d 1025, 1031
- *Levitt v. Yelp! Inc.*, 765 F.3d 1123, 1135 (9th Cir.)
- *In re Century Aluminum Co. Sec. Litig.*, 729 F.3d 1104, 1107 (9th Cir.)
- *Starr v. Baca*, 652 F.3d 1202, 1216 (9th Cir.)
- *Hinds Invs., L.P. v. Angioli*, 654 F.3d 846, 850 (9th Cir.)
- *Johnson v. Riverside Healthcare Sys., LP*, 534 F.3d 1116, 1121 (9th Cir.)
- *Moss v. U.S. Secret Service*, 572 F.3d 962, 969 (9th Cir.)
- *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)
- *Ivey v. Bd. of Regents of Univ. of Alaska*, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir.)
- *Robinson Rancheria Citizens Council v. Borneo*, 971 F.2d 244, 248 (9th Cir.)

- Gay v. Waiters' & Dairy Lunchmen's Union, Local No. 30, 694 F.2d 531, 538 (9th Cir.)
- In re Gilead Scis. Secs. Litig., 536 F.3d 1049, 1055 (9th Cir.)
- Chacanaca v. Quaker Oats Co., 752 F. Supp. 2d 1111, 1127 (N.D. Cal.)
- Mut. Pharm. Co. v. Ivax Pharms., Inc., 459 F. Supp. 2d 925, 934 (C.D. Cal.)
- Southland Sod Farms v.
- Lexmark Int'l, Inc. v. Static Control Components, Inc., 572 U.S. 118, 131-32 (2014)
- Vess v. Ciba-Geigy Corp. USA, 317 F.3d 1097, 1105 (9th Cir.)
- Salameh v.
- Jackson v. Ryder Truck Rental, Inc., 16 Cal. App. 4th 1830, 1837 (1993)
- Seismic Reservoir 2020, Inc. v. Paulsson, No. 13-55413, 2015 WL 1883388, at *4 (9th Cir. Apr. 27, 2015)
- Omar v. Sea-Land Serv., Inc., 813 F.2d 986, 991 (9th Cir.)
- Moore v. Brewster, 96 F.3d 1240, 1243 (9th Cir.)
- Mullis v. U.S. Bankr. Ct. for Dist. of Nev., 828 F.2d 1385, 1394 (9th Cir.)
- Leadsinger, Inc. v. BMG Music Pub., 512 F.3d 522, 532 (9th Cir.)