

United States District Court
For the Northern District of California

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

THE DEPARTMENT OF FAIR
EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING, *et. al.*,

No. C-12-1830 EMC

Plaintiffs,

**ORDER GRANTING DFEH’S MOTION
TO PROCEED FOR GROUP OR CLASS
RELIEF**

v.

LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION COUNCIL,
INC.,

(Docket No. 106)

Defendant.

_____ /

I. INTRODUCTION

The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (“DFEH”) filed suit against the Law School Admission Council, Inc. (“LSAC”), seeking damages and injunctive relief over alleged failures of the Defendant to provide disability-related accommodations to test-takers of the Law School Admission Test (“LSAT”), in violation of the Unruh Civil Rights Act (“Unruh Act”), Cal. Civ. Code §§ 51, *et. seq.*, California’s Fair Employment and Housing Act (“FEHA”), Cal. Gov. Code, § 12900 *et seq.*, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (“ADA”), 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101, *et. seq.* DFEH brought its action both on behalf of seventeen named individuals and as a “group or class” complaint on behalf of “all disabled individuals in the State of California who requested a reasonable accommodation for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) from January 19, 2009 to the present.” First Amended Group and Class Action Complaint (Docket No. 104)

1 (“FAC”) ¶ 7.¹ DFEH now moves for an order “confirming that [it] may proceed in this enforcement
2 action without filing a motion under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23.” Motion to Proceed for Group or Class
3 Relief (Docket No. 106) (“Pl.’s Mot.”) at 1. LSAC opposes the amendment. *See* LSAC’s
4 Opposition to DFEH Motion (Docket No. 116) (“Def’s Opp’n Br.”). Having considered the
5 parties’ briefs and accompanying submissions, as well as the oral argument of counsel, the Court
6 hereby **GRANTS** DFEH’s motion for the reasons set forth below.

7 **II. FACTUAL & PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND**

8 LSAC is a non-profit membership organization based in Pennsylvania that, among other
9 things, administers the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) to prospective law students. The LSAT
10 is a standardized test that evaluates potential law school applicants on their acquired reading, verbal,
11 and reasoning skills. FAC. ¶ 45. In 2010, DFEH received two written “verified complaint[s] of
12 discrimination” from individuals alleging that LSAC had denied them certain testing
13 accommodations for their disabilities when taking the LSAT. *Id.* ¶ 18-19. These written complaints
14 alleged that LSAC had unlawfully denied test applicants “full and equal access to the LSAT” in
15 violation of FEHA and the Unruh Act. *Id.* By virtue of its incorporation into the Unruh Act, a
16 violation of the ADA also constitutes a violation of the Unruh Act. *Id.* ¶ 15; *see also* Unruh Act,
17 Cal. Civ. Code § 51(f). Through DFEH’s investigation into the merits of these complaints, “the
18 Department came to believe that LSAC’s policies and practices toward disabled applicants
19 requesting reasonable accommodation were affecting a larger group of class of applicants in a
20 similar manner.” FAC ¶ 20.

21 Following its investigation into these complaints, DFEH filed an administrative accusation
22 before the California Fair Employment and Housing Commission on February 6, 2012, which LSAC
23 elected to have transferred to the California Superior Court in Alameda County under Cal. Gov.
24 Code § 12965(c)(1). FAC ¶¶ 39-41. The administrative accusation, styled a “Group and Class

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26 ¹ In DFEH’s original complaint, this “group or class” component was limited to “all disabled
27 individuals in the State of California who requested a reasonable accommodation for the Law School
28 Admission Test (LSAT) from January 19, 2009 to February 6, 2012.” *See* Complaint (“Compl.”)
(Docket No. 1, Ex. A) ¶ 8. DFEH was granted leave to expand the “group or class” definition by
this Court on February 6, 2013. *See* Order Granting DFEH’s Motion for Leave to File First
Amended Complaint (Docket No. 103).

1 Accusation,” was brought on behalf of seventeen named individuals and certain “class
2 complainants” consisting of “all disabled individuals in the State of California who requested a
3 reasonable accommodation for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) from January 19, 2009 to
4 February 6, 2012,” and charged LSAC with violations of the Unruh Act. FAC ¶¶ 6-7, 39. *See*
5 Declaration of Caroline Mew (Docket No. 116-1), Ex. 1 (Group and Class Accusation). LSAC
6 removed the matter from the Alameda County Superior Court to this Court on April 12, 2012,
7 pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1441, on the basis of federal question jurisdiction and diversity jurisdiction.
8 *See* Notice of Removal of Action Under 28 U.S.C. § 1441 (Docket No. 1) at 2.

9 DFEH’s lawsuit focuses on LSAC’s practices regarding the provision of testing
10 accommodations to test-takers who claim to be disabled. According to LSAC, “more than a
11 thousand individuals request disability-based accommodations on the LSAT every year, and LSAC
12 grants accommodations to most, but not all, of those individuals.” Def.’s Mot. to Dismiss (Docket
13 No. 66) at 2. LSAC claims to conscientiously evaluate requests for testing accommodation to ensure
14 that “individuals with *bona fide* disabilities receive accommodations, and that those without
15 disabilities do not receive accommodations,” which could provide them with an unfair advantage on
16 the exam. Def.’s Mot. to Dismiss (Docket No. 13) at 2 (quoting *Powell v. Nat’l Bd. of Med.*
17 *Examiners*, 364 F.3d 79, 88-89 (2d Cir. 2004)). DFEH claims that LSAC’s accommodations
18 evaluation procedures include, among other things, requirements that testing candidates requesting
19 extra time or other accommodations for a “cognitive or psychological impairment” submit to
20 psychoeducational and neuropsychological testing, and provide a “full diagnostic report” that
21 includes records of the candidates’ aptitude and achievement testing. FAC ¶ 53. DFEH also claims
22 that LSAC requires applicants to disclose in an accommodations request whether or not they took
23 prescribed medications during medical evaluations of their condition, and if not, to explain their
24 failure to do so. *Id.* ¶ 54.

25 DFEH also alleges that LSAC maintains a policy of “flagging” the LSAT exam scores of
26 individuals who receive disability accommodations for extra time. FAC ¶ 55. LSAC allegedly
27 includes a notation on an accommodated individuals’ score report that the score was achieved under
28 non-standard time constraints, and excludes extended-time scores when calculating its LSAT

1 —, — (2011) (slip op., at 10)). Rule 23 permits “[o]ne or more members of a class [to] sue or
2 be sued as representative parties on behalf of all members only if:

- 3 (1) the class is so numerous that joinder of all members is
4 impracticable;
- 5 (2) there are questions of law or fact common to the class;
- 6 (3) the claims or defenses of the representative parties are typical of
7 the claims or defenses of the class; and
- 8 (4) the representative parties will fairly and adequately protect the
9 interests of the class.

10 Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a). Rule 23 “does not set forth a mere pleading standard,” but rather requires that
11 a party ““be prepared to prove that there are *in fact* sufficiently numerous parties, common questions
12 of law or fact,’ typicality of claims or defenses, and adequacy of representation, as required by Rule
13 23(a)” in order to prosecute a class action. *Behrend*, 11-864, __U.S. __, 2013 WL 1222646 at *4
14 (quoting *Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. v. Dukes*, 564 U.S. —, — (2011) (slip op., at 10)) (emphasis in
15 original). Additionally, the party seeking to maintain a class action “must also satisfy through
16 evidentiary proof at least one of the provisions of Rule 23(b).” *Behrend*, 11-864, __U.S. __, 2013
17 WL 1222646 at *4. “At an early practicable time after a person sues or is sued as a class
18 representative,” Rule 23 requires “the court [to] determine by order whether to certify the action as a
19 class action,” and in that order to “define the class and the class claims, issues, or defenses, and . . .
20 appoint class counsel.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(1).

21 The Supreme Court has also recognized a related exception to the normal rule that litigants
22 “cannot rest a claim to relief on the legal rights or interests of third parties,” for certain kinds of
23 government enforcement actions. *Powers*, 499 U.S. at 410. In *General Telephone Co. of the Nw.,*
24 *Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Comm’n*, 446 U.S. 318 (1980), the Court held that the EEOC
25 could maintain a civil action for the enforcement of a statute under its jurisdiction “and may seek
26 specific relief for a group of aggrieved individuals without first obtaining class certification pursuant
27 to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23.” *Id.*, 446 U.S. 318, 333-34. *General Telephone* involved a
28 suit commenced by the EEOC under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended),
stemming from the investigation of four General Telephone employees’ complaints of sex

1 discrimination. The EEOC’s suit sought broad injunctive relief and backpay for a number of
2 General Telephone employees across several states, but “[t]he complaint did not mention Federal
3 Rule of Civil Procedure 23, and the EEOC did not seek class certification pursuant to that Rule.”
4 *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 321-22. General Telephone objected, citing the EEOC’s failure to
5 comply with Rule 23. The Supreme Court granted certiorari on the question of “whether the
6 [EEOC] may seek classwide relief under § 706(f)(1) of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
7 (Title VII) without being certified as the class representative under Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of
8 Civil Procedure.” *Id.* at 320.

9 Upholding the EEOC’s authority to pursue classwide relief without first obtaining class
10 action certification, the Supreme Court held, “[g]iven the clear purpose of Title VII, the EEOC’s
11 jurisdiction over enforcement, and the remedies available, the EEOC need look no further than § 706
12 for its authority to bring suit in its own name for the purpose, among others, of securing relief for a
13 group of aggrieved individuals. Its authority to bring such actions is in no way dependent upon Rule
14 23, and the Rule has no application to a § 706 suit.” *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 324. The
15 Court held that Title VII “empowers the EEOC to prevent any person from engaging in any
16 unlawful practice as set forth in the Title,” and “specifically authorizes the EEOC to bring a civil
17 action against any respondent not a governmental entity upon failure to secure an acceptable
18 conciliation agreement, the purpose of the action being to terminate unlawful practices and to secure
19 appropriate relief, including reinstatement or hiring, with or without back pay, for the victims of the
20 discrimination.” *Id.* at 323-24 (internal quotation marks omitted). “Title VII thus itself authorizes
21 the procedure that the EEOC followed in this case,” and the Court found “no basis for imposing the
22 Rule 23 framework in an EEOC enforcement action” when the operative statute “seems to us to
23 authorize the EEOC to sue in its own name to enforce federal law by obtaining appropriate relief for
24 those persons injured by discriminatory practices forbidden by the Act.” *Id.* at 324-25.

25 *General Telephone* recognized a longstanding practice of permitting the Attorney General to
26 bring civil enforcement actions seeking classwide relief under Title VII based on “a pattern or
27 practice of discrimination” by an employer without requiring compliance with Rule 23. *See General*
28 *Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 327 (“Prior to 1972, the Department of Justice filed numerous . . .

1 pattern-or-practice suits. In none was it ever suggested that the Attorney General sued in a
2 representative capacity or that his enforcement suit must comply with the requirements of Rule 23.”)
3 (citations omitted). The decision extended that exception to Rule 23 to enforcement actions brought
4 by the EEOC in its own name to secure classwide relief for the victims of unlawful employment
5 practices. In so doing, the Court focused heavily on the statutory enforcement regime under which
6 the EEOC operates. When Congress amended Title VII in 1972 to “secure more effective
7 enforcement” of the statute, it expanded the EEOC’s enforcement powers “by authorizing [it] to
8 bring a civil action in federal district court against private employers reasonably suspected of
9 violating Title VII,” and “[i]n so doing, Congress sought to implement the public interest as well as
10 to bring about more effective enforcement of private rights.” *Id.* at 325-26. Importantly, the 1972
11 amendments “did not transfer all private enforcement to the EEOC,” but kept in place the private
12 right of action that had been previously available to aggrieved parties. *Id.* at 326. The Court found
13 that “[t]hese private-action rights suggest that the EEOC is not merely a proxy for the victims of
14 discrimination and that the EEOC’s enforcement suits should not be considered representative
15 actions subject to Rule 23.” *Id.* Rather, “[w]hen the EEOC acts, albeit at the behest of and for the
16 benefit of specific individuals, it acts also to vindicate the public interest in preventing employment
17 discrimination.” *Id.* Hence, EEOC’s enforcement rights exist outside of Rule 23.

18 The Court also noted that “forcing EEOC civil actions into the Rule 23 model would in many
19 cases distort the Rule as it is commonly interpreted and in others foreclose enforcement actions not
20 satisfying prevailing Rule 23 standards but seemingly authorized by [Title VII].” *General*
21 *Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 329-30. Title VII permits the EEOC to bring enforcement actions against
22 employers with as few as 15 employees. Applying Rule 23 to actions of that size “would require the
23 EEOC to join all aggrieved parties despite its statutory authority to proceed solely in its own name,”
24 since a putative class of 15 “would be too small to meet the numerosity requirement” of the Rule.
25 *Id.* at 330. Similarly, the typicality requirement of Rule 23 “would limit the EEOC action to claims
26 typified by those of the charging party,” despite the fact that existing law renders actionable “[a]ny
27 violations that the EEOC ascertains in the course of a reasonable investigation of the charging
28 party’s complaint.” *Id.* at 331. Finally, the adequate representation requirement of Rule 23 may

1 operate to foreclose an enforcement action “where there is a conflict of interest between the named
2 plaintiff [the EEOC] and the members of the putative class.” *Id.* The Court reasoned,

3 unlike the Rule 23 class representative, the EEOC is authorized to
4 proceed in a unified action and to obtain the most satisfactory overall
5 relief even though competing interests are involved and particular
6 groups may appear to be disadvantaged. The individual victim is
7 given his right to intervene for this very reason. The EEOC exists to
8 advance the public interest in preventing and remedying employment
9 discrimination, and it does so in part by *making the hard choices*
10 where conflicts of interest exist.

11 *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 331 (emphasis added). For these reasons, the Court held “that the
12 nature of the EEOC’s enforcement action is such that it is not properly characterized as a ‘class
13 action’ subject to the procedural requirements of Rule 23.” *Id.* at 334 n.16.

14 Subsequent courts have read *General Telephone* broadly, finding certain government
15 enforcement actions exempt from Rule 23 beyond the context of the EEOC and its authorizing
16 statute. In *N.L.R.B. v. Plumbers & Pipefitters Local Union No. 403, Affiliated with United Ass’n of*
17 *Journeyman & Apprentices of Plumbing & Pipefitting Indus., AFL-CIO*, the Ninth Circuit held that
18 the rationale of *General Telephone* equally “applies to an action brought by the [National Labor
19 Relations Board] under section 10 of the [National Labor Relations Act], for the action is one to
20 vindicate ‘[t]he public interest in effectuating the policies of federal labor laws;’ it is not a civil
21 proceeding brought by a group of individual claimants to vindicate the wrongs they have suffered.”
22 *Id.*, 710 F.2d 1418, 1420 (9th Cir. 1983) (quoting *Vaca v. Sipes*, 386 U.S. 171, 182 n.8 (1967)). *See*
23 *also Donovan v. University of Texas at El Paso*, 643 F.2d 1201 (5th Cir. 1981) (same).

24 Similarly, several courts have held that government enforcement actions do not constitute
25 “class actions” within the meaning of the Class Action Fairness Act of 2005 (“CAFA”), 28 U.S.C.
26 §§ 1332(d), 1453, 1711–15, because they are not “civil action[s] filed under rule 23 of the Federal
27 Rules of Civil Procedure or similar State statute or rule of judicial procedure authorizing an action to
28 be brought by 1 or more representative persons as a class action,” 28 U.S.C. § 1332(d)(1)(B)
(defining “class action”). *See Washington v. Chimei Innolux Corp.*, 659 F.3d 842, 850 (9th Cir.
2011) (*parens patriae* actions filed by state Attorneys General “lack statutory requirements for
29 numerosity, commonality, typicality, or adequacy of representation that would make them

1 sufficiently ‘similar’ to actions brought under Rule 23, and that they do not contain certification
2 procedures. *Parens patriae* suits lack the defining attributes of true class actions. As such, they
3 only ‘resemble’ class actions in the sense that they are representative suits.”); *Nevada v. Bank of Am.*
4 *Corp.*, 672 F.3d 661 (9th Cir. 2012) (same). *See also LG Display Co., Ltd. v. Madigan*, 665 F.3d
5 768, 772 (7th Cir. 2011) (*parens patriae* suit not a “class action” under Rule 23 because the “case
6 was brought by the Attorney General, not by a representative of a class”); *West Virginia ex rel.*
7 *McGraw v. CVS Pharmacy, Inc.*, 646 F.3d 169, 174–76 (4th Cir. 2011) (State Attorney General’s
8 *parens patriae* action to enforce consumer protection statute not removable under CAFA because
9 state statute lacked the procedural requirements of Rule 23). Importantly, these decisions have
10 found enforcement actions by *state* agencies to be outside the strictures of Rule 23.

11 The principle that has emerged is that where a governmental agency is authorized to act in
12 the public’s interest to obtain broad relief, *e.g.*, in the role of *parens patriae*, and the authorizing
13 statute confers such power without reference to class certification, Rule 23 may not apply. This
14 principle applies to both state and federal law enforcement agencies. Such actions are not “class
15 actions” subject to Rule 23. *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 334, n. 16.

16 Thus, for instance, in *People v. Pac. Land Research Co.*, the California Supreme Court held
17 “that consumer protection actions brought by the People, seeking injunctive relief, civil penalties
18 and restitution,” were not “the equivalent of class actions brought by private parties, requiring the
19 same safeguards to protect a defendant from multiple suits and other harmful consequences.” *Id.*, 20
20 Cal. 3d 10, 17 (1977). Referring specifically to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23, the Court found that “[a]n action
21 filed by the People seeking injunctive relief and civil penalties is fundamentally a law enforcement
22 action designed to protect the public and not to benefit private parties” and “lacks the fundamental
23 attributes of a consumer class action filed by a private party.” *Id.*, 20 Cal. 3d at 17-18. “The
24 Attorney General or other governmental official who files [such a suit] is ordinarily not a member of
25 the class, his role as a protector of the public may be inconsistent with the welfare of the class so that
26 he could not adequately protect their interests . . . , and the claims and defenses are not typical of the
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1 class.” *Id.* at 18.² While *Pac. Land Research* is a decision of state court, as noted above, federal
2 courts, including the Ninth Circuit, have similarly found state enforcement actions not governed by
3 Rule 23.

4 DFEH argues that its enforcement of the provisions of FEHA, the Unruh Act, and, by
5 extension, the ADA, through civil litigation designed to secure classwide relief on behalf of
6 aggrieved individuals is similarly a government enforcement action that “falls outside the scope of
7 Fed. R. Civ. P. 23.” Pl.’s Mot. at 7. Following *General Telephone*, this Court must examine “the
8 nature of [DFEH’s] enforcement action” to determine whether or not it is “properly characterized as
9 a ‘class action’ subject to the procedural requirements of Rule 23.” *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at
10 334 n.16.

11 B. DFEH Enforcement Authority

12 The legislature of the State of California has vested DFEH with the authority to enforce the
13 civil rights of California citizens as “an exercise of the police power of the state for the protection of
14 the welfare, health, and peace of the people of this state.” Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12920. “[S]ince 1959
15 the DFEH has been actively investigating, prosecuting and conciliating” complaints of
16 discrimination falling within those areas under its jurisdiction. *State Pers. Bd. v. Fair Employment*
17 *& Hous. Com.*, 39 Cal. 3d 422, 431 (1985). FEHA, the California statute that created DFEH, “was
18 meant to supplement, not supplant or be supplanted by, existing antidiscrimination remedies, in
19 order to give [Californians] the maximum opportunity to vindicate their civil rights against
20 discrimination.” *Id.* at 431. *See* Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12993(a) (“Nothing contained in this part shall
21 be deemed to repeal any of the provisions of the Civil Rights Law or of any other law of this state
22 relating to discrimination because of race, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, physical
23 disability, mental disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sex, age, or
24 sexual orientation, unless those provisions provide less protection to the enumerated classes of

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26 ² A State Court of Appeals in Arizona has specifically held that classwide civil rights
27 enforcement actions brought by the Arizona Civil Rights Division, the state agency that enforces the
28 Arizona Civil Rights Act, are not subject to the state equivalent of Rule 23 under the reasoning
advanced in *General Telephone*. *See Arizona Civil Rights Div., Dept. of Law v. Hughes Air Corp.*,
139 Ariz. 309, 314 (Ct. App. 1983).

1 persons covered under this part”); *id.* (“The provisions of this part shall be construed liberally for the
2 accomplishment of the purposes of this part.”). FEHA’s declared purpose is “to provide effective
3 remedies that will eliminate these discriminatory practices.” Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12920. *See*
4 *Munson v. Del Taco, Inc.*, 46 Cal. 4th 661, 666 (2009) (“[t]he Unruh Civil Rights Act,” incorporated
5 into FEHA via Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12948, “must be construed liberally in order to carry out its
6 purpose to create and preserve a nondiscriminatory environment in California business
7 establishments by banishing or eradicating arbitrary, invidious discrimination by such
8 establishments.”) (internal citations and quotation marks omitted).

9 FEHA authorizes the Director of DFEH to file administrative charges and to bring suit in
10 court for group or class relief. *See* Cal. Gov’t. Code §§ 12930, 12961; *see also id.* § 11180 (“head of
11 each department may make investigations and prosecute actions”). In particular, § 12961 of FEHA
12 states:

13 Where an unlawful practice alleged in a verified complaint adversely
14 affects, in a similar manner, a group or class of persons of which the
15 aggrieved person filing the complaint is a member, or where such an
16 unlawful practice raises questions of law or fact which are common to
17 such a group or class, the aggrieved person or the director may file the
18 complaint on behalf and as representative of such a group or class.
Any complaint so filed may be investigated as a group or class
complaint, and, if in the judgment of the director circumstances
warrant, shall be treated as such for purposes of conciliation, dispute
resolution, and civil action.

19 Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12961. Remedial civil actions brought by the Director under FEHA are brought
20 “in the name of the department on behalf of the person claiming to be aggrieved.” Cal. Gov’t. Code
21 § 12965(a). The California Supreme Court has recognized that “DFEH is a public prosecutor testing
22 a public right,” when it pursues civil litigation to enforce statutes within its jurisdiction. *State Pers.*
23 *Bd. v. Fair Employment & Hous. Com.*, 39 Cal. 3d 422, 444 (1985) (citations and internal quotation
24 marks omitted).

25 Thus, like the EEOC, the DFEH has the authority to investigate complaints on behalf of a
26 group or class and to bring an enforcement action seeking group or class type relief. The California
27 legislature has amended FEHA to allow DFEH to secure more effective enforcement of the statutes
28 under its purview. *See* “Governor’s Message Relative to Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1979,”

1 *Assembly Journal*, Vol. 4, 1979-1980, Regular Session, at 6270 (creation of consolidated DFEH
2 “would have the organizational stature necessary to conduct its activities effectively”); Cal. Gov’t.
3 Code § 12930(h) (effective January 1, 2013) (authorizing DFEH to sue directly in state or federal
4 court). While the director is authorized to file a complaint “on behalf of and as a representative
5 of . . . a group of class,” nothing in § 12961 requires that the complaint be filed as a class action.
6 Also, like the EEOC, aggrieved individuals have the right to participate in DFEH enforcement
7 actions with their own counsel, underscoring the “public interest” focus of a DFEH suit. *See* Cal.
8 Gov’t. Code § 12965(a); *see also DFEH v. Am. Airlines, Inc.*, No. 91-06, FEHC Precedential Decs.
9 1990-1991, 1991 WL 370086 at *17 (Mar. 7, 1991) (“[T]he Department does not represent the
10 complaining party but rather the interests of the state. Its job is to effectuate the declared public
11 policy of the state ‘to protect and safeguard the right and opportunity of all persons to seek, obtain,
12 and hold employment without discrimination or abridgment on account of ... physical handicap.’”) (quoting Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12920). Courts have recognized the similarities between Title VII and
13 FEHA, *see e.g. Price v. Civil Serv. Com.*, 26 Cal. 3d 257, 271 (1980), *superseded on other grounds*
14 *by constitutional amendment, Strauss v. Horton*, 46 Cal. 4th 364 (2009), and have relied on Title VII
15 jurisprudence when interpreting FEHA’s provisions, *see e.g. Bradley v. Harcourt, Brace & Co.*, 104
16 F.3d 267, 270 (9th Cir. 1996).

18 In this action, DFEH alleges that it “filed suit to remedy LSAC’s pattern of denial of the
19 right to reasonable accommodation,” and claims “an interest in ensuring that gateways to education
20 and employment are open to individuals with disabilities.” Pl.’s Mot. at 6 (citations omitted).
21 DFEH states that “California’s public policy against discrimination on the basis of disability is
22 substantial and fundamental.” *Id.* at 8. *See City of Moorpark v. Superior Court*, 18 Cal. 4th 1143,
23 1161 (1998) (“we think discrimination based on disability, like sex and age discrimination, violates
24 a substantial and fundamental public policy”) (quotation marks omitted).³ It views the LSAT as
25 playing a “crucial role” in “determining applicants’ admission to law school (and by extension, to

27 ³ *See also* Cal. Civ. Code § 51(b) (“All persons within the jurisdiction of this state are free
28 and equal, and no matter what their . . . disability . . . are entitled to the full and equal
accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments of
every kind whatsoever”).

1 the legal profession).” Pl.’s Mot. at 8. Consequently, it “filed suit to halt the ongoing harm to
2 persons with disabilities who seek to enter the legal profession.” *Id.* at 9.

3 The Court finds that, following the analysis presented in *General Telephone*, DFEH’s suit
4 against LSAC is properly characterized as a government enforcement action seeking relief for a
5 class of aggrieved individuals, and is not a “class action” within the meaning of Rule 23. Just as
6 with an EEOC enforcement action under § 706, provisions of FEHA codified at Cal. Gov’t. Code §
7 12961 and § 12965(a) give DFEH the authority to pursue the remedies sought here. Thus, “[i]ts
8 authority to bring such actions is in no way dependent upon Rule 23.” *General Telephone*, 446 U.S.
9 at 324. Like Title VII, FEHA empowers DFEH to “prevent any person from engaging in any
10 unlawful practice as set forth in the [statute],” *id.* at 323, and “specifically authorizes [DFEH] to
11 bring a civil action,” *id.* at 324, in the role of a “public prosecutor testing a public right,” *State Pers.*
12 *Bd. v. Fair Employment & Hous. Com.*, 39 Cal. 3d at 444. In bringing enforcement actions, DFEH
13 acts “not merely [as] a proxy for the victims of discrimination,” but also “to vindicate the public
14 interest in preventing [certain forms of] discrimination.” *General Telephone*, at 326. Indeed, the
15 instant suit began when Phyllis Cheng issued a “Notice of Class Action Complaint and Director’s
16 Complaint” in her official capacity as the Director of DFEH. *See* FAC, Ex. 3 (Director’s
17 Complaint). The Plaintiff for purposes of evaluating this motion is DFEH and not any specifically
18 identified victim, as is readily apparent by this Court’s earlier order granting permission for some of
19 DFEH’s identified “real parties in interest” to intervene in this suit on their own behalf. *See* Order
20 Granting in Part Motion to Intervene by Legal Aid Society - Employment Law Center (Docket No.
21 61). Given the procedure employed by DFEH in bringing this suit, and the authority with which it is
22 vested to obtain broad relief for alleged discriminatory conduct under California law, the Court
23 concludes that DFEH’s instant “enforcement suit[] should not be considered [a] representative
24 action[] subject to Rule 23.” *General Telephone*, at 326.

25 Further, as with EEOC enforcement actions, it is “apparent that forcing” DFEH civil actions
26 such as this one “into the Rule 23 model would in many cases distort the Rule as it is commonly
27 interpreted and in others foreclose enforcement actions not satisfying prevailing Rule 23 standards
28 but seemingly authorized by [FEHA].” *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 329-30. FEHA permits

1 DFEH to bring enforcement actions against employers with as few as five employees (10 less than
2 required under Title VII). *See* Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12926(d). Applying Rule 23 to actions of that
3 size “would require [DFEH] to join all aggrieved parties despite its statutory authority to proceed
4 solely in its own name,” since a putative class of five “would be too small to meet the numerosity
5 requirement” of the Rule. *General Telephone*, at 330. Similarly, the typicality requirement of Rule
6 23 “would limit [DFEH’s] action to claims typified by those of the [original] charging party,” *id.* at
7 331, despite the fact that existing law renders actionable additional claims that are “like or
8 reasonably related” to the original charge filed with DFEH, *see Rodriguez v. Airborne Express*, 265
9 F.3d 890, 897 (9th Cir. 2001). *See also Dep’t of Fair Employment & Hous. v. Law Sch. Admission*
10 *Council Inc.*, C-12-1830 EMC, 2012 WL 4119827 at *12 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 18, 2012) (approving
11 addition of claims “like or reasonably related” to those originally filed with DFEH). Finally, the
12 adequate representation requirement of Rule 23 may operate to foreclose an enforcement action
13 “where there is a conflict of interest between the named plaintiff [DFEH] and the members of the
14 putative class.” *General Telephone*, at 331. Like the EEOC, DFEH “is authorized to proceed in a
15 unified action and to obtain the most satisfactory overall relief even though competing interests are
16 involved and particular groups may appear to be disadvantaged.” *Id.* In such cases, DFEH is
17 charged with “advanc[ing] the public interest . . . in part by making the hard choices where conflicts
18 of interest exist.” *Id.* The distortion that would result by forcing DFEH to pursue broad relief for
19 victims of discrimination through the mechanism of Rule 23 leads this Court to conclude that
20 DFEH’s present enforcement action cannot be “properly characterized as a ‘class action’ subject to
21 the procedural requirements of Rule 23.” *Id.* at 334 n.16.

22 FEHA “itself authorizes the procedure” that DFEH seeks to follow in this case, and this
23 Court finds “no basis for imposing the Rule 23 framework in [a DFEH] enforcement action” when
24 the operative statute authorizes the agency “to sue in its own name to enforce [state] law by
25 obtaining appropriate relief for those persons injured by discriminatory practices forbidden by the
26 Act.” *General Telephone*, at 324-25. Like the Supreme Court, this Court is “reluctant . . . [to
27 impose] requirements that might disable [an] enforcement agency from advancing the public interest
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1 in the manner and to the extent contemplated by [its organic] statute,” and thereby undermine a
2 public interest enforcement scheme crafted by the State of California. *Id.* at 331.

3 Finally, there is a significant policy basis for distinguishing the DFEH’s action here and a
4 Rule 23 class action. Unlike a private class action, where typicality requirements ensure that absent
5 class members are not denied due process of law when they are bound without their explicit consent,
6 *see Hansberry v. Lee*, 311 U.S. 32 (1940), absent victims whose claims would otherwise fall within
7 the scope of a government enforcement action are not bound by the outcome of such an enforcement
8 suit. *See Shimkus v. Gersten Companies*, 816 F.2d 1318, 1320 (9th Cir. 1987) (“When the
9 government brings a discrimination action against a party resulting in a consent order, private
10 parties, not in privity with the order, are not bound by its terms and may bring their own suit against
11 the defendant.”) (citations omitted). The need for procedural safeguards of Rule 23 are thus
12 obviated to some degree.

13 C. LSAC’s Objections

14 LSAC offers three arguments as to why Rule 23 ought to apply to DFEH’s present suit.
15 First, Defendant asserts that adopting DFEH’s position would create an untenable conflict between
16 FEHA (specifically Cal. Gov’t. Code § 12961) and Rule 23. It is uncontested that the Federal Rules
17 of Civil Procedure apply to the conduct of all civil actions and proceedings in United States district
18 courts, including cases removed from state court such as the instant suit. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 1; Fed.
19 R. Civ. P. 81(c)(1); *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 2072(a) (providing that the Supreme Court “shall have the
20 power to prescribe general rules of practice and procedure . . . for cases in the United States district
21 courts”). “And like the rest of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 23 automatically applies
22 ‘in all civil actions and proceedings in the United States district courts,’ Fed. Rule Civ. Proc. 1.”
23 *Shady Grove Orthopedic Associates, P.A. v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 559 U.S. 393, ___, 130 S. Ct. 1431,
24 1438 (2010) (citing *Califano v. Yamasaki*, 442 U.S. 682, 699–700 (1979)). From these two
25 premises, LSAC concludes that “DFEH cannot pursue class claims unless a class is certified in
26 accordance with Rule 23.” Def’s. Opp’n. Br. at 4.

27 The unstated, erroneous premise implicit within LSAC’s argument is, of course, that DFEH’s
28 “class claims” asserted here constitute a “class action” within the meaning of Rule 23. As described

1 at length above, the Supreme Court’s *General Telephone* decision recognizes that certain
2 government enforcement actions are not “class actions” under Rule 23 despite the fact that they may
3 seek to obtain classwide relief on behalf of a class of aggrieved parties. LSAC correctly asserts that
4 when there is a conflict between a state statute and a federal procedural rule, the federal procedural
5 rule controls ““unless it exceeds statutory authorization or Congress’s rulemaking power.”” *Jones v.*
6 *United Parcel Serv., Inc.*, 674 F.3d 1187, 1203 (10th Cir. 2012) (citing *Shady Grove*, 130 S. Ct. at
7 1437)). But in this case there is no such conflict. DFEH does not argue, and this Court does not
8 hold, that “California law in any sense trumps Rule 23.” Pl.’s Mot. at 16. Rather, what *General*
9 *Telephone* and the cases following it show is that under established federal law, certain government
10 enforcement actions seeking classwide remedies are not “class actions” within the meaning of Rule
11 23 and are thus not governed by the provisions of that rule. Quite simply, Rule 23 does not apply to
12 the present suit. There is, therefore, no conflict between federal and state procedural rules in this
13 case.⁴

14 Second, LSAC contends “[n]otwithstanding the class certification allegations in its own
15 Complaint, DFEH now seeks to avoid application of Rule 23’s class action certification
16 requirements by arguing that DFEH is not pursuing a class action after all.” Def.’s Opp’n. Br. at 7.
17 The fact that DFEH’s complaint uses the phrase “class action” is of no moment. *General Telephone*
18 established that the parties’ “characterization” of a suit is not the key issue. Rather “[t]he issue is
19 whether an action, however it is styled, brought by a Government agency to enforce the . . . law with
20 whose enforcement the agency is charged is subject to the requirements of Rule 23.” *General*
21 *Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 323 n.5. Further, it is clear from the pleadings that to the extent DFEH
22 sought to establish compliance with the Rule 23 in its complaint, such pleadings were made in the
23 alternative. See FAC ¶ 8 (“Section 12961 authorizes the DFEH to seek class relief without being
24 certified as the class representative. Nonetheless, this lawsuit meets the criteria for class

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26 ⁴ Because this action is not subject to the provisions of Rule 23, there is no need to consider
27 whether Rule 23 operates to “abridge, enlarge or modify any substantive right” so as to run afoul of
28 the Federal Rules Enabling Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2072(b). *Dep’t of Fair Employment & Hous. v. Lucent*
Technologies, Inc., is similarly inapposite because this case does not raise the question of whether
“state law [can] negate the requirement of [a] federal rule.” *Id.*, 642 F.3d 728, 741 (9th Cir. 2011).

1 certification.”); *Grid Sys. Corp. v. Texas Instruments Inc.*, 771 F. Supp. 1033, 1041 (N.D. Cal. 1991)
2 (“It is well established that a plaintiff may offer conflicting allegations in the alternative in his
3 complaint.”).

4 LSAC also seeks to distinguish *Washington v. Chimei Innolux Corp.*, *Nevada v. Bank of Am.*
5 *Corp.*, and similar *parens patriae* suits not subject to Rule 23 on the basis that those suits did not
6 involve claims seeking classwide relief on behalf of specific individuals. “The doctrine of *parens*
7 *patriae* allows a sovereign to bring suit on behalf of its citizens when the sovereign alleges injury to
8 a sufficiently substantial segment of its population, articulates an interest *apart from the interests of*
9 *particular private parties*, and expresses a quasi-sovereign interest.” *Washington v. Chimei Innolux*
10 *Corp.*, 659 F.3d at 847 (citing *Alfred L. Snapp & Son, Inc. v. Puerto Rico*, 458 U.S. 592, 607 (1982))
11 (emphasis added). In this suit, LSAC alleges that “DFEH is not seeking relief for the public at large
12 or civil penalties payable to the State of California, but rather, specific relief on behalf of the real
13 parties in interest and members of the purported class.” Def’s. Opp’n. Br. at 8.

14 *General Telephone* clearly establishes that seeking remedies solely on behalf of the
15 sovereign or in the general public interest is not the metric by which a government enforcement
16 action falls outside the scope of Rule 23. When a government agency brings an enforcement action,
17 it may have multiple objectives. The Court in *General Telephone* observed, “[w]hen the EEOC acts,
18 albeit at the behest of and for the benefit of specific individuals, *it acts also* to vindicate the public
19 interest in preventing employment discrimination.” *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 326 (emphasis
20 added). Here, it is clear that DFEH seeks remedies extending beyond the interests of the identified
21 “real parties in interest.” It seeks, for example, injunctive relief prohibiting Defendant from
22 “specifically annotating LSAT . . . test scores administered under extended time conditions,” and
23 from considering “mitigation measures such as medication when making a determination as to
24 whether an applicant needs an accommodation.” FAC ¶¶ 218-219. These remedies clearly extend
25 beyond the more narrow interest of the specific aggrieved individuals identified by DFEH. They are
26 “designed to protect the public” and seek, via injunctive relief, to prevent what the agency considers
27 “continued violations of the law.” *See People v. Pac. Land Research Co.*, 20 Cal. 3d 10, 17 (1977)
28 (“An action filed by the People seeking injunctive relief . . . is fundamentally a law enforcement

1 action designed to protect the public and not to benefit private parties. The purpose of injunctive
2 relief is to prevent continued violations of law . . .”). The record before the Court demonstrates
3 quite clearly that DFEH seeks to “vindicate” what it considers to be “the public interest in
4 preventing . . . discrimination” in the administration of the LSAT, and not simply to secure remedies
5 for a discrete group of individuals. *General Telephone*, 446 U.S. at 326. LSAC’s argument
6 distinguishing *parens patriae* suits from the instant action is, therefore, inapposite.

7 Finally, LSAC argues in opposition to DFEH’s motion that “[a]t a more fundamental level, it
8 is one thing to conclude that a *federal* statute allows a *federal* government enforcement action to be
9 pursued outside the class action requirements of the *federal* rules, as the Supreme Court did in
10 *General Telephone*. But this same analysis cannot be extended wholesale to allow a *state* statute to
11 prescribe the procedure for pursuing purported class claims in *federal* court.” Def.’s Opp’n. Br. at
12 10 (emphasis in original). LSAC cites as support the Supreme Court’s decision in *Hanna v. Plumer*,
13 where it reasoned “[t]o hold that a Federal Rule of Civil Procedure must cease to function whenever
14 it alters the mode of enforcing state-created rights would be to disembowel either the Constitution’s
15 grant of power over federal procedure or Congress’ attempt to exercise that power in the Enabling
16 Act.” *Id.*, 380 U.S. 460, 473-74 (1965).

17 Again, Defendant’s argument misses the import of *General Telephone*. When a government
18 agency pursues classwide relief through a civil enforcement action, it is not prosecuting a “class
19 action” subject to Rule 23. This is so irrespective of whether state or federal law authorizes the
20 agency’s enforcement action. As noted above, *General Telephone* did not limit its holding to
21 enforcement actions brought solely under the authority of federal law; subsequent cases have applied
22 *General Telephone* to state agency enforcement actions.

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IV. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, the Court **GRANTS** DFEH's Motion to Proceed for Group or Class Relief and hereby orders that DFEH may proceed in this enforcement action without filing a motion for class certification under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23.

This order disposes of Docket No. 106.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: April 22, 2013



EDWARD M. CHEN
United States District Judge