

JUL 27 2020

CLERK OF THE COURT

BY: Deputy Clerk

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHIYOMI BRENT,

No. CGC-20-584828

Plaintiff,

V.

AMAZONFRESH LLC, PRIME NOW LLC, AMAZON.COM, INC. and Does 1-50,

Defendants.

ORDER DENYING PLAINTIFF'S APPLICATION FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION

INTRODUCTION AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff Chiyomi Brent is employed as a "picker" at a grocery warehouse operated by Defendants AmazonFresh LLC, Prime Now LLC, and Amazon.com, Inc. (Amazon) and known as the San Francisco Fulfillment Center or Amazon Ultra Fast Fresh (UCA1), located at 888 Tennessee Street, San Francisco. Plaintiff alleges that Amazon has failed during the COVID-19 pandemic to take adequate measures to safeguard employee health and safety in the warehouse, including failing to take adequate measures to sanitize common areas and equipment such as carts

and scanners used by pickers and other Amazon employees; failing to sanitize "freezer suits" used by multiple Amazon employees while working in refrigerator and freezer sections of the warehouse; and failing to ensure proper social distancing between employees. Before filing this action, Plaintiff filed complaints with the Division of Occupational Safety and Health of the State Department of Industrial Relations (Cal/OSHA) and with the City and County of San Francisco, which referred her complaint to its Community Education Response Team (CERT). On June 11, 2020, Plaintiff filed this action. The first amended complaint, filed on June 26, 2020, alleges that Amazon's practices and policies at UCA1 violate numerous provisions of the California Labor Code and regulations promulgated by Cal-OSHA, as well as state and local shelter-in-place orders and directives issued by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH). The first amended complaint states causes of action against Amazon for creating a public nuisance and for violations of the Unfair Competition Law, Bus. & Prof. Code § 17200 et seq., and a representative claim for civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act, Lab. Code § 2698 et seq. (PAGA). It seeks damages, declaratory and injunctive relief, and other relief.

On July 1, 2020, Plaintiff sought a temporary restraining order and order to show re preliminary injunction. The application was factually supported by a single declaration, that of the Plaintiff, regarding her complaints and the shortcomings she had observed at the facility. Amazon opposed the application, and filed the declaration of Amy Murphy, a Senior Work, Health and Safety leader, regarding Amazon's interactions with Plaintiff, its health and safety policies at UCA1, and the regulatory oversight of Amazon and UCA1 by CERT, SFDPH, Cal/OSHA, and the California Attorney General.

The July 2 Order to Show Cause

On July 2, 2020, after an initial hearing, this Court issued an order to show cause to Defendants to show cause on July 23, 2020, why a preliminary injunction should not be granted enjoining Defendants from operating UCA1 until and unless Defendants:

1. Perform a deep cleaning by professional cleaners of UCA1, and regularly perform adequate deep cleaning and sanitization;

- 2. Make possible and enforceable reasonably safe physical distancing of at least six feet between workers in work areas;
- 3. Monitor and enforce proper use of face coverings;
- 4. Develop a protocol for, instruct managers and employees on, and regularly conduct sufficient and proper cleaning and disinfection of equipment, including all Freezer Suits, carts, baskets, and all other equipment be sanitized after each use;
- 5. Ensure contact tracing of all persons known or suspected to have been infected with the COVID-19 virus while physically present at UCA1 and the adjoining offices, including employees.¹

The Court ordered Amazon to electronically serve a copy of the OSC on CERT, SFDPH, Cal/OSHA, and the Attorney General. Each of those agencies was requested to provide the Court, at or before the July 23 hearing, with any pertinent information it may have, including inspection reports relating to the UCA1 facility, relating to Amazon's compliance with the City and County of San Francisco Shelter-In-Place Orders and other applicable public health and safety requirements relating to COVID-19. Each of those agencies was also requested to inform the Court as to its position whether injunctive relief is required to compel Amazon to comply with such requirements.

The Public Agencies' Responses

In response to the Court's OSC, each of the agencies provided written responses, and their representatives also appeared at the July 23 hearing. Because of the importance of those responses and of the agencies' investigatory and enforcement authority to the Court's decision, they are summarized here.²

¹ The Court denied Plaintiffs' request for a temporary restraining order, primarily on the grounds that the limited record then before it was contested and did not establish that Plaintiff or the public would suffer irreparable harm before the matter could be heard on notice and a full record.

² The Court again expresses its gratitude to the public agencies for their detailed and timely responses. Because of the time urgency associated with this matter, the Court invited the agencies to submit materials informally, in letter briefs or emails. At the hearing, it requested that they electronically file those materials in the court's online docket so that there would be a complete record of the proceedings.

On July 16, 2020, the City and County of San Francisco, acting through CERT and SFDPH, provided a lengthy written response to the Court's order, and separately (via an online link) submitted numerous photographs taken by City inspectors at the UCA1 facility. The City's response provided valuable information on the San Francisco's Health Officer's COVID-19 business regulations, including the Health Directive applicable to the UCA1 warehouse operation and orders requiring face coverings; it detailed CERT's April 7 inspection of that facility in response to Plaintiff Brent's complaint regarding the shared use of freezer suits, which was also intended to assess the warehouse's overall compliance with the Health Order and its health and safety requirements; it detailed SFDPH's regulatory correspondence with Amazon, including a July 10 Notice of Violation with regard to its social distancing protocol and signage that followed a July 7 inspection of the facility; and SFPDH's determination that because there has not been a positive COVID-19 case at the warehouse, no contact tracing efforts have been required. In response to the Court's question as to the necessity of injunctive relief, the City responded that "no injunction is required to compel Amazon Defendants' cooperation with SFDPH contact tracing, as there has been no failure to cooperate in that regard. Furthermore, due to the lack of positive COVID-19 cases associated with 888 Tennessee, San Francisco has no basis to recommend an injunction to compel a 'deep cleaning' of that location." The City took no position on whether an injunction was required to compel Amazon to comply with physical distancing requirements and with face covering requirements; and it indicated that it expected Amazon to follow through on its assurances that it would implement protocols to ensure that freezer suits are not re-used without being cleaned, but if not, an injunction requiring it to do so would be warranted.

On July 22, 2020, the City provided a further submission. In that submission, the City indicated that SFDPH had conducted a second site visit on July 16 and abated the Notice of Violation after finding the facility in compliance with its directions to update the facility's social distancing protocol and place appropriate COVID-19 safety posters at an entrance that lacked them. The City's submission also indicated that the SFDPH inspector had walked through the facility and found that it complied with numerous items that were marked as "TBD" (to be

determined) on the checklist portion of the July 10 Notice of Violation. Those matters encompassed the following areas: signage and education (specifically, "Educate Personnel about this Protocol and other COVID-19 related items"); protective measures (including "Require Personnel and patrons to wear a face covering as required by Health Officer orders" and "Implement a plan to keep site Personnel safe, including by limiting the number of Peronnel and customers onsite to a number that ensures physical distancing and favoring allowing Personnel to carry out their duties from home when possible"); measures to prevent unnecessary contact (including "Tell Personnel and patrons to maintain physical distancing of at least six feet, except Personnel may momentarily come closer when necessary to accept payment, deliver goods or services, or as otherwise necessary"); sanitizing measures (including "Regularly disinfect high touch areas" and "Disinfect break rooms, bathrooms, and other common areas frequently"); and the facility's compliance with industry-specific directives.

Cal/OSHA's response, dated July 22, indicated that it had not received Plaintiff's May 22 complaint at the time it was submitted, but that once it learned of Plaintiff's concerns, its San Francisco enforcement office opened an investigation. Cal/OSHA indicated that its enforcement staff visited the UCA1 warehouse on July 14, and that its investigation is not yet complete. Cal/OSHA stated that its enforcement staff had not yet begun interviewing non-managerial employees, and that it intends to request further documentation from the employer. Accordingly, it cannot yet evaluate the current policies and procedures at the warehouse or determine whether they are adequately understood, followed, and enforced, nor could it take a position on the need for injunctive relief. Cal/OSHA's response also provided helpful background information regarding its regulatory guidelines and other oversight in relation to COVID-19 and to the warehouse industry sector, including guidance requiring California employers to establish and implement an injury and illness prevention plan (IIIP) to protect employees from workplace hazards, including infectious diseases. Cal/OSHA also confirmed that it, like Amazon, is not aware of any known or suspected COVID-19 infections at the facility.

Finally, the Attorney General confirmed that on May 11, 2020, he had requested Amazon in writing to provide detailed information and documents relating to its policies and practices

regarding the protection of its workforce from COVID-19 at its facilities in California, and had received an initial response from Amazon on June 12. However, the Attorney General indicated that Amazon's response did not specifically reference the UCA1 facility or provide any documents particular to it. Accordingly, the Attorney General indicated that he had not made any determination specific to that facility, and lacks sufficient information to offer his opinion regarding the propriety of injunctive relief.

The Parties' Further Factual Submissions

On July 16, 2020, with leave of court, both parties filed further factual submissions relating to Plaintiff's request for a preliminary injunction. In her further declaration, Plaintiff asserted that as of early July, Amazon had not fully complied with its assurances that freezer suits will be cleaned and disinfected after each use. She acknowledges that on three days when she worked at the facility, she saw signage directing workers to place dirty suits in the hamper or dry-cleaning bags ["Freezer Suits are picked up by our Dry Cleaning Vendor. Please place dirty suits in the hamper or dry-cleaning bags below, thank you!"]; however, she asserted that Amazon did not specifically inform workers that the freezer suits were to be used only once before cleaning, and that on one day (July 4), there were no bins for soiled freezer suits. (Brent Decl. ¶¶ 3-6.) She also asserted that Amazon did not provide her with updated information regarding masks, cleaning carts, or social distancing (id. ¶ 7); that carts and scanners did not appear to have been cleaned between each use (id. ¶ 8); that on two of the days, employees did not abide by social distancing (id. ¶ 9); that she did not observe any employee monitoring or enforcing social distancing (id.); and that employees failed to wear their face masks correctly and she did not observe anyone monitoring or enforcing the use of face masks. (id. ¶ 10.)

Amazon, for its part, filed a lengthy declaration by Tim Coleman, the acting Site Lead at the UCA1 facility. That declaration details the policies and procedures that Amazon has taken at the facility to address the various issues raised by Plaintiff, and attaches numerous color photographs of that facility, including of signage regarding social distancing and other requirements. Those measures include contracting with a janitorial services provider to provide daily cleaning and disinfecting services every day, and with another vendor to provide nightly

disinfectant spraying services;³ maintaining safe physical distances between workers with policies that are advertised throughout the worksite and enforced by employees ("Social Distancing Heroes") whose sole job is to patrol the facility to detect and address policy violations; providing free facial coverings to workers and requiring their use at all times, except when eating or drinking at socially distanced tables in the breakroom; and adopting and publicizing detailed policies and protocols regarding the regular and proper cleaning and disinfection of shared equipment (including freezer suits and baskets).⁴

DISCUSSION

The Court undoubtedly has the authority to grant an injunction to abate a public nuisance. (See Civ. Code § 3491.) Moreover, there is no gainsaying the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic or of the issues raised by Plaintiff, both in terms of worker safety and public health and safety generally. This Court takes seriously its obligations in that context. All that said, however, the Court concludes this is not an appropriate case for issuance of a preliminary injunction. That is so for at least three principal reasons.

First, Plaintiff's application does not seek "preliminary injunctive relief to preserve the status quo pending a final judgment," which is the usual function of such relief. (Sanchez v. Valencia Holding Co., LLC (2015) 61 Cal.4th 899, 922.) Rather, as Plaintiff's counsel acknowledged at the hearing, Plaintiff seeks a mandatory injunction that would compel Amazon, among other things, to "regularly perform adequate deep cleaning and sanitization," "[m]ake possible and enforceable reasonably safe physical distancing of at least six feet between workers in work areas, "[m]onitor and enforce proper use of face coverings," "[d]evelop a protocol for,

³ Amazon's counsel represented at the hearing that the facility operates 24 hours a day.

⁴ At the hearing, Plaintiff's counsel sought leave to further supplement the record with declarations from other Amazon employees regarding conditions at the UCA1 warehouse. Representing that Amazon employees are reluctant to come forward for fear of retaliation, counsel requested that the Court permit such declarations to be filed anonymously or under to a protective order limiting disclosure of the declarants' identities to outside counsel to the parties. The request is denied. The Court notes that employees may submit complaints to Cal/OSHA on a confidential basis, and that Plaintiff herself does not claim that she has been retaliated against because of her role in submitting such complaints or in bringing this action.

instruct managers and employees on, and regularly conduct sufficient and proper cleaning and disinfection of equipment." (See *Davenport v. Blue Cross of California* (1997) 52 Cal.App.4th 438, 446 ["an injunction is prohibitory if it requires a person to refrain from a particular act and mandatory if it compels performance of an affirmative act that changes the position of the parties."].) Such a preliminary mandatory injunction is "rarely granted." (*People ex rel. Herrera v. Stender* (2012) 212 Cal.App.4th 614, 630.) "The granting of a mandatory injunction pending trial 'is not permitted except in extreme cases where the right thereto is clearly established." (*Id.*; see also *Brown v. Pacifica Foundation, Inc.* (2019) 34 Cal.App.5th 915, 925; *Teachers Ins. & Annuity Ass'n v. Furloff* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 1487, 1493.)

Here, the Court cannot find that the right to a mandatory injunction is "clearly established." The factual record, while complex and disputed, does not clearly establish the existence of ongoing serious regulatory violations that pose an imminent risk of irreparable harm to Amazon employees or the public. To the contrary, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, which most recently inspected the facility just 11 days ago on July 16, found no current violations. Further, as Amazon's counsel observed at the hearing, it is a fair reading of the record that Amazon—like countless other employers and institutions, private and public—has improved its practices and policies over time as it attempts to react to a fast-moving and unprecedented global health crisis, and to evolving regulatory requirements. (See, e.g., Coleman Decl. ¶ 28 [discussing implementation in late April of targeted airborne disinfectant application]; *id.* ¶ 35 [discussing issuance on June 19 of new freezer PPE management guidelines]; *id.* ¶ 38 [recent posting of additional signs regarding freezer PPE policy].)) Amazon doubtless could still further improve its health and safety practices. And, at least with the benefit of hindsight, it arguably could have done a better or swifter job in the past of developing and implementing those practices. But perfection is not the standard.

Second, the Court is particularly disinclined to grant mandatory injunctive relief because the relief Plaintiff requests would require continuing judicial oversight and supervision that the Court is ill-equipped to provide. As the Court observed at both hearings in this matter, a judge is not an expert in public health matters, and lacks the training, expertise, and resources to oversee

compliance with an injunction such as the one Plaintiff seeks here. It is no answer to suggest, as Plaintiff's counsel asserted at the hearing, that the Court need only order Amazon to "comply with the law." How is the Court to ascertain what is "adequate deep cleaning and sanitization" and how often it should be performed? Or to determine what is "sufficient and proper cleaning and disinfection of equipment," or to assess the adequacy of any protocol that Amazon might be ordered to develop on those subjects? How long would such an injunction need to remain in effect? The requested relief begs all these questions and more.

Third, and closely related, there are responsible administrative and law enforcement agencies that do have the technical expertise to oversee Amazon's compliance with the various state and local regulatory provisions governing its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the authority to take effective enforcement action if its efforts fall short of those required to protect employee and public health. Under the circumstances, two related doctrines—those of judicial abstention and primary jurisdiction—support the conclusion that the preferable approach here is for the Court to defer to those agencies' expertise and authority. Likewise, a mandatory injunction is properly refused where, as here, an alternative remedy is available to the moving party. (See Shoemaker v. County of Los Angeles (1995) 37 Cal.App.4th 618, 633-634 [trial court abused its discretion in issuing mandatory preliminary injunction compelling county hospital to reinstate doctor to administrative positions, where doctor could pursue reinstatement through administrative procedures].)

"As a general matter, a trial court may abstain from adjudicating a suit that seeks equitable remedies if 'granting the requested relief would require a trial court to assume the functions of an administrative agency, or to interfere with the functions of an administrative agency." (Arce v. Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc. (2010) 181 Cal.App.4th 471, 496.) In addition, and of particular pertinence here, "judicial abstention may be appropriate in cases where 'granting injunctive relief would be unnecessarily burdensome for the trial court to monitor and enforce given the availability of more effective means of redress." (Id.) Thus, in Alvarado v. Selma

⁵ The requirement that a plaintiff exhaust her administrative remedies as a condition precedent to judicial relief, while based in similar concerns, is distinct from these doctrines.

Convalescent Hospital (2007) 153 Cal.App.4th 1292, plaintiffs filed a class action seeking injunctive relief to require the owners and operators of skilled nursing and intermediate care facilities to comply with certain nursing hour requirements set forth in the Health and Safety Code. The court held that the trial court properly sustained defendants' demurrer without leave to amend on the basis of the judicial abstention doctrine, since granting injunctive relief "would place a tremendous burden on the trial court to undertake a classwide regulatory function and manage a long-term monitoring process to ensure compliance" with the statute. (*Id.* at 1296; see also *Hambrick v. Healthcare Partners Medical Group, Inc.* (2015) 238 Cal.App.4th 124, 152 [in action against professional medical corporation and related entities for operating as a health care service plan without obtaining the required regulatory license, trial court properly abstained, where court would be required to determine complex economic policy within the context of the managed health care system, a task properly left to the responsible administrative agency].)

The primary jurisdiction doctrine is grounded in similar concerns. That doctrine "applies where a claim is originally cognizable in the courts, and comes into play whenever enforcement of the claim requires the resolution of issues which, under a regulatory scheme, have been placed within the special competence of an administrative body; in such a case the judicial process is suspended pending referral of such issues to the administrative body for its views." (Farmers Ins. Exchange v. Superior Court (1992) 2 Cal.4th 377, 390-391.) "The doctrine does not permanently foreclose judicial action, but provides the appropriate administrative agency with an opportunity to act if it chooses to do so." (Wise v. Pacific Gas & Electric Co. (2000) 77 Cal.App.4th 287, 296.) "Administrative agency involvement may serve to resolve factual issues or provide a record for subsequent judicial review. [Citation.] In addition, a stay will conserve judicial and other resources which otherwise would be consumed in litigation of issues that may be resolved by the administrative proceeding." (Id.) The primary jurisdiction doctrine "advances two related policies: it enhances court decisionmaking and efficiency by allowing courts to take advantage of

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administrative expertise, and it helps assure uniform application of regulatory laws." (Farmers Ins. Exchange, 2 Cal.4th at 390.)⁶

Here, the public agencies' submissions do not establish that there is a need at this time for this Court to grant extraordinary injunctive relief. To the contrary, they support the conclusion that agencies that, unlike the Court, have the specialized expertise to assess and oversee Amazon's compliance with applicable (and ever-changing) public health directives, are doing their job, and appear to be doing so vigorously and responsibly. The Attorney General, Cal/OSHA, and the San Francisco Department of Public Health have all opened investigations into Amazon's practices, and both Cal/OSHA and SFDPH have inspected Amazon's UCA1 warehouse within the last two weeks. Moreover, those agencies have the ability and apparent will to exercise robust enforcement authority if they determine that Amazon is not complying with its obligations. Indeed, the City gave Amazon only 48 hours to comply with its July 10, 2020 Notice of Violation, and stated that the City considers any violation of its public health directives to constitute a public nuisance as defined in the San Francisco Health Code. The Notice of Violation warned Amazon that if it failed to comply with the Notice of Violation, the Director of Public Health may cause the abatement and removal of the nuisance, even to the extent of ordering closure of the business. (July 16, 2010 letter brief from Deputy City Attorney Peter J. Keith, Ex. F (July 10, 2020 Notice of Violation and Inspection Report).) Likewise, Cal/OSHA and the Attorney General have authority to take enforcement action if they determine that an employer has violated the Labor Code or applicable regulations, including the authority to

⁶ The two doctrines result in different outcomes. A court may dismiss a cause of action based on the doctrine of judicial abstention. (*Arce*, 181 Cal.App.4th at 482.) In applying the primary jurisdiction doctrine, in contrast, "the proper procedure is to stay the action pending resolution of the issues within the administrative body's expertise." (*Wise*, 77 Cal.App.4th at 296.) Here, Amazon has not sought either dismissal or a stay of the action, and the Court does not find that either doctrine necessarily applies by its terms. Rather, the Court looks to the considerations underlying those doctrines to inform its consideration of Plaintiff's request for injunctive relief.

⁷ The Notice of Violation specifically refers to Section 581(b)(17) of the San Francisco Health Code, which broadly defines prohibited public health nuisances to include "[a]nything else that the Director [of Public Health] deems to be a threat to public health and safety." Section 596(f) of the same Code authorizes the Director, if the nuisance is not abated and removed within the time period set forth in the notice, to "abate and remove the nuisance as soon as practicable."

1	prohibit use of or entry into a place of employment if Cal/OSHA determines that it presents an
2	"imminent hazard to employees." (Lab. Code § 6325; see generally Sacramento County Deputy
3	Sheriffs' Assn. v. County of Sacramento (1990) 220 Cal.App.3d 280, 285 [describing
4	Cal/OSHA's power and jurisdiction to enforce and administer laws, standards, and orders
5	requiring the protection of employees' health and safety].)
6	In short, the investigatory, inspection and enforcement efforts of these public health and
7	law enforcement agencies, and the availability of effective relief if they determine that Amazon
8	has failed to comply with applicable local or state law or regulations, supports the Court's
9	determination that judicial intervention by way of extraordinary injunctive relief is not warranted
10	at this time. (See <i>Hambrick</i> , 238 Cal.App.4th at 154 [abstention appropriate where the
11	administrative agency "both has the power to enforce the [statute], and has repeatedly issued
12	cease and desist orders that require health care service plans to obtain the required licenses, enjoin
13	deceptive and misleading business practices and advertising, and order restitution," thereby
14	ensuring that plaintiff will have a remedy for her claims]; Alvarado, 153 Cal.App.4th at 1306
15	["The DHS has the power, expertise, and statutory mandate to regulate and enforce [the statute].
16	Given this alternative and more effective means of ensuring compliance with [the statute], we
17	conclude the trial court did not abuse its discretion by applying the abstention doctrine."].)
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20	CONCLUSION
21	For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff's request for a preliminary injunction is denied.
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23	IT IS SO ORDERED.
24	Lyh an Kildm
25	Dated: July 27, 2020 HON. ETHAN P. SCHULMAN

JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

CERTIFICATE OF ELECTRONIC SERVICE

(CCP 1010.6(6) & CRC 2.260(g))

I, M. Goodman, a Deputy Clerk of the Superior Court of the County of San Francisco, certify that I am not a party to the within action.

On 7/27/20, I electronically served the ORDER DENYING PLAINTIFF'S APPLICATION FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION via electronic mail on the recipients.

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Dated: July 27, 2020

T. Mic	hael Yuen, Clerk	
By:	\mathcal{N}	
_	M. Goodman, Deputy Clerk	