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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

JOSE TRUJILLO,

Plaintiff,

v.

HARBIR CHAUDHARY, individually and
dba 99 Food Market & Gasoline, et al.,

Defendants.

Case No. 1:22-cv-00969-SKO

**ORDER DISCHARGING ORDER TO
SHOW CAUSE**

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
TO DECLINE SUPPLEMENTAL
JURISDICTION OVER PLAINTIFF'S
STATE LAW CLAIMS**

(Docs. 1, 13, 14)

14 DAY DEADLINE

Clerk to Assign District Judge

I. INTRODUCTION

On August 3, 2022, Plaintiff Jose Trujillo (“Plaintiff”) filed his Complaint against Defendants Harbir Chaudhary and Ved Vati Chaudhary (aka Ved Vati Rana), both individually and doing business as 99 Food Market & Gasoline (“Defendants”), alleging claims under the American with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), California’s Unruh Civil Rights Act (“Unruh Act”), and California’s Health and Safety Code. (Doc. 1). These claims stem from alleged barriers Plaintiff encountered (such as a lack of accessible parking) while he visited a facility owned, operated, or leased by Defendants—99 Food Market & Gasoline. (*See id.*) No defendant has appeared in this action, and default has been entered. (Docs. 7, 8.) On April 20, 2023, Plaintiff filed a motion for default judgment against all defendants. (Doc. 11.)

On April 24, 2023, the undersigned ordered Plaintiff to show cause why the Court should

1 not decline to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over his state law claims in light of the Ninth
2 Circuit’s decision in *Vo v. Choi*. (See Doc. 13.); *Vo v. Choi*, 49 F.4th 1167 (9th Cir. 2022) (affirming
3 a district court’s decision to decline supplemental jurisdiction over an Unruh Act claim); see 28
4 U.S.C. § 1367(c). Plaintiff timely filed a response on May 4, 2023. (Doc. 14.) For the reasons
5 discussed below, the undersigned shall discharge the order to show cause and shall recommend that
6 supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff’s state law claims be declined and those claims be dismissed
7 without prejudice.

8 II. LEGAL STANDARDS

9 Under 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a), a court that has original jurisdiction over a civil action “shall
10 have supplemental jurisdiction over all other claims that are so related to claims in the action within
11 such original jurisdiction that they form part of the same case or controversy under Article III of the
12 United States Constitution.” The Ninth Circuit has concluded that ADA and Unruh Act claims that
13 derive from a common nucleus of operative fact “form part of the ‘same case or controversy’ for
14 purposes of § 1367(a).” *Arroyo v. Rosas*, 19 F.4th 1202, 1209 (9th Cir. 2021).

15 However, even where supplemental jurisdiction over a claim exists under § 1367(a), the
16 Court may decline jurisdiction over the claim under § 1367(c) if:

- 17 (1) the claim raises a novel or complex issue of State law,
- 18 (2) the claim substantially predominates over the claim or claims over which the
district court has original jurisdiction,
- 19 (3) the district court has dismissed all claims over which it has original jurisdiction,
or
- 20 (4) in exceptional circumstances, there are other compelling reasons for declining
21 jurisdiction.

22 § 1367(c)(1)-(4).

23 Pertinent here, a court deciding whether to apply § 1367(c)(4) must make “a two-part
24 inquiry.” *Arroyo*, 19 F.4th at 1210. “First, the district court must articulate why the circumstances
25 of the case are exceptional within the meaning of § 1367(c)(4).” *Id.* (citations and internal quotation
26 marks omitted). “Second, in determining whether there are compelling reasons for declining
27 jurisdiction in a given case, the court should consider what best serves the principles of economy,
28 convenience, fairness, and comity which underlie the pendent jurisdiction doctrine articulated in

1 [*United Mine Workers of Am. v. Gibbs*, 383 U.S. 715 (1966)].” *Id.* (citations and internal quotation
2 marks omitted).

3 After considering § 1367(c)(4) and California’s requirements for bringing Unruh Act claims,
4 “[n]umerous federal district courts across California have declined to exercise supplemental
5 jurisdiction over Unruh Act . . . claims brought alongside ADA claims.” *Rutherford v. Nuway Ins.*
6 *Agency Inc.*, No. SACV 21-00576-CJC-JDE, 2021 WL 4572008, at *1 (C.D. Cal. Apr. 1, 2021).
7 Underlying these decisions is “the recent confluence of several California-law rules [that] have
8 combined to create a highly unusual systemic impact on ADA-based Unruh Act cases that clearly
9 threatens to have a significant adverse impact on federal-state comity.” *Arroyo*, 19 F.4th at 1211.

10 Congress adopted the ADA to address the discrimination encountered by persons with
11 disabilities, providing a private cause of action to seek injunctive, but not monetary, relief. *See*
12 *Arroyo v. Rosas*, 19 F.4th 1202, 1205 (9th Cir. 2021) (discussing background and relief available
13 under the ADA). The Unruh Act likewise prohibits disability discrimination, containing a provision,
14 Cal. Civ. Code § 51(f), stating that a violation of the ADA also violates the Unruh Act. However,
15 unlike the ADA, the Unruh Act allows a plaintiff to recover “up to a maximum of three times the
16 amount of actual damage but in no case less than four thousand dollars.” Cal. Civ. Code § 52(a).

17 In response to perceived abuses of the Unruh Act, California has enacted requirements for
18 bringing such claims, which the Ninth Circuit has assumed, without deciding, “apply only in
19 California state court.” *Vo*, 49 F.4th at 1170. For example a provision was added (1) regarding the
20 contents of demand letters, Cal. Civ. Code § 55.31; (2) imposing heightened pleading requirements,
21 Cal. Civ. Code § 425.50(a); and (3) requiring an additional filing fee of \$1,000 for so called “high-
22 frequency litigants,” Cal. Gov’t Code § 70616.5(b), *see* Cal. Civ. Code § 425.55(b) (defining a high-
23 frequency litigant to include “[a] plaintiff who has filed 10 or more complaints alleging a
24 construction-related accessibility violation within the 12-month period immediately preceding the
25 filing of the current complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility violation.”).

26 These heightened pleading requirements apply to actions alleging a “construction-related
27 accessibility claim,” which California law defines as “any civil claim in a civil action with respect
28 to a place of public accommodation, including but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51,

1 54, 54.1, or 55, based wholly or in part on an alleged violation of any construction-related
2 accessibility standard.” Cal. Civ. Code § 55.52(a)(1). The requirements apply to claims brought
3 under the Unruh Act as well as to related claims under the California Health & Safety Code. *See*
4 *Gilbert v. Singh*, No. 1:21cv1338-AWI-HBK, 2023 WL 2239335, *2 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 27, 2023). By
5 enacting such restrictions, California has expressed a “desire to limit the financial burdens
6 California’s businesses may face from claims for statutory damages under the Unruh Act.” *Arroyo*,
7 19 F.4th at 1209 (internal quotations omitted). However, “Unruh Act plaintiffs have evaded these
8 limits by filing in a federal forum in which [they] can claim these state law damages in a manner
9 inconsistent with the state law’s requirements.” *Arroyo*, 19 F.4th at 1213 (internal quotation marks
10 omitted). Consequently, “the procedural strictures that California put in place have been rendered
11 largely toothless, because they can now be readily evaded.” *Id.*

12 Recently, the Ninth Circuit provided substantial guidance on this issue in *Vo v. Choi* in
13 affirming a district court’s order denying supplemental jurisdiction over an Unruh Act claim under
14 § 1367(c)(4). *Vo*, 49 F.4th at 1168. In that case, the district court declined supplemental jurisdiction
15 over the Unruh Act claim after giving the plaintiff the opportunity to respond and before addressing
16 the merits of the case. *Id.* at 1168-69. In reviewing the district court’s decision, the Ninth Circuit
17 held that the district court sufficiently explained why the circumstances of the case were exceptional
18 under § 1367(c)(4), agreeing with the district court that “it would not be ‘fair’ to defendants and ‘an
19 affront to the comity between federal and state courts’ to allow plaintiffs to evade California’s
20 procedural requirements by bringing their claims in federal court.” *Id.* at 1171. The Court also
21 affirmed the district court’s finding that the balance of the *Gibbs* values—economy, convenience,
22 fairness, and comity—provided compelling reasons to decline supplemental jurisdiction, stating that
23 “the district court [properly] analyzed *Vo*’s situation under the *Gibbs* values and determined that the
24 values of fairness and comity favored not retaining jurisdiction over the claim.” *Id.* at 1172.
25 Accordingly, “[g]iven these very real concerns, in addition to the deferential standard of review,
26 [the Ninth Circuit saw] no reason to hold that the district court abused its discretion in determining
27 there were compelling reasons to decline jurisdiction over the Unruh Act claim.” *Id.*

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III. ANALYSIS

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2 The Court begins with the first part of the two-step inquiry under § 1367(c)(4)—whether the
3 circumstances here are exceptional. *Vo*, 49 F.4th at 1171.

4 As discussed above, California has enacted various requirements that apply to claims
5 alleging a construction-related accessibility violation. If the Court were to exercise jurisdiction over
6 Plaintiff’s Unruh Act claim, Plaintiff would be permitted to avoid these requirements. *See Arroyo*,
7 19 F.4th at 1213 (noting that potential evasion of California’s requirements met exceptional-
8 circumstances prong of § 1367(c)(4)). Further, such evasion would undermine California’s policy
9 interests in enforcing its requirements—providing monetary relief but limiting burdens on small
10 businesses and disincentivizing plaintiffs’ attorneys from obtaining “monetary settlements at the
11 expense of forward-looking relief that might benefit the general public.” *Id.* Plaintiff offers no
12 argument for why such circumstances should not be deemed exceptional, and there is “little doubt
13 that the first prong [under § 1367(c)(4)] is satisfied here.” *Vo*, 49 F.4th at 1171. *See also Garcia v.*
14 *Maciel*, No. 21-CV-03743-JCS, 2022 WL 395316, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 9, 2022) (collecting cases).

15 Turning to the second part of the inquiry—whether there are other compelling reasons for
16 declining jurisdiction—the Court considers the *Gibbs* values of economy, convenience, fairness,
17 and comity. *Vo*, 49 F.4th at 1171. Importantly, this case is an early stage of the litigation—
18 Defendants have not appeared. While Plaintiff has moved for default judgment, that motion is not
19 set to be heard until May 31, 2023 (*see* Doc. 11), and thus, the merits of Plaintiff’s claims have not
20 yet been addressed. *See Arroyo*, 19 F.4th at 1214 (noting that the *Gibbs* values did not support
21 declining supplemental jurisdiction where the case was at a “very late stage”). This is not a case
22 “where it makes no sense to decline jurisdiction . . . over a pendent state law claim that that court
23 has effectively already decided.” *Id.* Notably, Plaintiff makes no argument that the stage of this
24 case warrants exercising jurisdiction.

25 Moreover, in light of the above discussion of California’s requirements for Unruh Act
26 claims, it would not be fair, nor would comity be served, by allowing Plaintiff’s Unruh Act claim to
27 proceed without the state court being able to enforce its policy interests as reflected in its various
28 procedural requirements. *Id.* at 1213 (noting “comity-based concerns that California’s policy

1 objectives in this area were being wholly thwarted” by plaintiffs being able to bring Unruh Act
2 claims in federal court). On this issue, Plaintiff concedes in his response to the show cause order
3 that he would be considered a high-frequency litigant and would otherwise have to meet certain
4 California requirements, such as paying the \$1,000 filing fee in state court.¹ (Doc. 14 at 2 (“Plaintiff
5 acknowledges that he would be considered a high-frequency litigant under California law as he filed
6 more than ten construction-related accessibility claims in the twelve months preceding the filing of
7 the instant action.”).)

8 Plaintiff contends that requiring him to bring a second action in state court “would be
9 duplicative and would only increase the ultimate burden on the subject business, as Plaintiff would
10 be entitled to seek recovery of the additional attorney’s fees and costs spent bringing the second
11 action.” (Doc. 14 at 2–3.) As an initial matter, this argument improperly assumes that Plaintiff will
12 be successful in this action. However, even accepting such an assumption, the fact that the litigation
13 could prove duplicative or increase costs does not, in light of the other considerations, warrant
14 retaining jurisdiction. As one court has concluded, “if plaintiff legitimately seeks to litigate this
15 action in a single forum, plaintiff may dismiss this action and refile it in a state court in accordance
16 with the requirements California has imposed on such actions.” *Garibay v. Rodriguez*, No. CV 18-
17 9187 PA (AFMX), 2019 WL 5204294, at *6 (C.D. Cal. Aug. 27, 2019). Moreover, it is California’s
18 prerogative to impose a heightened filing fee for high-frequency litigants in an effort to curb abuses
19 of the Unruh Act at the risk of the fee being ultimately paid by defendants. It would undermine
20 comity and fairness were Plaintiff permitted to proceed with his Unruh Act claim in light of
21 California’s policy concerns.

22 Accordingly, considering the two-step inquiry under § 1367(c)(4), the undersigned
23 concludes that this case presents “exceptional circumstances” such that “there are other compelling
24 reasons for declining [supplemental] jurisdiction” over Plaintiff’s state law claims.

25 IV. ORDER AND RECOMMENDATIONS

26 The Court’s order to show cause (Doc. 13) is hereby DISCHARGED. For the reasons given

27 ¹ While the Court acknowledges Plaintiff’s concession, it need not determine whether he is in fact a high-frequency
28 litigant. *Vo*, 49 F.4th at 1174 (noting that court was not required to determine whether the plaintiff was in fact a high-
frequency litigant).

1 above, IT IS RECOMMENDED as follows:

- 2 1. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c)(4) and *Vo v. Choi*, 49 F.4th 1167 (9th Cir. 2022),
3 the Court DECLINE to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff’s Unruh Act
4 claim and Plaintiff’s Cal. Health & Safety Code § 19955 and § 19959 claims; and
5 2. Plaintiff’s Unruh Act and Cal. Health & Safety Code § 19955 and § 19959 claims be
6 DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c)(4).

7 The Clerk of Court is DIRECTED to assign a District Judge to this action.

8 These findings and recommendations will be submitted to the United States District Judge
9 assigned to the case, pursuant to the provisions of Title 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). **Within fourteen**
10 **(14) days** after being served with these findings and recommendations, any party may file written
11 objections with the Court. The document should be captioned “Objections to Magistrate Judge’s
12 Findings and Recommendations.” The parties are advised that failure to file objections within the
13 specified time may result in the waiver of rights on appeal. *Wilkerson v. Wheeler*, 772 F.3d 834,
14 838-39 (9th Cir. 2014) (citing *Baxter v. Sullivan*, 923 F.2d 1391, 1394 (9th Cir. 1991)).

15
16 IT IS SO ORDERED.

17 Dated: May 9, 2023

/s/ Sheila K. Oberto
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

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