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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

PAUL HOA,
Plaintiff,
v.
RICHARD RILEY, *et al.*,
Defendants.

No. C-12-2078 EMC

**ORDER GRANTING CROSS-
DEFENDANTS’ MOTION TO DISMISS
(Docket No. 146)**

David F. Lopez, T. Gregory Stagnito, Bridge Transport, and Stag Leasing Inc. (collectively “Cross-Defendants”) have moved to dismiss Richard Riley, Raymond Matteucci, David Moore, Ronald Chan, Tammy Foss, Thomas Alioto, and George Moon’s (collectively “Cross-Claimants”) cross-complaint for equitable indemnity, contribution and declaratory relief. Cross-Claimants sought equitable indemnity and contribution from Cross-Defendants in the event they are held liable to Plaintiff Paul Hoa for violations of 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Cross-Defendants argue that there is no federal right to indemnification or contribution under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and thus Cross-Claimants have failed to state a claim under federal law. Cross-Defendants further contend that Cross-Claimants cannot bring claims for equitable indemnity or contribution under state law. The Court **GRANTS** Cross-Defendants’ motion to dismiss, because Cross-Claimants may not seek indemnity and contribution under Section 1983, and any such rights under state law would be inconsistent with the goals of Section 1983.

1 **I. FACTUAL & PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND**

2 For purposes of resolving the present motion, the Court assumes certain facts in the
3 Complaint, which are incorporated by reference into the Cross-Complaint, to be true. *See* Docket
4 No. 138 at ¶ 5. On July 27, 2011, a truck carrying food supplies to San Quentin State Prison
5 (“Prison”) and driven by Cross-Defendant Lopez, injured the Plaintiff, Paul Hoa, a prisoner who
6 assisted commercial vehicles coming into the Prison as part of the Prison work program. The truck
7 trapped and crushed Mr. Hoa as it backed up a loading ramp. The Cross-Claimants are employed by
8 the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and, for the most part, either directly or
9 indirectly supervised Plaintiff’s work, work area, and/or working conditions. Docket No. 109
10 (“TAC”) at ¶¶ 32-47.

11 Plaintiff sued Cross-Defendants, alleging claims relating to their ownership or operation of
12 the truck involved in the incident. Cross-Defendant Lopez was an employee of Cross-Defendant
13 Stagnito and drove the trailer truck that backed into the Plaintiff. TAC at ¶ 48. Cross-Defendant
14 Stagnito is an individual doing business under the name Bridge Transport. *Id.* at ¶ 49. Mr. Hoa
15 named Cross-Defendants Stag Leasing and Bridge Transport based on Mr. Hoa’s belief that they are
16 shell corporations of Cross-Defendant Stagnito. *Id.* at ¶ 52.

17 Plaintiff sued the Cross-Claimants (the prison supervisors), alleging that they are liable under
18 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for (1) deliberate indifference and (2) cruel and unusual punishment in violation of
19 Plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment rights. Plaintiff’s claims against the Cross-Claimants arise from the
20 alleged unsafe procedures, failure to train, and hazardous work area in the warehouse, along with
21 related violations of the CDCR’s Department’s Operating Manual. As to the Cross-Defendants (the
22 truck owners or operators) Plaintiff has alleged state tort claims of (1) negligence, (2) negligent
23 supervision, and (3) negligent training. Plaintiff has alleged that Cross-Claimants and Cross-
24 Defendants are jointly and severally liable for his injuries. TAC at ¶ 54.

25 In June of 2014, Cross-Claimants filed a cross-complaint for equitable indemnification,
26 contribution, and declaratory relief against Cross-Defendants. Docket No. 138. Cross-Claimants’
27 declaratory relief claim seeks a judicial declaration that Cross-Defendants are obligated to indemnify
28 Cross-Claimants or contribute to a judgment against Cross-Claimants. Cross-Claimants argue that,

1 if they are ultimately found liable, their liability only arose by reason of Cross-Defendants’ active
2 and primary negligence. Docket No. 138 at ¶¶ 9, 13.

3 The State Compensation Insurance Fund served a notice of lien (“Notice of Lien”) on the
4 parties in this action on October 31, 2012, which reflected that just under \$900,000 in workers’
5 compensation benefits had been provided to Mr. Hoa as of the date of the Notice of Lien.¹ After the
6 hearing on the instant motion, the State Compensation Insurance Fund filed an updated Notice of
7 Lien, which is a part of the case file. The updated Notice of Lien shows that, as of September 18,
8 2014, the State Compensation Insurance Fund provided approximately \$2.1 million in workers’
9 compensation benefits to Plaintiff. Docket No. 154.

10 Cross-Defendants filed this motion to dismiss on August 4, 2014, arguing that, as a matter of
11 law, (1) 42 U.S.C. § 1983 does not permit claims for indemnification and/or contribution and (2) any
12 state law claims for indemnification or contribution are precluded by the California Workers
13 Compensation Act. *See* Docket No. 146. Cross-Defendants further raised, and the Court received
14 supplemental briefing on, the issue of whether federal law precludes the cross-claims.

15 **II. DISCUSSION**

16 A. Standard of Review

17 Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), a party may move to dismiss a pleading
18 based on a failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. A motion to dismiss based on
19 Rule 12(b)(6) challenges the legal sufficiency of the claims alleged. *See Parks v. Sch. Of Bus.*
20 *Symington*, 51 F.3d 1480, 1484 (9th Cir. 1995). “A complaint may be dismissed as a matter of law
21 for one of two reasons: (1) lack of a cognizable legal theory or (2) insufficient facts under a
22 cognizable legal claim.” *Robertson v. Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc.*, 749 F.2d 530, 534 (9th Cir. 1984)
23 (citation omitted). In considering such a motion, a court must take all allegations of material fact

24
25 ¹ Cross-Defendants’ request for judicial notice of a Notice of Lien served by California State
26 Compensation Insurance Fund is granted. “The court may judicially notice a fact that is not subject
27 to reasonable dispute because it: (1) is generally known within the trial court’s territorial
28 jurisdiction; or (2) can be accurately and readily determined from sources whose accuracy cannot
reasonably be questioned.” Fed. R. Evid. 201(b). In this case, the Notice of Lien was served on all
parties in this action. Moreover the request for judicial notice is unopposed and no party questions
the document’s accuracy.

1 and construe them in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, although “conclusory
2 allegations of law and unwarranted inferences are insufficient to avoid a Rule 12(b)(6) dismissal.”
3 *Cousins v. Lockyer*, 568 F.3d 1063, 1067 (9th Cir. 2009). While “a complaint need not contain
4 detailed factual allegations . . . it must plead enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible
5 on its face.” *Id.* (citation omitted). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual
6 content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the
7 misconduct alleged.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009); *see also Bell Atl. Corp. v.*
8 *Twombly*, 550 U.S. 554, 556 (2007). “The plausibility standard is not akin to a ‘probability
9 requirement,’ but it asks for more than sheer possibility that a defendant acted unlawfully.” *Iqbal*,
10 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556).

11 B. 42 U.S.C. § 1983

12 A right to contribution among joint tortfeasors did not exist at common law. *Nw. Airlines,*
13 *Inc. v. Transp. Workers Union of Am., AFL-CIO*, 451 U.S. 77, 86 (1981). Most states have allowed
14 a right to contribution either by statute or judicial decision. *Id.* However, “federal courts, unlike
15 their state counterparts, are courts of limited jurisdiction that have not been vested with open-ended
16 lawmaking powers.” *Id.* at 95. A federal right to contribution can therefore arise in only two ways:
17 “first, through the affirmative creation of a right of action by Congress, either expressly or by clear
18 implication; or, second, through the power of federal courts to fashion a federal common law of
19 contribution.” *Texas Indus., Inc. v. Radcliff Materials, Inc.*, 451 U.S. 630, 638 (1981). The latter
20 route is limited: there is no federal general common law, and the instances where courts have
21 fashioned federal common law “are few and restricted.” *Id.* (citing *Wheeldin v. Wheeler*, 373 U.S.
22 647, 651 (1963)). Federal common law arises in two categories: (1) where a federal rule of decision
23 is “necessary to protect uniquely federal interests,” and (2) where Congress has empowered courts to
24 develop substantive law. *Id.* (citations omitted).

25 Although *Northwest Airlines* and *Texas Industries* addressed the right to contribution,
26 indemnity and contribution are closely related; in a sense, “indemnity is only an extreme form of
27 contribution.” *Slattery v. Marra Bros.*, 186 F.2d 134, 138 (2d Cir. 1951). Thus, the analytical
28 framework for determining the right of contribution has been extended to the right of indemnity.

1 *Mortgages, Inc. v. U.S. Dist. Court for Dist. of Nev. (Las Vegas)*, 934 F.2d 209, 212 n.3 (9th Cir.
2 1991).

3 The Ninth Circuit has concluded that “[t]here is no federal right to indemnification provided
4 in 42 U.S.C. § 1983.” *Allen v. City of Los Angeles*, 92 F.3d 842, 845 n.1 (9th Cir. 1996) *overruled*
5 *on other grounds Acri v. Varian Ass’ns, Inc.*, 114 F.3d 999 (9th Cir. 1997). *Allen* arose from a
6 Section 1983 lawsuit that Rodney King filed against the City of Los Angeles and city police officers
7 regarding certain officers’ use of unreasonable force. The Ninth Circuit began its analysis by
8 holding that there was no right to indemnification under Section 1983. *Allen* cited with approval
9 *Banks v. City of Emeryville*, 109 F.R.D. 535 (N.D. Cal 1985). *Banks* involved similar claims to the
10 claims at issue here. In *Banks*, the plaintiffs’ decedent burned to death while in the custody of the
11 city jail. 109 F.R.D. at 537. Ms. Banks’s body was found on a mattress that had disintegrated in the
12 fire. Plaintiffs brought an action against the city under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The city filed a
13 third-party complaint against parties involved in the manufacture, distribution, or sale of the
14 mattress, alleging that the mattress was defective. *Id.* at 537-38. The city sought indemnification or
15 contribution. *Id.* *Banks* held that Section 1983 does not provide for indemnification. *Id.* Noting the
16 absence of clear authority on the issue, *Banks* reasoned that “[t]he Supreme Court made it clear that
17 courts are not free to read a cause of action for indemnity into statutes where no statutory basis
18 exists for such a claim.” *Id.* (discussing *Northwest Airlines*, 451 U.S. 77). Where there was “no
19 provision of § 1983, nor any legislative history, to support [third-party plaintiff’s] assertion that §
20 1983 provides for a right of contribution or indemnity,” then “any claims for indemnification against
21 third-party defendants based directly upon § 1983 are impermissible.” *Banks*, 109 F.R.D. at 539.

22 Other district courts in the Ninth Circuit, following *Allen* and *Banks*, have likewise
23 concluded there is no right of contribution or indemnification under Section 1983. *See Anselmo v.*
24 *Mull*, No. 2:12-1422 WBS, 2012 WL 4863661, at *8 (E.D. Cal. 2012) (citing *Allen* and concluding
25 Section 1983 does not provide for a federal right to contribution or indemnity); *AE v. Portillo*, No.
26 09-2204 LJO, 2011 WL 3740829, at *8 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 24, 2011) (“any claims for indemnification
27 against the third party defendants based directly upon § 1983 are impermissible”); *DeGroff v. Las*
28 *Vegas Metro. Police Dep’t*, No. 2:11-CV-02007-KJD, 2013 WL 1405848, at *2 (D. Nev. Apr. 5,

1 2013) (“The Ninth Circuit has unequivocally held that there is no federal right to indemnification
2 provided in 42 U.S.C. § 1983.” (citation omitted)). Courts in other jurisdictions have reached the
3 same conclusion. *See Katka v. Mills*, 422 F. Supp. 2d 1304, 1308-09 (N.D. Ga. 2006) (noting “most
4 cases decided since *Northwest Airlines* have held that there is no right to contribution under § 1983”
5 and collecting cases).

6 Cross-Claimants urge the Court to reject the cases from the Ninth Circuit, including *Allen*.
7 Docket No. 151 at 3. They argue that “*Allen* does not discuss this issue in any depth” and contend
8 that therefore the Court should rely on *Miller v. Apartments & Homes of New Jersey, Inc.*, 646 F.2d
9 101 (3d Cir. 1981), and its progeny. *Miller* found a right of contribution as a matter of federal
10 common law. *Miller*, 646 F.2d at 108. However, while the Ninth Circuit’s decision in *Allen* on this
11 issue was brief, its holding is binding in this Court. Moreover, *Miller* has been called into question
12 by numerous courts, because it was decided without the guidance of *Northwest Airlines* and *Texas*
13 *Industries*.² *See Bank v. City of Philadelphia*, 991 F. Supp. 2d 523, 538 (E.D. Pa. 2014) (noting
14 district courts have questioned *Miller*’s precedential value, “[b]ecause *Miller* relied on *Glus*, and
15 *Glus* was subsequently vacated.”); *see also Kohn v. Sch. Dist. of City of Harrisburg*, No.
16 1:11-CV-109, 2012 WL 3560822, at *4 (M.D. Pa. Aug. 16, 2012) (concluding that “*Miller* does not
17 survive *Texas Industries*,” which implicitly overruled *Miller*); *Diaz-Ferrante v. Rendell*, No.
18 95-5430, 1998 WL 195683, at *4 (E.D. Pa. Mar. 30, 1998) (“Shortly after *Miller* was decided, the
19 United States Supreme Court held that other federal laws did not implicitly create a federal right to
20 contribution[;] . . . the viability of a contribution claim in a § 1983 action is thus dubious.”).

21 Under current Ninth Circuit law, there is no right of indemnification under Section 1983.
22 This Court, in line with other district courts, finds that Section 1983 also does not provide the related
23 right of contribution. Section 1983 has not created such rights expressly or by implication, and no
24 right of contribution or right of indemnification arises under the “few and restricted” areas of federal
25 common law.

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28 ² *Miller* was decided two days after *Northwest Airlines* and around one month before *Texas Industries*.

1 C. 42 U.S.C. § 1988

2 Cross-Claimants also argue that under Section 1988 this Court should look to state law to
3 determine whether a state law right of indemnification or contribution may be recognized under
4 Section 1983. Section 1988 provides that where federal law is

5 deficient in the provisions necessary to furnish suitable
6 remedies and punish offenses against law, the common law,
7 as modified and changed by the constitution and statutes of
8 the State wherein the court having jurisdiction of such civil
9 or criminal cause is held, so far as the same is not
10 inconsistent with the Constitution and laws of the United
11 States, shall be extended to and govern the said courts in the
12 trial and disposition of the cause

13 42 U.S.C. § 1988(a). The purpose of Section 1988 is “to complement the various acts which do
14 create federal causes of action for the violation of federal civil rights.” *Moor v. Alameda Cnty.*, 411
15 U.S. 693, 702 (1973). In this way, Section 1988 “recognizes that in certain areas ‘federal law is
16 unsuited or insufficient “to furnish suitable remedies”’; federal law simply does not ‘cover every
17 issue that may arise in the context of a federal civil rights action.’” *Robertson v. Wegmann*, 436
18 U.S. 584, 588 (1978) (citing *Moor*, 411 U.S. at 703). In other words, “the ultimate rule adopted
19 under § 1988 is a federal rule responsive to the need whenever a federal right is impaired.” *Id.*
20 (citation omitted). Analysis of whether a state law applies through Section 1988 requires
21 consideration of Section 1983’s policies. *Id.* at 590-92. Those policies include “compensation of
22 persons injured by deprivation of federal rights and prevention of abuses of power by those acting
23 under color of state law.” *Id.* at 590-91.

24 In *Robertson*, the Supreme Court applied Section 1988 to conclude that a Section 1983
25 action abated under the survival laws of Louisiana. *Robertson*, 436 U.S. at 590-91. *Robertson*,
26 however, cautioned that the decision should be read narrowly and was “limited to situations in
27 which no claim is made that state law generally is inhospitable to survival of § 1983 actions and in
28 which the particular application of state survivorship law, while it may cause abatement of the
action, has no independent adverse effect on the policies underlying § 1983.” *Id.* at 594.

Some courts have interpreted Section 1988 as requiring application of state law on
contribution. For example, the court in *Kohn*, which rejected *Miller* and concluded there is no

1 statutory right of contribution, determined that Section 1988 permitted borrowing Pennsylvania law
2 on contribution. *Kohn*, 2012 WL 3560822, at *5. In *Kohn*, Pennsylvania’s Uniform Contribution
3 Among Joint Tortfeasors Act allowed contribution between joint tortfeasors; the court therefore
4 allowed those claims to proceed pursuant to Section 1988. *Id.*

5 On the other hand, other courts have concluded that Section 1988 does not permit borrowing
6 state law on contribution, because doing so “would conflict with the policies underlying § 1983.”
7 *Hurley v. Horizon Project, Inc.*, No. CV 08-2009-1365, 2009 WL 5511205, at *5 (D. Or. Dec. 3,
8 2009). The conflict would arise, because a right of contribution would not serve Section 1983’s
9 policies of compensation and deterrence. *Id.* As a result, “permitting a right to contribution in this
10 context may weaken one of the primary purposes of Section 1983.” *Crews v. Cnty. of Nassau*, 612
11 F. Supp. 2d 199, 212 (E.D.N.Y. 2009); *see Mason v. City of New York*, 949 F. Supp. 1068, 1079
12 (S.D.N.Y. 1996) (“Permitting a right to contribution [by borrowing from New York law under
13 Section 1988], however, would weaken Section 1983’s deterrent value.”); *Koch v. Mirza*, 869 F.
14 Supp. 1031, 1041 (W.D.N.Y. 1994) (“[C]ommon law or statutory indemnity and contribution
15 principles serve different interests than the constitutional values sought to be vindicated in a § 1983
16 action.”).

17 In *Moor*, the Supreme Court concluded that Section 1988 did not authorize the application of
18 the California Tort Claims Act under which a county could be held vicariously liable for the acts of
19 its deputies and sheriff, to Section 1983. *Moor*, 411 U.S. at 709-10. *Moor* explained that Section
20 1988 did not “authorize the wholesale importation into federal law of state causes of action—not
21 even one purportedly designed for the protection of federal civil rights.” *Id.* at 703-04. Section
22 1988 prescribes what law to apply to federal civil rights claims; it does not “authorize the federal
23 courts to borrow entire causes of action from state law.” *Id.* at 701-04. State law could not be used
24 to assert vicarious liability against a county in light of Congress’s deliberate refusal to impose such
25 liability. *Id.* at 709-10.

26 For the reasons stated above, interpreting Section 1988 as importing a state law right to
27 contribution or indemnification into Section 1983 would conflict with the policies underlying
28 Section 1983 and contravene the guidance in *Moor*. *See Hurley*, 2009 WL 5511205, at *5 n.6

1 (citing *Moor*, 411 U.S. at 703-04; Martin A. Schwartz, *Section 1983 Litigation: Claims and*
2 *Defenses* § 16.15[C] at 16–250 (4th ed. 2003)). “[T]he Ninth Circuit has never found that [Section
3 1988] provides a right to seek contribution.” *De Groff*, 2013 WL 1405848, at *3. Absent a contrary
4 directive from the Ninth Circuit, this Court finds the decision in *Hurley, Crews, Mason, and Koch*
5 persuasive.

6 This Court concludes that Section 1988 does not permit borrowing state law on contribution
7 or indemnification.

8 D. State Law

9 In this case, the parties do not dispute that the applicable state law provides a right of
10 contribution or indemnification. Under California law, “[i]ndemnity either imposes the entire loss
11 on one of two or more tortfeasors or apportions it on the basis of comparative fault.” *Coca-Cola*
12 *Bottling Co. v. Lucky Stores, Inc.*, 11 Cal. App. 4th 1372, 1378 (1992). “[A] defendant may pursue a
13 comparative equitable indemnity claim against other tortfeasors either (1) by filing a
14 cross-complaint in the original tort action or (2) by filing a separate indemnity action after paying
15 more than its proportionate share of the damages through the satisfaction of a judgment or through a
16 payment in settlement.” *Henry v. Superior Court*, 160 Cal. App. 4th 440, 449 (2008) (citation
17 omitted). Alternatively, where there is no right of indemnity, and “[w]here a money judgment has
18 been rendered jointly against two or more defendants in a tort action there shall be a right of
19 contribution among them.” Cal. CCP § 875; *see also* Cal. Civ. C. § 1432 (“Except as provided in
20 Section 877 of the Code of Civil Procedure, a party to a joint, or joint and several obligation, who
21 satisfies more than his share of the claim against all, may require a proportionate contribution from
22 all the parties joined with him.”). Such right of contribution “shall be administered in accordance
23 with the principles of equity.” *Id.* A defendant cannot recover under a theory of both
24 indemnification and contribution; where there is a right of indemnity, there is no right of
25 contribution. *Coca-Cola*, 11 Cal. App. 4th at 1378; *see also* Cal. CCP § 875(f).

26 The parties disagree regarding (1) whether California’s Workers Compensation Act
27 precludes the cross-claims; and (2) whether state law may provide any right of contribution or
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1 indemnity or whether such right would conflict with the purposes of Section 1983 and thus be pre-
2 empted.

3 1. The Workers Compensation Act

4 In their briefs, Cross-Defendants argue that, unlike the cross-claimants in *Banks*, in this case,
5 Cross-Claimants are precluded from bringing claims against Cross-Defendants due to the California
6 Workers Compensation Act (“the Act”). Under California Law, Mr. Hoa was covered by the Act.
7 *See* Cal. Lab. C. § 3370 (“Each inmate of a state penal or correctional institution shall be entitled to
8 workers’ compensation benefits provided by this division for injury arising out of and in the course
9 of assigned employment. . . .”). The incident leading to Mr. Hoa’s injuries was within the scope of
10 the Act, because Mr. Hoa was “performing service growing out of and incidental to his . . .
11 employment and [was] acting within the course of his employment.” Cal. Lab. C. § 3600.
12 Cross-Defendants argue that the Act provides the exclusive remedies for all work-related injuries,
13 and therefore bars the cross-claims of the Cross-Claimant co-employees.

14 The Act reflects a “compensation bargain” between an employer and her employee. *Privette*
15 *v. Superior Court*, 5 Cal. 4th 689, 697 (1993), *as modified on denial of reh’g* (Sept. 16, 1993).
16 Broadly speaking the terms of the bargain are as follows:

17 The employer assumes liability for industrial personal injury
18 or death without regard to fault in exchange for limitations in
19 the amount of that liability. The employee is afforded
20 relatively swift and certain payment of benefits to cure or
relieve the effects of industrial injury without having to
prove fault but, in exchange, gives up the wider range of
damages potentially available in tort.

21 *Id.* (citations omitted). “By this means society as a whole is relieved of the burden of caring for the
22 injured workman and his family, and the burden is placed upon the industry.” *Moyer v. Workmen’s*
23 *Comp. Appeals Bd.*, 10 Cal. 3d 222, 233 (1973). To effect this compensation bargain, “when the
24 conditions of compensation exist, recovery under the workers’ compensation scheme is the
25 exclusive remedy against an employer for injury or death of an employee.” *Privette*, 5 Cal. 4th at
26 697 (citation omitted). This exclusivity rule safeguards the compensation bargain by limiting the
27 liability as to the employer. *Id.* Correspondingly, California Labor Code Section 3600(a) provides:
28

1 Liability for the compensation provided by this division, *in lieu of any*
2 *other liability whatsoever* to any person except as otherwise
3 specifically provided in Sections 3602, 3706, and 4558, shall without
4 regard to negligence, *exist against an employer* for any injury
sustained by his or her employees arising out of and in the course of
employment and for the death of any employee if the injury
proximately causes death

5 *Id.* (emphasis added). Thus, for example, if a third party pays damages for a covered employee’s
6 injuries, “the Act’s limitations on employer liability preclude the third party from obtaining
7 equitable indemnity from the employer.” *Privette*, 5 Cal. 4th at 698; *see also* Cal. Lab. C. § 3864
8 (“[T]he employer shall have no liability to reimburse or hold such third person harmless on such
9 judgment or settlement in absence of a written agreement so to do executed prior to the injury.”). To
10 permit otherwise would circumvent the limit on employer liability and threaten the bargain
11 embodied in the Act.

12 Nevertheless, the exclusivity rule is not absolute, even as to the employer. The “workers’
13 compensation exclusivity rule does not apply to an injury resulting from conduct in violation of a
14 fundamental public policy.” *Singh v. Southland Stone, U.S.A., Inc.*, 186 Cal. App. 4th 338, 368,
15 (2010). In other words, where claims implicate fundamental public policy considerations, they are
16 “not preempted by the Workers’ Compensation Act.” *Maynard v. City of San Jose*, 37 F.3d 1396,
17 1405 (9th Cir. 1994), as amended (Nov. 22, 1994) (discussing retaliation claims). In general, a
18 “public policy is fundamental if it has a basis in constitutional or statutory provisions,” such as
19 public policy prohibiting an employer’s retaliation for an employee’s participation in the
20 investigation of discriminatory practices. *Id.* This is so, because actions in violation of public
21 policy “cannot under any reasonable viewpoint be considered a normal part of the employment
22 relationship.” *Huffman v. Interstate Brands Companies*, 121 Cal. App. 4th 679, 695 (2004) (citation
23 omitted).

24 a. Third-Party Tortfeasors

25 Nor does the exclusivity rule “preclude the employee from suing anyone else [*i.e.*, other than
26 the employer] whose conduct was a proximate cause of the injury.” *Privette*, 5 Cal. 4th at 697
27 (1993). Under the Act, an employee’s claim for compensation as to his or her employer does not
28 affect his right to sue “any person other than the employer” for damages proximately resulting from

1 his injury or death. Cal. Lab. C. § 3852. In other words, “a plaintiff who recovers workers’
2 compensation from an employer can pursue common law tort actions against third parties for
3 independent acts of negligence.” *Waste Mgmt. Inc. v. Superior Court*, 119 Cal. App. 4th 105, 109
4 (2004). Under this rule, a plaintiff may even sue “the parent company of the plaintiff’s employer, as
5 long as there are independent acts of negligence.” *Id.* at 110.

6 Nevertheless, the injured employee should not receive a double recovery, *i.e.*, one recovery
7 from the employer and one from a negligent third-party tortfeasor. Among other things, principles
8 of comparative negligence guide apportionment of liability between the employer and a third-party
9 tortfeasor.³ See *Associated Constr. & Eng’g Co. v. Workers’ Comp. Appeals Bd.*, 22 Cal. 3d 829,
10 846-47 (1978). If the employer is concurrently negligent, the third-party tortfeasor can seek set-off
11 from the compensation benefits paid. See *Roe v. Workmen’s Comp. Appeals Bd.*, 12 Cal. 3d 884,
12 889 (1974), *holding modified on other grounds by Associated Constr.* (“[T]he inhibition against
13 double recovery is designed to allow the third party a [p]ro tanto reduction of a liability which he
14 shares with a concurrently negligent employer.”). Correspondingly, an employer who pays out
15 benefits may bring a cause of action against a third-party tortfeasor to recover compensation
16 payments as well as other emoluments paid, such as salary and wages. Cal. Lab. C. § 3852.
17 Consistent with application of comparative fault, the employer can recover such compensation
18 payments from the third-party tortfeasor “only to the extent the employer’s liability in workers’
19 compensation exceeds its share of responsibility for the employee’s full tort damages.” *Associated*
20 *Constr.*, 22 Cal. 3d at 847.

21 b. Co-Employee Liability

22 To prevent backdoor circumvention of the exclusivity provisions in the Act, in 1959, the
23 California Legislature enacted California Labor Code Section 3601, which provides immunity to co-

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25 ³ The general principles of comparative liability and apportionment were modified by the
26 California electorate by Proposition 51. “Proposition 51 retains the joint liability of all tortfeasors,
27 regardless of their respective shares of fault, with respect to all objectively provable expenses and
28 monetary losses, but the more intangible and subjective categories of damage are limited to a rule of
strict proportionate liability.” *Henry*, 160 Cal. App. 4th at 450. Thus, “[i]n any action for personal
injury, property damage, or wrongful death, based upon principles of comparative fault, the liability
of each defendant for non-economic damages shall be several only and shall not be joint.” Cal. Civ.
C. § 1431.2(a).

1 employees and “severely limit[ed] a preexisting right to freely sue a fellow employee for damages.”
2 *Torres v. Parkhouse Tire Serv., Inc.*, 26 Cal. 4th 995, 1002 (2001). Co-employee immunity was
3 deemed necessary, because if injured employees were able to sue their co-employees for actions
4 those co-employees took in the scope of their employment, the application of *respondeat superior*
5 could expose the employer to liability, undermining the exclusivity provisions of the Act. *Id.* Thus,
6 “a co[-]employee is immune from suit to the extent necessary to prevent an end-run against the
7 employer under the exclusivity rule.” *Id.* This immunity, however, only extends to co-employees
8 “acting within the scope of employment,” reflecting the intent to extend such immunity only to
9 “*respondeat superior* situations.” *Id.* Consequently, there are statutory exceptions that permit a
10 civil suit against a co-employee where an “employee proximately causes another employee’s injury
11 or death by a willful and unprovoked physical act of aggression or by intoxication.” *Id.* (citing Cal.
12 Lab. C. § 3601, subs. (a)(1); (a)(2)).

13 In this case, Mr. Hoa’s claims against his “co-employee” prison supervisors are not
14 precluded by the Act, because he sued his co-employees under Section 1983. “[T]o the extent
15 workers’ compensation precludes recovery for other causes of action, it does not preclude recovery
16 for claims involving ‘substantive rather than procedural constitutional rights.’” *Jensen v. City of*
17 *Oxnard*, 145 F.3d 1078, 1084 n.3 (9th Cir. 1998) (citing *Smith v. Fontana*, 818 F.2d 1411, 1419-20
18 (9th Cir. 1987)). As discussed, *supra*, substantive constitutional rights implicate fundamental public
19 policy. Violations of such rights fall outside the workers’ compensation exclusivity rule. The
20 Section 1983 claims that Mr. Hoa has brought against Cross-Claimants involve such substantive
21 constitutional rights. *Jensen*, 145 F.3d at 1084 n.3. Thus, the Act does not preempt Mr. Hoa’s
22 Section 1983 claims⁴ and does not provide the co-employee prison supervisors with immunity. *Id.*⁵

23 _____
24 ⁴ Consistent with these principles, the Cross-Claimant co-employee prison supervisors do not
25 challenge Mr. Hoa’s right to bring a cause of action against them. Indeed, the Cross-Claimants seek
26 contribution and indemnity from the Cross-Defendants only in the event the Cross-Claimants are
27 found liable. See Docket No. 138 at ¶¶ 8, 9, 13, 16.

28 ⁵ For this reason the Court also rejects the separate argument, alluded to briefly in Cross-
29 Defendants’ reply, that it would be inequitable to permit recovery under the Cross-Complaint,
30 because Cross-Claimants would profit at the expense of Cross-Defendants. The case cited by Cross-
31 Defendants involved a claim for indemnity where the settlement by the party seeking indemnity was
32 paid by an insurance carrier. Here, the Cross-Defendants have not shown that any settlement or

1 c. No Workers Compensation Preclusion

2 What is *not* at issue in this case is any claim Mr. Hoa may have against his employer – either
3 direct or indirect. The CDCR and Prison were dismissed as defendants. *See* Docket No. 29. This
4 matters, because the Act and the cases that Cross-Defendants cite concern limitation on the liability
5 of an employer. *See State v. Superior Court (Glovsky)*, 60 Cal. App. 4th 659 (1997); *E.B. Wills Co.*
6 *v. Superior Court*, 56 Cal. App. 3d 650 (1976). The Act demands fixed liability as to the employer,
7 because the defined liability of the employer is a core term of the Act’s compensation bargain. *See*
8 *Schlick v. Comco Mgmt., Inc.*, 196 Cal. App. 3d 974, 978 (Ct. App. 1987) (“The workers
9 compensation system imposes upon the employer the responsibility to pay benefits without regard to
10 fault; at the same time, the employer is assured of a fixed and ascertainable liability and relieved of
11 the prospect of large damage verdicts.” (citation omitted)). But those cases are inapposite here.

12 The trucking-related Cross-Defendants cannot rely on the Act for dismissal of the
13 cross-claims brought against them by the Section 1983 Defendants (*i.e.*, Cross-Claimants). The
14 cross-claims are not precluded by the Act because those claims do not upset or circumvent the
15 compensation bargain struck between Mr. Hoa and his employer for several reasons. First, Mr.
16 Hoa’s underlying claims against the Cross-Claimant prison supervisors are not barred by the Act; as
17 discussed above, constitutional claims under Section 1983 are not barred by workers compensation.
18 *Jensen*, 145 F.3d at 1084 n.3. Hence, the underlying claims on which the cross-claims are
19 predicated are outside the Act. Second, Cross-Defendants are not a party to the compensation
20 bargain. The Act specifically allows suits against third parties such as third-party tortfeasors. Cal.
21 Lab. C. § 3852. Suing third-party tortfeasors such as Cross-Defendants does not threaten to
22 undermine the prescribed and limited liability of the employer under the Act, especially where the
23 underlying claims are outside the Act. Nor do the respective claims and cross-claims of Mr. Hoa
24 and Cross-Claimants against Cross-Defendants offend any prohibition on double-recovery;
25 principles of comparative negligence and equity will govern any set-off between workers’

26 _____
27 judgment was paid or would be paid by an insurance carrier as to the Section 1983 claims alleged
28 against Cross-Claimants. *Cf. Miller v. Ellis*, 103 Cal. App. 4th 373, 382 (2002) (determining that
permitting a cotortfeasor who paid nothing in settlement “to obtain ‘reimbursement’ from [another]
for sums he never paid himself would result in unjust enrichment.”).

1 compensation benefits paid by the employer’s insurer and any judgment against Cross-Defendants.
2 *See Associated Constr.*, 22 Cal. 3d at 846-47.

3 Thus, Cross-Claimants’ cross-claims for contribution or indemnity are not barred by the Act.
4 The Act does not limit the liability of Cross-Claimants or Cross-Defendants in this case. *See*
5 *Coca-Cola*, 11 Cal. App. 4th at 1378; Cal. Civ. Proc. C. § 875; *cf. Mize v. Atchison, T. & S. F. Ry.*
6 *Co.*, 46 Cal. App. 3d 436 (1975) (concluding that where workers’ compensation is not the exclusive
7 remedy and judgment is rendered against two joint tortfeasors, one of which was the employer,
8 contribution is allowed).

9 2. Applicability of State Law

10 At oral argument Cross-Defendants raised an argument not presented in their papers. In
11 *Mortgages*, 934 F.2d 209, the Ninth Circuit held that where neither the False Claims Act (“FCA”)
12 nor federal common law provided a right to indemnity or contribution, there was no right to assert
13 state counterclaims that, if successful, would effectively provide a backdoor right to indemnity or
14 contribution under the FCA. *Id.* at 213. Cross-Defendants argue that, applying *Mortgages*, state law
15 should not allow a right to indemnity or contribution where Section 1988 has been interpreted as not
16 authorizing such a right under federal law. In effect, for the reasons why Section 1988 does not
17 authorize a right of contribution or indemnification – such a right undermines the policy of Section
18 1983 – state law claims should be preempted.

19 Because Cross-Defendants’ argument regarding preemption was raised for the first time at
20 oral argument, the Court ordered supplemental briefing to allow the parties to develop their positions
21 more fully. *See* Docket No. 155. The Court has considered the parties’ arguments and supplemental
22 briefing and concludes that importing state law of indemnification and contribution would be
23 impermissible under Section 1988 and inconsistent with the purposes of Section 1983; the state law
24 right to contribution or indemnification is thus preempted by Section 1983.

25 First, Section 1988 prescribes when a state law may be imported into a Section 1983. *Nw.*
26 *Airlines*, 451 U.S. at 97 n.38; *see also Mortgages*, 934 F.2d at 212. Whether such state law applies
27 in a case where Section 1983 supplies the rule of decision is solely a federal question, and that
28 question here is governed by Section 1988 and not by, *e.g.*, state statutory or common law. *Cf.*

1 *Anderson v. Local Union No. 3, Int’l Bhd. of Elec. Workers*, 582 F. Supp. 627, 629 (S.D.N.Y.) *aff’d*
2 *sub nom. Anderson v. Local Union No. 3, Int’l Bhd. of Elec. Workers, AFL-CIO*, 751 F.2d 546 (2d
3 Cir. 1984) (“The question of whether contribution and indemnity are available under [Title VII of]
4 the federal civil rights laws should be governed by federal law.”); *Don King Prods./Kingvision v.*
5 *Ferreira*, 950 F. Supp. 286, 288-89 (E.D. Cal. 1996), *aff’d sub nom. Doherty v. Wireless Broad. Sys.*
6 *of Sacramento, Inc.*, 151 F.3d 1129 (9th Cir. 1998) (analyzing right to indemnity as to Cable
7 Communications Policy Act of 1984 under federal law and right to indemnity as to claims against
8 cross-claimant for conversion and intentional interference with prospective economic advantage
9 under state law); *Gilmore v. List & Clark Const. Co.*, 866 F. Supp. 1310, 1313 (D. Kan. 1994)
10 (“[S]tate law creating a right of indemnity or contribution is inapplicable where the defendant’s
11 liability, for which indemnity or contribution is sought, arises solely from Title VII.”); *In re Olympia*
12 *Brewing Co. Sec. Litig.*, 674 F. Supp. 597, 608 (N.D. Ill. 1987) (analyzing availability of indemnity
13 and contribution for liability under federal securities law and RICO claims under federal law;
14 analyzing availability of indemnity and contribution as to damages paid out with respect to state law
15 claims under state law). As discussed above, Section 1988 does not allow for the importation of an
16 express or implied right of contribution or indemnification under state law into Section 1983 suits.
17 As governing federal law, Section 1988 disposed of this issue.

18 Second, even if the applicability of state law on contribution and indemnification were not
19 governed exclusively by Section 1988, such state law is subject to implied preemption under the
20 doctrine of obstacle preemption. There are three types of preemption: express, field, and conflict
21 preemption. *See Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Inst. v. Energy Res. Conservation & Dev.*
22 *Comm’n*, 410 F.3d 492, 495 (9th Cir. 2005). The different types of preemption are not rigidly
23 divided. *See Crosby v. Nat’l Foreign Trade Council*, 530 U.S. 363, 372 n. 6 (2000). Conflict
24 preemption will apply, for example, to claims that range from where “it is impossible for a private
25 party to comply with both state and federal law” to where “under the circumstances of a particular
26 case, the challenged state law stands as an obstacle to the accomplishment and execution of the full
27 purposes and objectives of Congress.” *Id.* at 372-73 (citations omitted). Whether state law presents
28 such an obstacle is determined through “examining the federal statute as a whole and identifying its

1 purpose and intended effects.” *Id.* If the state law frustrates the operation of the federal act or
2 deprives the act’s provisions of their natural effect, “the state law must yield to the regulation of
3 Congress.” *Id.* at 373 (citations omitted).

4 For the reasons discussed above, the rights of contribution and indemnification conflict with
5 Section 1983’s goal of deterrence. “Counterclaims for indemnification or contribution by definition
6 only have the effect of offsetting liability.” *U.S. ex rel. Madden v. Gen. Dynamics Corp.*, 4 F.3d
7 827, 830-31 (9th Cir. 1993). It would not enhance compensation for the Section 1983 plaintiff and
8 instead would weaken Section 1983’s deterrent value. *Hurley*, 2009 WL 5511705 at *5; *Mason*, 949
9 F. Supp. at 1079. The instant case well illustrates how the right of contribution conflicts with the
10 policies of Section 1983. The Complaint herein alleges that Cross-Claimants were deliberately
11 indifferent to, among other things, unsafe conditions of confinement and the need for basic
12 precautions to avoid substantial risk of severe injury. Complaint ¶¶ 165-221. Allowing a right of
13 contribution or indemnification in a case like this would allow a deliberately indifferent defendant to
14 offset his liability by shifting it onto a merely negligent tortfeasor. The possibility of such liability-
15 shifting conflicts with the aim of deterrence. *See Hepburn*, 324 F. Supp. 2d at 759. Moreover,
16 indemnification and contribution claims arise out of equitable considerations. *See Nw. Airlines*, 451
17 U.S. at 88; *see also* Cal. CCP § 875; *Am. Motorcycle*, 20 Cal. 3d at 584 (1978). In a Section 1983
18 case like this one, those equitable concerns are diminished, because the “level of culpability
19 necessary for § 1983 liability reduces the need to equitably distribute damages among tortfeasors.”
20 *Hepburn*, 324 F. Supp. 2d at 759. As the Supreme Court has commented, “partial immunities
21 inconsistent with § 1983 must yield to the federal right.” *Felder v. Casey*, 487 U.S. 131, 142 (1988).

22 Cross-Claimants correctly argue that a state law contribution or indemnity claim is not
23 inconsistent with Section 1983’s goal of compensation, because the rule against double recovery of
24 damages prohibits a plaintiff from recovering more than his actual losses. Docket No. 158 at 4-5
25 (discussing dicta in *Sanders v. Cnty. of Santa Cruz*, No. 5:13-CV-03205-EJD, 2014 WL 4773992, at
26 *8 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 19, 2014)). In this case, however, Plaintiff alleges that Cross-Claimants and
27
28

1 Cross-Defendants are liable to him on a joint and several basis. Joint and several liability⁶ provides
2 a plaintiff flexibility to recover up to the full extent of his injuries against any concurrently culpable
3 defendant, which matters, if, for example, a defendant turns out to be “impecunious or otherwise
4 immune from suit.” *Rudelson*, 602 F.2d at 1332 (quoting *Am. Motorcycle*, 20 Cal. 3d at 587). The
5 amount of damages owed by each defendant to the plaintiff (or risk of double-recovery) is not
6 enhanced or reduced by the availability of a right to contribution or indemnification.

7 The conclusion that state claims are preempted here is supported by the Ninth Circuit’s
8 decision in *Mortgages*. In *Mortgages*, a mortgage lending company accepted mortgage applications
9 for loans that were insured by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The loans
10 defaulted, causing millions of dollars in losses to the insurer. After reaching a settlement with the
11 government, *Mortgages, Inc.* filed a complaint under the FCA on the basis of allegedly false and
12 misleading statements in the loan applications. The government proceeded with the action, and
13 *Mortgages* remained as *qui tam* plaintiff. The FCA defendants (the borrowers and related parties)
14 filed third-party complaints alleging breach of contract, breach of the covenant of good faith and fair
15 dealing, breach of fiduciary duty, fraud, negligence, negligent misrepresentation and conspiracy.
16 Pursuant to each of their state law claims, the FCA defendants sought indemnification and/or
17 contribution from *Mortgages* against any recovery or judgment in favor of the United States. 934
18 F.2d at 211. *Mortgages*’s motion to dismiss the third-party complaints was denied. *Mortgages* filed

20 ⁶ In this case, Cross-Claimants’ and Cross-Defendants’ liability, if any, would be joint and
21 several, because the alleged injury is indivisible. The Cross-Complaint incorporates by reference
22 the Complaint’s allegation that the Defendants are liable on a joint and several basis. *See* Complaint
23 ¶ 54. In turn, the Complaint alleges that the concurrent negligence of all Defendants caused Mr.
24 Hoa an indivisible injury. *Hazle v. Crofoot*, 727 F.3d 983, 995 (9th Cir. 2013) (injury “was clearly
25 indivisible” where the concurrent actions of all defendants were necessary cause the harm).

24 This is not the sort of case where one defendant broke the plaintiff’s arm and then an
25 hour later, in an unrelated incident, a second defendant broke the plaintiff’s leg. Here
26 the injuries were indivisible; all of the defendants, acting concurrently, [are alleged to
27 have] proximately caused [Mr. Hoa’s injuries]. Had any one of the defendants
28 exercised due care, none of the injuries would have occurred. Consequently, each
29 defendant is liable for all of the damages stemming from the collision.

27 *Rudelson v. United States*, 602 F.2d 1326, 1332 (9th Cir. 1979). The Cross-Claimants’ and Cross-
28 Defendants’ liability would be determined on a joint and several basis. Cross-Claimants do not
dispute that the harm at issue is a “single, indivisible injury.” *See* Docket No. 158, Supp. Brief at 5.

1 a writ of mandamus after the denial of its motion to dismiss the third-party complaints. *Id.*, n.1. The
2 Ninth Circuit granted Mortgages’s petition for mandamus, and remanded the case with instructions
3 that the district court vacate its order requiring Mortgages to answer the third-party complaints.

4 The Ninth Circuit began its analysis by determining that the FCA does not include an express
5 or implied right to contribution or indemnification. *Id.* at 213. *Mortgages* reasoned that Congress
6 did not intend to create a right to contribution or indemnification under the FCA, because the “FCA
7 is in no way intended to ameliorate the liability of wrongdoers by providing defendants with a
8 remedy against a qui tam plaintiff with ‘unclean hands.’” *Id.* The Ninth Circuit also declined to
9 formulate a right of contribution or indemnification under federal common law in light of (1) the
10 express and comprehensive procedures and provisions for enforcement within the FCA and (2) the
11 lack of implication of federal interests. *Id.* *Mortgages* explained that such rights of action would
12 serve only private interests and would punish relators. Permitting contribution and indemnification
13 would discourage relators from bringing an action, impeding the purpose of the FCA. *Id.* The Ninth
14 Circuit went on to hold that “[b]ecause there is no basis in the FCA or federal common law to
15 provide a right to contribution or indemnity in a FCA action, we conclude that there can be no right
16 to assert state law counterclaims that, if prevailed on, would end in the same result.” *Id.* at 214. In
17 other words, the Ninth Circuit found that there was no right to assert state law counterclaims that, if
18 prevailed on, would effectively result in a right to contribution or indemnity in an FCA action,
19 impeding the purpose of the FCA.

20 Although the case for preemption was particularly strong in *Mortgages*, because the third-
21 party claim there would disincentivize the qui tam plaintiff and threaten to directly undermine the
22 FCA enforcement mechanism, rights of contribution and indemnification likewise conflict with
23 Section 1983’s policy and thus stand as an obstacle to the accomplishment and execution of the full
24 purpose and objectives of Congress.

25 Cross-Claimants’ reliance on *Banks* which permitted state law claims is not persuasive.
26 *Banks* was decided before *Mortgages* and does not consider or discuss whether rights of contribution
27 or indemnification are consistent with the goals of Section 1983. The Court declines to follow the
28 portion of *Banks* that concludes that a claim of contribution or indemnification based on a third

1 party's liability under state law constitutes a claim for indemnification "based on state law claims,
2 rather than on § 1983 directly." *Banks*, 109 F.R.D. at 539 (permitting impleader of state law
3 claims); *see also Sanders*, 2014 WL 4773992, at *8 (relying on *Banks*).

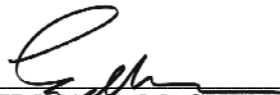
4 **III. CONCLUSION**

5 For the foregoing reasons, Cross-Defendants' motion to dismiss the cross claim is
6 **GRANTED**. The Cross-Claimants may not seek contribution or indemnity based on Section 1983.
7 State law cross-claims for contribution or indemnity are not precluded by the exclusivity rule of the
8 Workers Compensation Act, but are precluded where, as here, federal law supplies the rule of
9 decision as to the Cross-Claimants and preempts such state claims. The motion to dismiss is
10 therefore **GRANTED**.

11 This order disposes of Docket No. 146.

12
13 IT IS SO ORDERED.

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15 Dated: January 26, 2015

16
17 
EDWARD M. CHEN
United States District Judge