

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

Civil Division

Central District, Stanley Mosk Courthouse, Department 224

22STCV06081

WILLIAM B. PITT, et al. vs ANGELINA JOLIE, et al.

May 4, 2026

3:57 PM

Judge: Honorable Cindy Pánuco
Judicial Assistant: Pedro Martinez
Courtroom Assistant: Deonna Jones

CSR: None
ERM: None
Deputy Sheriff: None

APPEARANCES:

For Plaintiff(s): No Appearances

For Defendant(s): No Appearances

NATURE OF PROCEEDINGS: Ruling on Submitted Matter

The Court, having taken the matter under submission on 04/17/2026 for Hearing on Motion to Compel Compliance With Prior Responses from Deft. Angelina Jolie, now rules as follows:

FINAL RULING

Plaintiff's motion to compel compliance is DENIED without prejudice.

ANALYSIS

Introduction

The complaint alleges that Plaintiff and Defendant purchased a controlling interest in Chateau Miraval S.A., a French company comprising a home and vineyard in the south of France, agreeing not to sell their respective interests without the other's consent. The vineyard became profitable, and has grown into a multimillion dollar venture. In October 2021, Defendant purported to sell her interest to a Luxembourg-based spirits manufacturer. Defendant consummated the sale without Plaintiff's knowledge.

Procedural History

On November 22, 2024, Plaintiff moved to compel Defendant to produce 126 unredacted emails between non-attorneys and to supplement her privilege log.

On December 17, 2025, Judge Lia Martin granted the motion and ordered production of 22 categories of documents identified on Defendant's privilege log.

On January 26, 2026, Defendant petitioned for writ relief. On January 27, 2026, the Court of Appeal stayed Judge Martin's order. On February 25, 2026, the Court of Appeal issued an

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Alternative Writ directing the trial court as follows:

“You are commanded, immediately upon receipt of this writ, either to (a) vacate your order of December 17, 2025 in Los Angeles County Superior Court Case number 22STCV06081, and thereafter make a new and different order finding that Jolie has met her initial burden of establishing facts necessary to support a prima facie claim of attorney-client privilege and setting the matter for a hearing (*see Costco Wholesale Corp. v. Superior Court*, (2009) 47 Cal. 4th 725, 733)...”

(Order and Alternative Writ of Mandate, 2/25/26.)

The matter was reassigned to this Court on March 2, 2026.

On April 2, 2026, Judge Martin vacated her prior order and found Defendant had met her initial burden under *Costco*, holding:

“Defendant Jolie has met her initial burden of establishing facts necessary to support a prima facie claim of attorney-client privilege. A hearing is scheduled for April 17, 2026, at 10:30 a.m. in Department 3 of the Stanley Mosk Courthouse, located at 111 N. Hill Street Room 224, Los Angeles California, 90012, before the Honorable Cincy Panuco [sic] pursuant to *Costco Wholesale Corp. vs. Superior Court* (2009) 47 Cal.4th 725, 733.”

(Order on Motion to Compel Compliance 4/2/26.)

This Court heard argument on April 17, 2026, and took the matter under submission. The Court now rules as follows.

Legal Standards

Under CCP § 2017.010, “any party may obtain discovery regarding any matter, not privileged, that is relevant to the subject matter involved in the pending action...if the matter either is itself admissible in evidence or appears reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence.”

A party to whom an inspection, copying, testing, or sampling demand has been directed may respond with an indication that the party will comply with the particular demand. (Code Civ. Proc., § 2031.210, subd. (a)(1).) If a party fails to permit inspection in accordance with a statement of compliance, the demanding party may move to compel compliance. (Code Civ.

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Proc., § 2031.320.)

The attorney-client privilege protects confidential communications between client and counsel made for the purpose of legal advice. (Evid. Code, § 952; *Roberts v. City of Palmdale* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 363.) The privilege extends to communications shared with agents or representatives reasonably necessary to accomplish the purpose of the legal consultation. (*Zurich American Ins. Co. v. Superior Court* (2007) 155 Cal.App.4th 1485.) Indeed, privilege may apply to communications involving clerks, secretaries, interpreters, or other agents who assist in the attorney-client relationship (*Insurance Co. of North America v. Superior Court*, 108 Cal.App.3d 758 (1980)). The privilege also applies to agents of the client who are necessary to understand or act upon the lawyer's advice (*Zurich American Ins. Co. v. Superior Court*, 155 Cal.App.4th 1485 (2007)).

Under *Costco*, once a party establishes facts sufficient to support a prima facie claim of privilege, the burden shifts to the opponent to demonstrate the privilege does not apply. (*Costco*, supra, 47 Cal.4th at p. 733.)

Discussion

Plaintiff's motion initially contended that Defendant improperly withheld or redacted hundreds of emails, including 126 communications exclusively between non-attorneys, on the basis of privilege. Plaintiff argued that communications between non-lawyers (such as her business manager Terry Bird, consultants, or assistants) are not protected under California Evidence Code § 952, and therefore Defendant must be compelled to comply with her previous discovery responses.

In its Opposition to Plaintiff's motion Defendant first represents that, after receiving the motion, Defendant provided a revised privilege log which Plaintiff accepted. After revisions to the privilege log, the parties agree that only 22 documents remain contested. (Jolie COE, Exh. 40). Further, Defendant maintains that all 22 of the documents contain privileged communications. Namely, Defendant contends that 13 of the 22 documents contain communications between Jolie and Terry Bird discussing legal advice, strategy, and communications to and from their jointly retained Luxembourg law firm, Arendt & Medernach ("Arendt") – with Arendt's advice often the first communication in the email chain. Arendt separately represented Nouvel, and because Bird was Nouvel's sole manager, Bird was a joint holder of the privilege. Bird was also Jolie's business manager and primary point of contact between Jolie and her lawyers and thus Jolie's "authorized representative" under Evidence Code section 951. As to the remaining 9 documents, Defendant contends they involve the same issue – Jolie's authorized representatives (Chloe

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Dalton and Arminka Helic) or hired consulting experts (James Friel and Marjorie Brabet-Friel) discussing Arendt’s legal advice and helping prepare and exchange communications with the lawyers.

Defendant provides evidence of the contents of each of the communications at issue. (Jolie Decl. ¶11-22) The documents concern communications with Terry Bird, the Friels, and Ms. Dalton and Ms. Helic. (Jolie Decl. ¶¶8-9) Terry Bird, Ms. Dalton, and Ms. Helic are employees, and therefore agents, of Defendant. (*Id.*) The Friels were introduced to Defendant regarding the sale of Defendant’s sale of her interest in Miraval. Defendant thereafter authorized her attorneys at Arendt to utilize them to “assist in providing [her] legal advice regarding the transaction.” (Jolie Decl. ¶ 24)

Both the Court of Appeal and Judge Martin have already found this showing sufficient to establish Defendant’s prima facie claim of privilege.

The burden therefore shifts to Plaintiff.

The inquiry remaining for this Court, is whether Plaintiff’s moving papers and evidence overcome Defendant’s privilege claim. “Evidence Code section 915, while prohibiting examination of assertedly privileged information, does not prohibit disclosure or examination of other information to permit the court to evaluate the basis for the claim, such as whether the privilege is held by the party asserting it.” *Costco Wholesale Corp. v. Superior Court* (2009) 47 Cal.4th 725, 737. Plaintiff argues that emails between non-attorneys cannot be privileged and relies on exhibits already before the Court (namely Exhibits 6 and 16). However, those same materials were deemed sufficient to establish Defendant’s privilege showing. Defendant argues that the same evidence can not also rebut the Defendant’s prima facie showing. The parties offered no law addressing that contention, and the Court is not aware of any. The Court finds that while Defendant’s evidence, combined with additional facts, could potentially rebut the privilege, Plaintiff has not done so on the present record.

Plaintiff requested leave to conduct further discovery and supplement the record. The Court denied that request, finding the Court of Appeals mandate required application of *Costco*’s burden-shifting framework to the existing papers in support of the motion.

On this record, Plaintiff has not met his burden to defeat Defendant’s prima facie privilege showing.

Because further discovery may yield additional facts relevant to this issue, the denial is without

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prejudice.

Sanctions

Under Code of Civil Procedure section 2031.300, the Court shall impose a monetary sanction against any party, person, or attorney who unsuccessfully makes or opposes a motion to compel a response to a demand for inspection unless the Court finds that the one subject to the sanction acted with substantial justification or that other circumstances make the imposition of the sanction unjust. (See Code Civ. Proc., § 2031.300, subd. (c).)

Plaintiff did not request sanctions.

Defendant seeks \$33,692.50 in sanctions.

Sanctions are not warranted. Judge Martin initially granted Plaintiff's motion, demonstrating Plaintiff's position was not without substantial justification. (Code Civ. Proc., § 2031.300, subd. (c).)

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, Plaintiff's motion to compel compliance is DENIED without prejudice.

Clerk is to give notice.

Certificate of Service is attached.