

United States District Court
Northern District of California

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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

RIANA BUFFIN, ET AL.,
Plaintiffs,
vs.
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO, ET AL.,
Defendants.

CASE NO. 15-cv-04959-YGR

ORDER GRANTING PLAINTIFFS’ MOTION FOR CLASS CERTIFICATION AS MODIFIED BY THE COURT

Re: Dkt. No. 140

Now before the Court is plaintiffs’ motion for class certification. (Dkt. No. 140 (“Motion”).) Having carefully considered the papers submitted, the pleadings in this action, the oral arguments held on December 12, 2017, and the parties’ comments to the Court’s proposed class definition, and for the reasons set forth below, the Court **GRANTS AS MODIFIED BY THE COURT** plaintiffs’ Motion.¹

I. RELEVANT BACKGROUND

The facts at issue in this case are well known to the parties and the Court. The Court adopts in full the background section of its order denying plaintiffs’ and CBAA’s motions for summary judgment. (*See* Dkt. No. 191.) The Court summarizes the procedural background pertinent to the instant motion below.

In response to CBAA’s opposition to the motion for class certification,² plaintiffs Riana Buffin and Crystal Patterson redefined the proposed class as follows:

¹ With respect to the various *Daubert* motions filed by plaintiffs and California Bail Agents Association (“CBAA”) (Dkt. Nos. 134, 137, 138, & 139), the Court **DENIES** these motions **WITHOUT PREJUDICE** to resubmitting them after a revised trial order has been issued. In so doing, the Court reiterates its concerns as to the evidentiary foundation for the experts’ opinions.

² The Court granted CBAA leave to file an opposition to plaintiffs’ motion. (*See* Dkt. No. 142.)

1 [A]ll pre-arraignment arrestees who are or who will be in the custody of the City
2 and County of San Francisco who have the option of monetary release under
3 current state law but remain in custody for any amount of time because they cannot
afford their bail amount.

4 (Plaintiffs’ Reply Brief in Support of Motion for Class Certification, Dkt. No. 168 at 1
5 (“Plaintiffs’ Reply”).) In light of the oral arguments on the motion, the Court proposed for
6 comment the following modified class definition:

7 All pre-arraignment arrestees (i) who are, or will be, in the custody of the City and
8 County of San Francisco; (ii) whose bail amount is determined by the Felony and
9 Misdemeanor Bail Schedule as established by the Superior Court of California,
10 County of San Francisco; (iii) whose arrest has not been reviewed by a judicial
officer; and (iv) who remain in custody for any amount of time because they cannot
afford to pay their set bail amount.

11 (Order re: Class Certification and Plaintiffs’ Requested Relief, Dkt. No. 178 at 2 (“Court’s
12 Inquiry”).) The Court also asked plaintiffs’ counsel, Mr. Phil Telfeyan of Equal Justice Under
13 Law, to supplement the record with information regarding his adequacy to represent the proposed
14 class and to clarify the relief sought by plaintiffs.³

15 Plaintiffs, CBAA, and Sheriff Vicki Hennessy (the “Sheriff”) (collectively, the “parties”)
16 responded timely to the Court’s inquiry. Plaintiffs principally approved of the Court’s proposed
17 definition but questioned whether the limitation in subsection (iii) was necessary. (Plaintiffs’
18 Response to Inquiry at 2.) The Sheriff proposed two revisions. First, she suggested that “the City
19 and County of San Francisco” in subsection (i) be changed to “the San Francisco Sheriff” to
20 reflect that the Sheriff is the proper defendant, and that she acts in her capacity as a state official
21 when enforcing the Bail Schedule. (Dkt. No. 182.) Second, the Sheriff proposed that subsection
22 (iii) be revised to delete the reference to those “whose arrest” has not been reviewed by a judicial
23 officer and to substitute instead “whose terms of pretrial release” have not been reviewed by a

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25 _____
26 ³ In this regard, Mr. Telfeyan indicated that plaintiffs seek “an order declaring
27 unconstitutional and enjoining the use of the bail schedule for the class In addition, Plaintiffs
28 believe that an injunction that outlines the framework for a replacement, non-monetary process for
the class would be helpful.” (Plaintiffs’ Response to Court’s Inquiry, Dkt. No. 181 at 2
 (“Plaintiffs’ Response to Inquiry”).) The response contributed further to the Court’s continuing
concern regarding Mr. Telfeyan’s adequacy.

1 judicial officer in light of the fact that judicial officers’ review of arrests for probable cause occurs
2 independently of any individualized judicial determination of the terms of pretrial release. (*Id.*)
3 Next, CBAA suggested that subsection (iii) be modified in order to exclude from the class “those
4 arrestees who are *eligible* to make a §1269c application, but who either have chosen not to . . . or
5 who have done so and are still awaiting review by a judicial officer.” (Dkt. No. 185 (emphasis in
6 original).) Moreover, CBAA expressed concerns that the Court’s proposed definition would not
7 satisfy ascertainability by virtue of its inclusion of the terms “cannot afford” and “because.” (*Id.*)

8 In its January 16, 2018 scheduling order, after denying plaintiffs’ and CBAA’s motions for
9 summary judgment, the Court expressed lingering concerns over the adequacy of counsel and gave
10 Mr. Telfeyan until February 8, 2018 to identify additional counsel to represent the proposed class
11 jointly. (Dkt. No. 192.) Mr. Telfeyan notified the Court on February 2, 2018 that Equal Justice
12 Under Law is now joined by Robert E. Sims and Steven M. Bauer from Latham & Watkins LLP
13 as co-counsel. (Dkt. No. 203.)

14 In light of the parties’ submissions, and for the reasons discussed below, the Court
15 **CERTIFIES** the following class:

16 All pre-arraignment arrestees (i) who are, or will be, in the custody of the San
17 Francisco Sheriff; (ii) whose bail amount is determined by the Felony and
18 Misdemeanor Bail Schedule as established by the Superior Court of California,
19 County of San Francisco; (iii) whose terms of pretrial release have not received an
20 individualized determination by a judicial officer; and (iv) who remain in custody
21 for any amount of time because they cannot afford to pay their set bail amount.

22 **II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

23 Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23(a), the Court may certify a class only where “(1)
24 the class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable; (2) there are questions of law
25 or fact common to the class; (3) the claims or defenses of the representative parties are typical of
26 the claims or defenses of the class; and (4) the representative parties will fairly and adequately
27 protect the interests of the class.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a). Courts refer to these four requirements as
28 “numerosity, commonality, typicality[,] and adequacy of representation.” *Mazza v. Am. Honda
Motor Co., Inc.*, 666 F.3d 581, 588 (9th Cir. 2012).

Once the threshold requirements of Rule 23(a) are met, plaintiffs must then show “through

1 evidentiary proof” that a class is appropriate for certification under one of the provisions of Rule
2 23(b). *Comcast Corp. v. Behrend*, 133 S. Ct. 1426, 1432 (2013). Here, plaintiffs seek
3 certification under Rule 23(b)(2), which requires plaintiffs to establish that the “party opposing the
4 class has acted or refused to act on grounds that apply generally to the class, so that final
5 injunctive relief or corresponding declaratory relief is appropriate respecting the class as a whole.”
6 Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(2); *see also Ellis v. Costco Wholesale Corp.*, 657 F.3d 970, 986 (9th Cir.
7 2011) (“Class certification under Rule 23(b)(2) is appropriate only where the primary relief sought
8 is declaratory or injunctive.”) (internal quotation marks omitted).

9 “[A] court’s class-certification analysis must be ‘rigorous’ and may ‘entail some overlap
10 with the merits of the plaintiff’s underlying claim[.]’” *Amgen, Inc. v. Conn. Ret. Plans & Trust*
11 *Funds*, 133 S. Ct. 1184, 1194 (2013) (quoting *Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. v. Dukes*, 564 U.S. 338, 351
12 (2011)); *see also Mazza*, 666 F.3d at 588. The court considers the merits to the extent they
13 overlap with the Rule 23 requirements. *Ellis*, 657 F.3d at 983. Nevertheless, “Rule 23 grants
14 courts no license to engage in free-ranging merits inquiries at the certification stage.” *Amgen*, 133
15 S. Ct. at 1194–95. If a court concludes that the moving party has met its burden of proof, then the
16 court has broad discretion to certify the class. *Zinser v. Accufix Research Inst.*, 253 F.3d 1180,
17 1186 (9th Cir. 2001).

18 **III. DISCUSSION**

19 Plaintiffs contend that they have established all requirements for certification of an
20 injunctive relief class under Rule 23(b)(2). CBAA challenges the typicality and adequacy of
21 representation elements of Rule 23(a).⁴ Moreover, CBAA argues that the proposed class is not
22 ascertainable.⁵ The Court will first address the Rule 23(a) and 23(b)(2) requirements followed by

24 ⁴ With respect to numerosity, CBAA stated at oral argument that “if the class is clearly
25 defined, there is likely not to be a dispute over that particular aspect of class cert.” (*See* Transcript
26 of Proceedings Held on December 12, 2017, Dkt. No. 186 at 52:14–16 (“Transcript”).) Moreover,
27 it indicated that it opposed commonality only to the extent that the definition “would include
28 arrestees who already received an individualized determination and weren’t subject to the bail
schedule” (*Id.* at 53.) The Court’s certified class definition assuages both of these concerns.

⁵ In its opposition to plaintiffs’ motion, CBAA objects to plaintiffs’ citation to, and
reliance on, certain articles by *Newsweek* and the *United Way Bay Area*. (CBAA’s Opposition to
Plaintiffs’ Motion for Class Certification, Dkt. No. 158 at 13 (“CBAA’s Opposition”).) CBAA

1 ascertainability.⁶

2 **A. Numerosity**

3 Rule 23(a) requires that the proposed class be “so numerous that joinder of all members is
4 impracticable.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a)(1). As indicated at oral argument, neither CBAA nor the
5 Sheriff contests that the numerosity requirement is met in the instant case. The Court concurs that
6 the numerosity requirement is satisfied.

7 **B. Commonality**

8 Commonality requires that the class members’ claims “depend upon a common contention
9 such that determination of its truth or falsity will resolve an issue that is central to the validity of
10 each claim in one stroke.” *Abdullah v. U.S. Sec. Assocs., Inc.*, 731 F.3d 952, 957 (9th Cir. 2013)
11 (internal quotation marks omitted). “Rule 23(a)(2) has been construed permissively.” *Hanlon v.*
12 *Chrysler Corp.*, 150 F.3d 1011, 1019 (9th Cir. 1998). “[T]he key inquiry is not whether the
13 plaintiffs have raised common questions . . . but rather, whether class treatment will ‘generate
14 common *answers* apt to drive the resolution of the litigation.’” *Abdullah*, 731 F.3d at 957 (quoting
15 *Dukes*, 564 U.S. at 350) (emphasis in original). “This does not, however, mean that *every*
16 question of law or fact must be common to the class; all that Rule 23(a)(2) requires is ‘a single
17 *significant* question of law or fact.’” *Id.* (quoting *Mazza*, 666 F.3d 581 at 589) (emphasis in
18 original). “[F]or purposes of Rule 23(a)(2), even a single common question will do.” *Dukes*, 564
19 U.S. at 359 (alteration and quotation marks omitted).

20 The Court finds that plaintiffs have demonstrated sufficient commonality to satisfy Rule
21 23(a)(2) because the resolution of one question, that is, whether the Sheriff’s use of the Bail

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24 does so on three grounds: (1) neither article is properly authenticated pursuant to Federal Rule of
25 Evidence 901; (2) neither article is supported by the declaration testimony of a witness with
26 knowledge that the articles are what they claim to be; and (3) the content of the articles is
27 inadmissible hearsay. (*Id.*) The Court agrees with the substance of CBAA’s objections, sustains
28 the objections, and has not incorporated the contents of the articles into its analysis.

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1 Schedule prior to arraignment violates the Equal Protection or Due Process clauses of the
2 Fourteenth Amendment, will resolve “in one stroke” all class members’ claims. *Abdullah*, 731
3 F.3d at 957; *see also Rodriguez v. Hayes*, 591 F.3d 1105, 1122–24 (9th Cir. 2010) (finding
4 commonality even though class members were detained pursuant to different statutes and under
5 different factual circumstances because a single question, namely, whether a bond hearing was
6 required for individuals detained longer than six months, was “posed by the detention of every
7 member of the class and their [individual claims would] largely be determined by its answer”).
8 Further, in keeping with the purpose of class action litigation, settling this common question
9 would “render management of [proposed members’] claims more efficient for the court” and
10 “would also benefit many of the putative class members by obviating the severe practical concerns
11 that would likely attend them were they forced to proceed alone.” *Rodriguez*, 591 F.3d at 1123.⁷

12 **C. Typicality**

13 “The typicality requirement looks to whether the claims of the class representatives [are]
14 typical of those of the class, and [is] satisfied when each class member’s claim arises from the
15 same course of events, and each class member makes similar legal arguments to prove the
16 defendant’s liability.” *Rodriguez*, 591 F.3d at 1124 (internal quotation marks omitted). “The
17 purpose of the typicality requirement is to assure that the interest of the named representative
18 aligns with the interests of the class.” *Hanon v. Dataproducts Corp.*, 976 F.2d 497, 508 (9th Cir.
19 1992). “Under the rule’s permissive standards, representative claims are ‘typical’ if they are
20 reasonably co-extensive with those of absent class members; they need not be substantially
21 identical.” *Hanlon*, 150 F.3d at 1020. The test of typicality “is whether other members have the
22 same or similar injury, whether the action is based on conduct which is not unique to the named
23

24 ⁷ CBAA’s primary concern with respect to commonality—that plaintiffs’ proposed class is
25 over-inclusive to the extent it would include (i) arrestees who received an individualized
26 determination pursuant to California Penal Code section 1269c and whose bail amount, as a result,
27 was set at an amount different from the scheduled amount; and/or (ii) arrestees detained after
28 arraignment—is moot in light of the Court’s certified class definition. The Sheriff “agrees that
this case presents questions of law that are common to members of the class . . .” (Sheriff Vicki
Hennessy’s Response to Plaintiffs’ Motion for Class Certification, Dkt. No. 157 at 3 (“Sheriff’s
Response to Motion”).)

1 plaintiffs, and whether other class members have been injured by the same course of conduct.”
2 *Hanon*, 976 F.2d at 508 (internal quotation marks omitted). “Where the challenged conduct is a
3 policy or practice that affects all class members, . . . the cause of the injury is the same”; thus, the
4 analysis requires “comparing the injury asserted in the claims raised by the named plaintiffs with
5 those of the rest of the class.” *Armstrong v. Davis*, 275 F.3d 849, 868–69 (9th Cir. 2001),
6 *abrogated on other grounds by Johnson v. California*, 543 U.S. 499 (2005).

7 The Court finds the typicality requirement satisfied. All class members had their bail
8 amounts set by the Bail Schedule and were unable to afford their set bail amounts. CBAA’s
9 argument that plaintiffs are not typical of the class because neither of them remained in custody
10 due to her inability to afford bail is unavailing. CBAA points to the fact that plaintiff Patterson
11 was ultimately, after having spent approximately 29 hours in jail, able to pay the surety bail agent
12 a deposit amount of \$1,500 with the help of family members. As to plaintiff Buffin, CBAA
13 argues that she made a “personal choice” to not attempt to obtain financial help from family
14 members or friends so that she could post a bail bond. (CBAA’s Opposition at 11.) Given these
15 circumstances, CBAA avers that plaintiffs lack a common interest in representing the class and do
16 not even appear to be members of the proposed class. However, CBAA’s focus on plaintiffs’
17 potential ability to obtain money from third parties does not persuade: plaintiffs were *personally*
18 unable to pay their set bail amounts, and as a result spent longer periods in jail than they otherwise
19 would have.⁸ The Court is not willing to exclude individuals from the class based on whether or
20 not they could ask friends and family members for bail money.

21 CBAA’s additional argument that plaintiffs’ claims are not typical because plaintiffs’
22 detentions predated the implementation of the Public Safety Assessment (“PSA”) Tool is also
23 unavailing. As the Sheriff noted and plaintiffs confirmed, “Plaintiffs claim that California’s
24 statutory scheme is unconstitutional notwithstanding the current or past operation of the OR
25 Project, and . . . [CBAA’s] arguments for the scheme’s constitutionality likewise do not depend on

26 _____
27 ⁸ Plaintiffs have both stated that if they had personally been able to pay their set bail
28 amounts they “would immediately pay for [their] freedom.” (Dkt. No. 136-7 ¶ 6; Dkt. No. 136-12
¶ 6.)

1 the OR Project’s existence or manner of operation” (Plaintiffs’ Reply at 13; *see also*
2 Sheriff’s Response to Motion at 4.) Thus, the typicality of plaintiffs’ claims is unaffected by the
3 implementation of the PSA Tool on April 30, 2016.⁹

4 The Court finds that plaintiffs’ claims are typical of those of the certified class members, as
5 both plaintiffs’ claims and those of the class members arise from the Sheriff’s use of the Bail
6 Schedule. The injury alleged is the same injury suffered by all of the certified class members, that
7 is, the violation of the class members’ Due Process and Equal Protection rights through the
8 Sheriff’s use of the Bail Schedule. Similarly, all class members share the remedy sought, namely,
9 an order declaring unconstitutional and enjoining the Sheriff’s use of the Bail Schedule.

10 **D. Adequacy of Representation**

11 Rule 23(a)(4) permits the certification of a class only if “the representative parties will
12 fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a)(4). In this regard,
13 the Court must consider: “(1) [whether] the representative plaintiffs and their counsel have any
14 conflicts of interest with other class members, and (2) [if] the representative plaintiffs and their
15 counsel [will] prosecute the action vigorously on behalf of the class.” *Staton v. Boeing Co.*, 327
16 F.3d 938, 957 (9th Cir. 2003).

17 Here, CBAA has not raised any potential conflicts of interest, and the Court cannot discern
18 any in this case.¹⁰ While the Court previously harbored concerns regarding plaintiffs’ counsel’s
19 adequacy to represent the proposed class, the Court is now satisfied in light of his recent filing that
20 plaintiffs’ counsel, now joined by and Robert E. Sims and Steven M. Bauer of Latham & Watkins
21 LLP as co-counsel, will prosecute this action vigorously moving forward and adequately represent
22 the interests of the class members.

23 ⁹ CBAA would appear to agree in light of this clarification by plaintiffs on reply.
24 Specifically, CBAA noted in its opposition that “[t]o the extent that Plaintiffs’ . . . claims *will*
25 *depend upon the role and/or use of the Public Safety Assessment Tool in San Francisco*, the
26 Plaintiffs’ claims are not typical of the class claims.” (CBAA’s Opposition at 11) (emphasis
supplied).

27 ¹⁰ Rather, CBAA’s argument against adequacy mirrors its argument against typicality—
28 that plaintiffs are not members of the proposed class because neither of them remained in custody
due to her inability to afford bail. Because the Court addressed this argument previously, it need
not do so again here.

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E. Rule 23(b)(2)—Injunctive Relief Class

CBA A does not dispute the propriety of an injunctive relief class under Rule 23(b)(2). Accordingly, and because a “single injunction or declaratory judgment would provide relief to each member of the class,” the Court finds that the certified class meets the requirements of Rule 23(b)(2). *Dukes*, 564 U.S. at 360.

F. Ascertainability

CBA A argues that the proposed class is not ascertainable because the phrase “cannot afford” is ambiguous. (CBA A’s Opposition at 6.) According to CBA A, “the class must be sufficiently definite so that it is feasible for the court to determine the membership by reference to objective criteria.” (*Id.* at 5 (internal quotation marks omitted).) CBA A does not persuade. The Ninth Circuit has not adopted an ascertainability requirement. *See Briseno v. ConAgra Foods, Inc.*, 844 F.3d 1121, 1124 n.4 (9th Cir. 2017).¹¹ Moreover, it has specifically held that “Rule 23 does not impose a freestanding administrative feasibility prerequisite to class certification.” *Id.* at 1126. Accordingly, the Court finds that plaintiffs’ inclusion of the phrase “cannot afford” in its proposed class definition does not preclude certification.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Court **ORDERS** as follows:

1. Plaintiffs’ Motion is **GRANTED AS MODIFIED BY THE COURT**. The Court **CERTIFIES** the following class:

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¹¹ With respect to 23(b)(2) classes specifically, the logic of *Briseno* is particularly apt given that the focus of such classes is on the indivisible nature of the remedy sought. *See Cole v. City of Memphis*, 839 F.3d 530, 542 (6th Cir. 2016) (“The decisions of other federal courts and the purpose of Rule 23(b)(2) persuade us that ascertainability is not an additional requirement for certification of a (b)(2) class seeking only injunctive and declaratory relief.”); *Shelton v. Bledsoe*, 775 F.3d 554, 563 (3d Cir. 2015) (“The nature of Rule 23(b)(2) actions, the Advisory Committee’s note on (b)(2) actions, and the practice of many of [sic] other federal courts all lead us to conclude that ascertainability is not a requirement for certification of a (b)(2) class seeking only injunctive and declaratory relief . . .”).

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All pre-arraignment arrestees (i) who are, or will be, in the custody of the San Francisco Sheriff; (ii) whose bail amount is determined by the Felony and Misdemeanor Bail Schedule as established by the Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco; (iii) whose terms of pretrial release have not received an individualized determination by a judicial officer; and (iv) who remain in custody for any amount of time because they cannot afford to pay their set bail amount.


2. The Court **APPOINTS** lead plaintiffs Riana Buffin and Crystal Patterson as class representatives of the certified class.

3. The Court **APPOINTS** Phil Telfeyan, Catherine Sevchenko, Rebecca Ramaswamy, and Marissa Hatton of Equal Justice Under Law, and Robert E. Sims and Steven M. Bauer of Latham & Watkins LLP as class counsel.

This Order terminates Docket Numbers 134, 137, 138, 139, and 140.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: February 26, 2018


YVONNE GONZALEZ ROGERS
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT JUDGE