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2
3 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
4 FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
5

6 SERGIO MARQUEZ, individually
7 and on behalf of others
8 similarly situated,

9 Plaintiff,

10 v.

11 BANK OF AMERICA, NATIONAL
12 ASSOCIATION, et al.,

13 Defendants.

Case No. 17-cv-00555-CW

ORDER GRANTING DEFENDANT BANK
OF AMERICA'S MOTION FOR
PARTIAL SUMMARY JUDGMENT

(Dkt. No. 78)

14 Plaintiff Sergio Marquez brings this putative class action
15 lawsuit against Defendants Bank of America, N.A. (BOA), Business
16 Information Group, Inc. (BIG), and TALX Corporation, d/b/a
17 Equifax Workforces Solutions (TALX). On January 9, 2018, BOA
18 brought a motion for partial summary judgment on Plaintiff's
19 First, Third, and Fifth Causes of Action.¹ Plaintiff filed an
20 opposition and BOA filed a reply. On March 20, 2018, the parties
21 appeared for a hearing. Having considered the papers and the
22 arguments of counsel, the Court GRANTS BOA's motion for partial
23 summary judgment.

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26 ¹ TALX simultaneously filed a motion to dismiss Plaintiff's
27 Eleventh Cause of Action for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.
28 TALX's motion was heard on the same day as BOA's motion. On
March 28, 2018, however, Plaintiff and TALX informed the Court
that they had reached a settlement in principle and requested
that the Court defer ruling on TALX's motion to dismiss, which
the Court will do. Docket Nos. 102, 104.

BACKGROUND

In October 2016, Plaintiff applied for employment with BOA as a Mortgage Loan Officer. During the application process, Plaintiff reviewed and electronically signed forms as part of an online background check. Declaration of Cindy Prebil (Prebil Decl.) ¶ 14. Plaintiff signed an "FCRA Disclosure and Authorization" form (Disclosure Form), a one-page document which states:

In connection with your employment or application for employment or contract assignment with Bank of America (the "Bank"), the Bank may obtain, where permitted, one or more consumer reports as defined in the Fair Credit Reporting Act (15 U.S.C. 1681) ("FCRA"). Consumer reports may contain information concerning your criminal history, fingerprint records, character, general reputation, employment history, civil history, credit history, education, academic and professional credentials, qualifications, motor vehicle record, and other background checks, based on the background check requirements for the subject position at the Bank. In some states, such as California, these reports are referred to as "Investigative Consumer Reports."

Prebil Decl., Ex. 2 at 1; see also id. ¶ 5. The Disclosure Form goes on to provide that the "Bank may obtain consumer reports from various entities, including, but not limited to:" "Equifax Workforce Solutions, a/k/a TALX Corporation," and "Business Information Group, Inc. (BIG)." Prebil Decl., Ex. 2 at 1. The form provides the entities' addresses, telephone numbers, and webpages where additional information and the entities' privacy policies can be found. Id. The form then provides an Authorization:

By signing below, you:

- 1. Authorize the Bank to obtain consumer reports about you at any time after receipt of this authorization and throughout your employment, if applicable; and
2. Agree, as permitted by law, that notices, documents

1 and communications may be provided electronically and
2 will meet the requirements set forth under Federal
3 and/or State law, and agree that a fax or photocopy of
4 this authorization with your signature should be
5 accepted with the same authority as the original.

6 By checking the box below you authorize Bank of America
7 to obtain, where permitted, one or more consumer
8 reports as described above for employment purposes.

9 Id. Beneath the authorization is a checkbox next to the
10 statement "Yes, I authorize Bank of America to obtain, where
11 permitted, one or more consumer reports for employment
12 purposes."; (2) the applicant's name and date; and (3) a space
13 where the applicant can use a mouse to electronically draw his
14 signature. Id.

15 Plaintiff executed the Disclosure Form and Authorization on
16 October 29, 2016. Prebil Decl. ¶ 7, Ex. 2 at 2. After signing
17 the Authorization, Plaintiff clicked "Continue," which brought up
18 another page entitled "Other Background Check Information," which
19 contained information about: (1) state and local laws and
20 ordinances governing background checks; (2) the Bank's
21 fingerprinting and criminal background check process; and
22 (3) additional checks for certain positions subject to Financial
23 Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA). Prebil Decl., Ex. 2 at 2.
24 This page also allowed Plaintiff to select an option "to indicate
25 if [he] would like a copy of [his] consumer report free of
26 charge." Id. at 2. Plaintiff selected this option. Id.

27 After submitting his application, on October 31, 2016,
28 Plaintiff was offered a position with BOA, which was contingent
upon a satisfactory background check. Declaration of James
Treglio (Treglio Decl.), Ex. 1. Ultimately, after conducting a
background check and interviewing Plaintiff about his employment

1 history, BOA decided not to hire Plaintiff. Prebil Decl. ¶ 18.

2 On February 2, 2017, Plaintiff filed this suit. Docket No.
3 1. On September 22, 2017, Plaintiff filed a first amended
4 complaint (FAC) against Defendants, asserting claims under the
5 Federal Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), 15 U.S.C. § 1681; the
6 Investigative Consumer Reporting Agencies Act (ICRA), California
7 Civil Code section 1786, et seq.; and the California Consumer
8 Credit Reporting Agencies Act (CCRA), California Civil Code
9 section 1785.1 et seq.

10 LEGAL STANDARD

11 Summary judgment is properly granted when no genuine and
12 disputed issues of material fact remain, and when, viewing the
13 evidence most favorably to the non-moving party, the movant is
14 clearly entitled to prevail as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P.
15 56; Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 322-23 (1986);
16 Eisenberg v. Ins. Co. of N. Am., 815 F.2d 1285, 1288-89 (9th Cir.
17 1987).

18 The moving party bears the burden of showing that there is
19 no material factual dispute. Therefore, the court must regard as
20 true the opposing party's evidence, if supported by affidavits or
21 other evidentiary material. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 324; Eisenberg,
22 815 F.2d at 1289. The court must draw all reasonable inferences
23 in favor of the party against whom summary judgment is sought.
24 Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574,
25 587 (1986); Intel Corp. v. Hartford Accident & Indem. Co., 952
26 F.2d 1551, 1558 (9th Cir. 1991).

27 Material facts which would preclude entry of summary
28 judgment are those which, under applicable substantive law, may

1 affect the outcome of the case. The substantive law will
2 identify which facts are material. Anderson v. Liberty Lobby,
3 Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986).

4 Where the moving party does not bear the burden of proof on
5 an issue at trial, the moving party may discharge its burden of
6 production by either of two methods:

7 The moving party may produce evidence negating an
8 essential element of the nonmoving party's case, or,
9 after suitable discovery, the moving party may show
10 that the nonmoving party does not have enough evidence
of an essential element of its claim or defense to
carry its ultimate burden of persuasion at trial.

11 Nissan Fire & Marine Ins. Co., Ltd., v. Fritz Cos., Inc., 210
12 F.3d 1099, 1106 (9th Cir. 2000).

13 If the moving party discharges its burden by showing an
14 absence of evidence to support an essential element of a claim or
15 defense, it is not required to produce evidence showing the
16 absence of a material fact on such issues, or to support its
17 motion with evidence negating the non-moving party's claim. Id.;
18 see also Lujan v. Nat'l Wildlife Fed'n, 497 U.S. 871, 885 (1990);
Bhan v. NME Hosps., Inc., 929 F.2d 1404, 1409 (9th Cir. 1991).

19 If the moving party shows an absence of evidence to support the
20 non-moving party's case, the burden then shifts to the non-moving
21 party to produce "specific evidence, through affidavits or
22 admissible discovery material, to show that the dispute exists."
23 Bhan, 929 F.2d at 1409.

24 If the moving party discharges its burden by negating an
25 essential element of the non-moving party's claim or defense, it
26 must produce affirmative evidence of such negation. Nissan, 210
27 F.3d at 1105. If the moving party produces such evidence, the
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1 burden then shifts to the non-moving party to produce specific
2 evidence to show that a dispute of material fact exists. Id.

3 If the moving party does not meet its initial burden of
4 production by either method, the non-moving party is under no
5 obligation to offer any evidence in support of its opposition.
6 Id. This is true even though the non-moving party bears the
7 ultimate burden of persuasion at trial. Id. at 1107.

8 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56(d) provides that a court
9 may defer considering a motion for summary judgment, deny it, or
10 issue any other appropriate order if "a nonmovant shows by
11 affidavit or declaration that, for specified reasons, it cannot
12 present facts essential to justify its opposition."

13 DISCUSSION

14 BOA brings a motion for summary judgment with respect to
15 Plaintiff's First, Third, and Fifth Causes of Action.

16 I. First Cause of Action: Violation of the FCRA

17 Section 1681b(b)(2)A requires that a person may not procure
18 a consumer report for employment purposes unless:

19 (i) a clear and conspicuous disclosure has been made in
20 writing to the consumer at any time before the report
21 is procured or caused to be procured, in a document
22 that consists solely of the disclosure, that a consumer
23 report may be obtained for employment purposes; and

24 (ii) the consumer has authorized in writing (which
25 authorization may be made on the document referred to
26 in clause (i)) the procurement of the report by that
27 person.

28 In his First Cause of Action, Plaintiff alleges that BOA
violated 15 U.S.C. § 1681b(b)(2)(A) because the Disclosure Form
was not a stand-alone document in that it contained:

(1) extraneous information such as state law disclosures and

1 (2) a liability waiver. Both arguments lack merit.

2 Plaintiff alleges that the Disclosure Form was not a stand-
3 alone document and instead appeared alongside other documents as
4 part of BOA's job application process, including other
5 information related to his background check, such as California
6 state law disclosures. Section 1681b(b)(2)(A) requires that the
7 disclosure be "clear and conspicuous" and "in a document that
8 consists solely of the disclosure." As the Federal Trade
9 Commission has noted, the "the reason for specifying a stand-
10 alone disclosure was so that consumers will not be distracted by
11 additional information at the time the disclosure is given."
12 Letter from Cynthia Lamb, Investigator, Div. of Credit Practices,
13 Fed. Trade Comm'n, to Richard Steer, Division of Credit
14 Practices, 1997 WL 33791227, at *1 (Oct. 21, 1997). The
15 disclosure may be accompanied by the authorization for
16 procurement of a report required by § 1681b(b)(2)(B). Id. BOA
17 has provided a screenshot showing that the Disclosure Form and
18 Authorization appeared as a stand-alone electronic page. Prebil
19 Decl. ¶¶ 4-5, Ex. 1. This complies with § 1681b(b)(2)(A).

20 Plaintiff alleges that the Disclosure Form and Authorization
21 was not a stand-alone document because it was displayed as part
22 of BOA's online application process, which included other
23 information such as various state law disclosures and
24 requirements for Plaintiff's signature. But the Disclosure and
25 Authorization appeared as a separate and distinct web page
26 separated from the rest of the documents. Id., Ex. 1. No other
27 information was displayed on the screen alongside the Disclosure
28 and Authorization. Plaintiff was required to click "Continue" to

1 view the rest of the online application. Id. ¶ 8. This
2 qualifies as a stand-alone document for purposes of
3 § 1681b(b)(2)(A). See Burnthorne-Martinez v. Sephora USA, Inc.,
4 No. 16-CV-02843-YGR, 2016 WL 6892721, at *6 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 23,
5 2016) (noting that the FCRA requires a separate and distinct
6 writing and, “[b]y analogy, the web page would also need to be
7 separate and distinct.”). As stated by a Central District of
8 California court considering an almost identical BOA disclosure
9 form provided as part of an online application, the “FCRA does
10 not prohibit an employer from providing an FCRA disclosure as
11 part of the employer’s job application process. Nor does the
12 FCRA prohibit an employer from providing an FCRA disclosure at
13 the same time the employer provides other employment documents.”
14 Newton v. Bank of Am., 2015 WL 10435907, at *8 (C.D. Cal. May 12,
15 2015).

16 Plaintiff also alleges that the Disclosure Form improperly
17 includes a liability waiver. As the Ninth Circuit has found,
18 “the FCRA unambiguously bars a prospective employer from
19 including a liability waiver on a disclosure document provided a
20 job applicant pursuant to Section 1681b(b)(2)(A).” Syed v. M-I,
21 LLC, 853 F.3d 492, 503 (9th Cir.), cert. denied, 138 S. Ct. 447,
22 (2017).

23 In Syed, the liability waiver read:

24 I understand the information obtained will be used as
25 one basis for employment or denial of employment. I
26 hereby discharge, release and indemnify prospective
27 employer, PreCheck, Inc., their agents, servants and
28 employees, and all parties that rely on this release
and/or the information obtained with this release from
any and all liability and claims arising by reason of
the use of this release and dissemination of
information that is false and untrue if obtained by a

1 third party without verification.

2 Id. at 497-98 (emphasis added). District courts have similarly
3 found that clear waivers of all liability associated with the
4 background check process violate the FCRA. See, e.g., Cunha v.
5 IntelliCheck, LLC, 254 F. Supp. 3d 1124, 1130 (N.D. Cal. 2017).

6 Here, Plaintiff contends that the following statement
7 appearing in the Authorization constitutes an illegal liability
8 waiver:

9 By signing below, you:

10 [. . .]

11 2. Agree, as permitted by law, that notices, documents
12 and communications may be provided electronically and
13 will meet the requirements set forth under Federal
14 and/or State law, and agree that a fax or photocopy of
15 this authorization with your signature should be
16 accepted with the same authority as the original.

17 Prebil Decl., Ex. 2 (emphasis added). Plaintiff contends that
18 this constitutes a waiver of liability under the FCRA, ICRA, and
19 CCRA, which is illegal under Syed.

20 Plaintiff's reading of the Authorization as a liability
21 waiver is strained. As both parties agree, contracts should be
22 "construed as a whole" and should "be interpreted to give effect
23 to the mutual intention of the parties." Opp. at 12, Reply at 3;
24 see also Leo F. Piazza Paving Co. v. Found. Constructors, Inc.,
25 128 Cal. App. 3d 583, 591 (1981). In Syed, the liability waiver
26 clearly and unambiguously served as a "broad release of
27 liability" for all violations of the FCRA. Syed, 853 F.3d at
28 498. By contrast, the portion of the Authorization pointed out
by Plaintiff serves to advise Plaintiff that notices, documents
and communications may be provided electronically and that such
notices, documents and communications should not violate the law

1 simply because they are provided electronically. Read in
2 context, this advises that the Disclosure Form's digital nature
3 does not affect its validity. The Authorization lacks the
4 "clear, unambiguous, and explicit" language necessary to
5 effectuate a waiver of all liability. R.H. v. Los Gatos Union
6 Sch. Dist., 33 F. Supp. 3d 1138, 1166 (N.D. Cal. 2014).

7 Because the Disclosure Form was a stand-alone document that
8 contained no extraneous information or liability waiver, it
9 complies with § 1681b(b)(2)(A).

10 II. Third Cause of Action: Violation of the ICRA

11 The ICRA, California Civil Code section 1786.16, provides
12 that a person may procure an investigative consumer report only
13 if the person:

14 procuring or causing the report to be made provides a
15 clear and conspicuous disclosure in writing to the
16 consumer at any time before the report is procured or
caused to be made in a document that consists solely of
the disclosure, that:

17 (i) An investigative consumer report may be obtained.

18 (ii) The permissible purpose of the report is
19 identified.

20 (iii) The disclosure may include information on the
21 consumer's character, general reputation, personal
characteristics, and mode of living.

22 (iv) Identifies the name, address, and telephone number
23 of the investigative consumer reporting agency
conducting the investigation.

24 (v) Notifies the consumer in writing of the nature and
25 scope of the investigation requested, including a
summary of the provisions of Section 1786.22.

26 (vi) Notifies the consumer of the Internet Web site
27 address of the investigative consumer reporting agency
28 identified in clause (iv), or, if the agency has no
Internet Web site address, the telephone number of the
agency, where the consumer may find information about
the investigative reporting agency's privacy practices,

1 including whether the consumer's personal information
2 will be sent outside the United States or its
territories and information that complies with
subdivision (d) of Section 1786.20.

3 Plaintiff asserts that the Disclosure Form violates the ICRA
4 in two respects: (1) the disclosure was not provided in a
5 document consisting "solely" of the disclosure (repeating many of
6 the same arguments asserted in his FCRA claim) and (2) the
7 disclosure did not identify the "investigative consumer reporting
8 agency conducting the investigation," as identified in subsection
9 (iv).

10 For the reasons stated in the previous section, Plaintiff's
11 first assertion lacks merit. The Disclosure Form was a stand-
12 alone document and did not contain extraneous information. As
13 for Plaintiff's second assertion, BOA points out that it properly
14 disclosed the information for the two parties that would provide
15 investigative consumer reports, namely, TALX and BIG. Plaintiff
16 responds that BOA did not disclose that, while the investigative
17 consumer report on Plaintiff was contracted to BIG, it was
18 actually performed by third parties Fieldprint, Inc. (which in
19 turn requested a report from the FBI) and Transunion, LLC, as
20 stated in a declaration provided by BIG. See also Declaration of
21 Timothy Gaudreau (Gaudreau Decl.) ¶¶ 13-14. But the plain
22 language of section 178616(a)(2)(iv) only requires that BOA
23 identify "the investigative consumer reporting agency conducting
24 the investigation." Here, BIG is the "investigative consumer
25 reporting agency conducting the investigation." That BIG
26 obtained information from several different repositories, such as
27 Fieldprint, Transunion, and the FBI, does not take away from this
28 fact. BOA was only obliged to disclose BIG, the agency it

1 engaged to provide a report, and not the various sources that BIG
2 used in conducting its investigation.

3 III. Fifth Cause of Action: Violation of the CCRA

4 The CCRA, California Civil Code section 1785.20.5 states:

5 Prior to requesting a consumer credit report for
6 employment purposes, the user of the report shall
7 provide written notice to the person involved. The
8 notice shall inform the person that a report will be
9 used, and shall identify the specific basis under
10 subdivision (a) of Section 1024.5 of the Labor Code for
11 use of the report. The notice shall also inform the
12 person of the source of the report, and shall contain a
13 box that the person may check off to receive a copy of
14 the credit report. If the consumer indicates that he or
15 she wishes to receive a copy of the report, the user
16 shall request that a copy be provided to the person
17 when the user requests its copy from the credit
18 reporting agency. The report to the user and to the
19 subject person shall be provided contemporaneously and
20 at no charge to the subject person.

21 In his Fifth Cause of Action, Plaintiff asserts that BOA
22 violated this section because it did not disclose that a consumer
23 credit report would be used, why it would be used, and who would
24 issue the report.

25 As a preliminary matter, BOA asserts that it was excused
26 from compliance with section 1785.20 because of an exemption in
27 California Civil Code section 1024.5. Section 1024.5 provides
28 that an employer or prospective employer shall not use a consumer
credit report for employment purposes unless the position is one
that is listed in subsection (a). Section 1024.5(b) states:

(b) This section does not apply to a person or business
subject to Sections 6801 to 6809, inclusive, of Title
15 of the United States Code and state and federal
statutes or regulations implementing those sections if
the person or business is subject to compliance
oversight by a state or federal regulatory agency with
respect to those laws.

BOA asserts that it is subject to the Title 15 code sections

1 referenced here and is thus exempt under section 1024.5(b). The
2 exemption of section 1024.5(b), however, appears to apply only to
3 the restrictions of "this section," i.e., section 1024.5, and not
4 section 1785.20.

5 In any event, Plaintiff's arguments that the Disclosure Form
6 does not comply with the CCRA lack merit. The Disclosure Form
7 disclosed that a consumer credit report would be used. See
8 Prebil Decl., Ex. 2 at 1 ("Consumer reports may contain
9 information concerning your . . . credit history . . . "). It
10 also disclosed the source of the consumer credit report requested
11 by BOA. Id. ("Bank may obtain consumer reports from various
12 entities, including, but not limited to" TALX and BIG). Again,
13 Plaintiff's argument that BIG pulled information from other
14 sources in compiling its consumer credit report goes too far.
15 The statute requires BOA to disclose the source of the report it
16 requested, not all of the various repositories of information
17 that the source used in compiling its report. BOA was not
18 required to disclose why it requested the report. Nor was BOA
19 required to disclose which basis provided in section 1024.5(a)
20 applied, because BOA is exempt under section 1024.5(b), which
21 Plaintiff does not contest.

22 IV. Plaintiff's Rule 56(d) Request

23 Plaintiff requests that the Court defer ruling on BOA's
24 summary judgment motion, arguing that additional discovery is
25 needed. Plaintiff has not explained why the requested discovery
26 is essential to his defense. Accordingly, his request is denied.

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CONCLUSION

BOA's motion for summary judgment on Plaintiff's First, Third, and Fifth Causes of Action is GRANTED. Plaintiff's Second and Fourth Causes of Action against BOA remain in the case.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: April 25, 2018



CLAUDIA WILKEN
United States District Judge