

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

CIVIL MINUTES - GENERAL

JS - 6

Case No.	CV 20-8589 FMO (MAAx)	Date	October 14, 2020
Title	Blonde Beard, Inc., et al. v. White Rabbit Group, Inc., et al.		

Present: The Honorable Fernando M. Olguin, United States District Judge

Vanessa Figueroa

None

None

Deputy Clerk

Court Reporter / Recorder

Tape No.

Attorney Present for Plaintiff:

Attorney Present for Defendant:

None Present

None Present

Proceedings: (In Chambers) Order Remanding Action

On July 21, 2020, Blonde Beard, Inc. and Jeff Jessamine (“Jessamine”) (collectively “plaintiffs”) filed a Complaint in the Los Angeles County Superior Court against several defendants, including White Rabbit Group, Inc., Vander Group, Derek J. Sine and Van Tucker (“defendants”), asserting state law claims related to a contract dispute. (See Dkt. 1, Notice of Removal (“NOR”) at ¶¶ 1, 4); (Dkt. 1-1, Complaint at ¶¶ 48-96). On September 18, 2020, defendants removed the action on diversity jurisdiction grounds pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1332. (See Dkt. 1, NOR at ¶¶ 8-9). Having reviewed the pleadings, the court hereby remands this action to state court for lack of subject matter jurisdiction. See 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c).

LEGAL STANDARD

“Federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction. They possess only that power authorized by Constitution and statute[.]” Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Ins. Co. of Am., 511 U.S. 375, 377, 114 S.Ct. 1673, 1675 (1994). The courts are presumed to lack jurisdiction unless the contrary appears affirmatively from the record. See DaimlerChrysler Corp. v. Cuno, 547 U.S. 332, 342 n. 3, 126 S.Ct. 1854, 1861 (2006). Federal courts have a duty to examine jurisdiction *sua sponte* before proceeding to the merits of a case, see Ruhrgas AG v. Marathon Oil Co., 526 U.S. 574, 583, 119 S.Ct. 1563, 1569 (1999), “even in the absence of a challenge from any party.” Arbaugh v. Y&H Corp., 546 U.S. 500, 514, 126 S.Ct. 1235, 1244 (2006).

“The right of removal is entirely a creature of statute and a suit commenced in a state court must remain there until cause is shown for its transfer under some act of Congress.” Syngenta Crop Prot., Inc. v. Henson, 537 U.S. 28, 32, 123 S.Ct. 366, 369 (2002) (internal quotation marks omitted). Where Congress has acted to create a right of removal, those statutes, unless otherwise stated, are strictly construed against removal jurisdiction.¹ See id. Unless otherwise expressly

¹ For example, an “antiremoval presumption” does not exist in cases removed pursuant to the Class Action Fairness Act (“CAFA”), 28 U.S.C. § 1332(d). See Dart Cherokee Basin Operating Co., LLC v. Owens, 574 U.S. 81, 89, 135 S.Ct. 547, 554 (2014).

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

CIVIL MINUTES - GENERAL

JS - 6

Case No. **CV 20-8589 FMO (MAAx)**

Date **October 14, 2020**

Title **Blonde Beard, Inc., et al. v. White Rabbit Group, Inc., et al.**

provided by Congress, “any civil action brought in a State court of which the district courts of the United States have original jurisdiction, may be removed by the defendant or the defendants, to the district court[.]” 28 U.S.C. § 1441(a); see Dennis v. Hart, 724 F.3d 1249, 1252 (9th Cir. 2013) (same). A removing defendant bears the burden of establishing that removal is proper. See Abrego Abrego v. The Dow Chem. Co., 443 F.3d 676, 684 (9th Cir. 2006) (*per curiam*) (noting the “longstanding, near-canonical rule that the burden on removal rests with the removing defendant”); Gaus v. Miles, Inc., 980 F.2d 564, 566 (9th Cir. 1992) (“The strong presumption against removal jurisdiction means that the defendant always has the burden of establishing that removal is proper.”) (internal quotation marks omitted). Moreover, if there is any doubt regarding the existence of subject matter jurisdiction, the court must resolve those doubts in favor of remanding the action to state court. See Gaus, 980 F.2d at 566 (“Federal jurisdiction must be rejected if there is any doubt as to the right of removal in the first instance.”).

“Under the plain terms of § 1441(a), in order properly to remove [an] action pursuant to that provision, [the removing defendant] must demonstrate that original subject-matter jurisdiction lies in the federal courts.” Syngenta Crop Prot., 537 U.S. at 33, 123 S.Ct. at 370. Failure to do so requires that the case be remanded, as “[s]ubject matter jurisdiction may not be waived, and . . . the district court must remand if it lacks jurisdiction.” Kelton Arms Condo. Owners Ass’n, Inc. v. Homestead Ins. Co., 346 F.3d 1190, 1192 (9th Cir. 2003). Indeed, “[i]f at any time before final judgment it appears that the district court lacks subject matter jurisdiction, the case shall be remanded.” 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c); see Emrich v. Touche Ross & Co., 846 F.2d 1190, 1194 n. 2 (9th Cir. 1988) (“It is elementary that the subject matter jurisdiction of the district court is not a waivable matter and may be raised at anytime by one of the parties, by motion or in the responsive pleadings, or *sua sponte* by the trial or reviewing court.”); Washington v. United Parcel Serv., Inc., 2009 WL 1519894, *1 (C.D. Cal. 2009) (a district court may remand an action where the court finds that it lacks subject matter jurisdiction either by motion or *sua sponte*).

DISCUSSION

The court’s review of the NOR and the attached Complaint makes clear that this court does not have subject matter jurisdiction over the instant matter. In other words, plaintiffs could not have originally brought this action in federal court, as plaintiffs do not competently allege facts supplying diversity jurisdiction.² Therefore, removal was improper. See 28 U.S.C. § 1441(a); Caterpillar Inc. v. Williams, 482 U.S. 386, 392, 107 S.Ct. 2425, 2429 (1987) (“Only state-court actions that originally could have been filed in federal court may be removed to federal court by the defendant.”) (footnote omitted).

When federal subject matter jurisdiction is predicated on diversity of citizenship, see 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a), complete diversity must exist between the opposing parties. See Caterpillar Inc.

² Plaintiffs seek only to invoke the court’s diversity jurisdiction. (See, generally, Dkt. 1, NOR).

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

CIVIL MINUTES - GENERAL

JS - 6

Case No. **CV 20-8589 FMO (MAAx)**

Date **October 14, 2020**

Title **Blonde Beard, Inc., et al. v. White Rabbit Group, Inc., et al.**

v. Lewis, 519 U.S. 61, 68, 117 S.Ct. 467, 472 (1996) (stating that the diversity jurisdiction statute “applies only to cases in which the citizenship of each plaintiff is diverse from the citizenship of each defendant”). Jessamine appears to be a citizen of California. (See Dkt. 1, NOR at ¶ 11); (Dkt. 1-1, Complaint at ¶ 5). However, defendants fail to set forth the citizenship of several of the defendants, asserting in conclusory fashion that the court should disregard these entities because they were fraudulently joined. (See Dkt. 1, NOR at ¶¶ 14-17).

“If a plaintiff fails to state a cause of action against a [non-diverse] defendant, and the failure is obvious according to the well-settled rules of the state, the joinder is fraudulent and the defendant’s presence in the lawsuit is ignored for purposes of determining diversity.” United Comput. Sys., Inc. v. AT & T Corp., 298 F.3d 756, 761 (9th Cir. 2002) (internal quotation marks omitted). “It is only where the plaintiff has not, in fact, a cause of action against the [non-diverse] defendant, and has no reasonable ground for supposing he has, and yet joins him in order to evade the jurisdiction of the federal court, that the joinder can be said to be fraudulent, entitling the real defendant to a removal.” Albi v. Street & Smith Publ’ns, 140 F.2d 310, 312 (9th Cir. 1944) (footnote omitted); see Allen v. Boeing Co., 784 F.3d 625, 634 (9th Cir. 2015) (“[J]oinder is fraudulent when a plaintiff’s failure to state a cause of action against the resident defendant is obvious according to the applicable state law.”). Defendants must show by “clear and convincing evidence” that plaintiffs do not have a colorable claim against the alleged sham defendants. See Hamilton Materials, Inc. v. Dow Chem. Corp., 494 F.3d 1203, 1206 (9th Cir. 2007) (“Fraudulent joinder must be proven by clear and convincing evidence.”); see also Mireles v. Wells Fargo Bank, N.A., 845 F.Supp.2d 1034, 1063 (C.D. Cal. 2012) (“Demonstrating fraudulent joinder” requires showing that “after all disputed questions of fact and all ambiguities . . . are resolved in the plaintiff’s favor, the plaintiff could not possibly recover against the party whose joinder is questioned.”) (emphasis in original); Vasquez v. Bank of Am., N.A., 2015 WL 794545, *4 (C.D. Cal. 2015) (finding defendants had not met the “heavy burden of persuasion to show to a near certainty that joinder was fraudulent” because plaintiff could amend complaint to state at least one valid claim) (internal quotation marks omitted). Indeed, “[a] defendant invoking federal court diversity jurisdiction on the basis of fraudulent joinder bears a heavy burden since there is a general presumption against [finding] fraudulent joinder.” Grancare, LLC v. Thrower, 889 F.3d 543, 548 (9th Cir. 2018) (internal quotation marks omitted).

The court finds that defendants have not only failed to show that the parties are diverse, (see, generally, Dkt. 1, NOR at ¶¶ 14-17) (failing to set forth citizenship of defendants), but have also failed to meet their “heavy burden” of showing by clear and convincing evidence that plaintiffs do not have colorable claims against any non-diverse defendants. (See id.)

In sum, given that any doubt regarding the existence of subject matter jurisdiction must be resolved in favor of remanding the action to state court, see Gaus, 980 F.2d at 566, the court is not persuaded, under the circumstances here, that defendants have met their burden of showing that the non-diverse defendants were fraudulently joined. As such, there is no basis for diversity jurisdiction, and the court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over this matter.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

CIVIL MINUTES - GENERAL

JS - 6

Case No. **CV 20-8589 FMO (MAAx)**

Date **October 14, 2020**

Title **Blonde Beard, Inc., et al. v. White Rabbit Group, Inc., et al.**

This order is not intended for publication. Nor is it intended to be included in or submitted to any online service such as Westlaw or Lexis.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The above-captioned action shall be **remanded** to the Superior Court of the State of California for the County of Los Angeles, 111 N. Hill St., Los Angeles, CA 90012, for lack of subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1447(c).
2. The Clerk shall send a certified copy of this Order to the state court.
3. Any pending motion is denied as moot.

Initials of Preparer vdr