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FILED
ALAMEDA COUNTY

NOV 12 2020

CLERK OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

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9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

10 COUNTY OF ALAMEDA

11 EMA BELL,

12 Plaintiff,

13 vs.

14 HOMEGOODS, INC.,

15 Defendant.

Case No.: R620081184

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

**(Violation of Health & Safety Code § 25249.5 et
seq.)**

16 Plaintiff Ema Bell ("Plaintiff"), by and through her attorneys, alleges the following cause
17 of action in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California.

18 **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

19 1. Plaintiff brings this representative action on behalf of all California citizens to
20 enforce relevant portions of Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified at
21 the Health and Safety Code § 25249.5 et seq ("Proposition 65"), which reads, in relevant part,
22 "[n]o person in the course of doing business shall knowingly and intentionally expose any
23 individual to a chemical known to the state to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity without first
24 giving clear and reasonable warning to such individual ...". Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

25 2. This complaint is a representative action brought by Plaintiff in the public interest
26 of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People's right to be informed of the health
27 hazards caused by exposure to lead, a toxic chemical found in floral print ceramic plates/dishes
28 sold and/or distributed by defendant Homegoods, Inc. ("Homegoods" or the "Defendant") in
California.

1 3. Lead is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and
2 adverse developmental and reproductive effects in both males and females. On October 1, 1992,
3 the state of California listed lead as a chemical known to cause cancer and it has come under the
4 purview of Proposition 65 regulations since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health
5 & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 & 25249.10(b). On February 27, 1987, the State of California listed
6 lead as a chemical known to cause adverse developmental and reproductive effects in both males
7 and females.

8 4. Proposition 65 requires all businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate
9 within California or sell products therein to comply with Proposition 65 regulations. Included in
10 such regulations is the requirement that businesses must label any product containing a Proposition
11 65-listed chemical with a “clear and reasonable” warning before “knowingly and intentionally”
12 exposing any person to any such listed chemical.

13 5. Proposition 65 allows for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation
14 for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00) to be
15 imposed upon defendants in a civil action for violations of Proposition 65. Health & Safety Code
16 § 25249.7(b). Proposition 65 also allows for any court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin the
17 actions of a defendant which “violate or threaten to violate” the statute. Health & Safety Code §
18 25249.7.

19 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendant distributes and/or offers for sale in California,
20 without a requisite exposure warning, floral print ceramic plates/dishes (the “Products”) that
21 expose persons to lead.

22 7. Defendant’s failure to warn consumers and other individuals in California of the
23 health hazards associated with exposure to lead in conjunction with the sale and/or distribution of
24 the Products is a violation of Proposition 65 and subjects Defendant to the enjoinder and civil
25 penalties described herein.

26 8. Plaintiff seeks civil penalties against Defendant for its violations of Proposition 65
27 in accordance with Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b).
28

1 9. Plaintiff also seeks injunctive relief, preliminarily and permanently, requiring
2 Defendant to provide purchasers or users of the Products with required warnings related to the
3 dangers and health hazards associated with exposure to lead pursuant to Health and Safety Code §
4 25249.7(a).

5 10. Plaintiff further seeks a reasonable award of attorney's fees and costs.

6 **PARTIES**

7 11. Plaintiff is a citizen of the State of California acting in the interest of the general
8 public to promote awareness of exposures to toxic chemicals in products sold in California and to
9 improve human health by reducing hazardous substances contained in such items. She brings this
10 action in the public interest pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(d).

11 12. Defendant Homegoods, through its business, effectively imports, distributes, sells,
12 and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California, or it implies by its conduct that
13 it imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California.

14 13. Plaintiff alleges that defendant Homegoods is a "person" in the course of doing
15 business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

16 **VENUE AND JURISDICTION**

17 14. Venue is proper in the County of Alameda because one or more of the instances of
18 wrongful conduct occurred, and continue to occur in this county and/or because Defendant
19 conducted, and continues to conduct, business in the County of Alameda with respect to the
20 Products.

21 15. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to California Constitution
22 Article VI, § 10, which grants the Superior Court original jurisdiction in all causes except those
23 given by statute to other trial courts. Health and Safety Code § 25249.7 allows for the enforcement
24 of violations of Proposition 65 in any Court of competent jurisdiction; therefore, this Court has
25 jurisdiction over this lawsuit.

26 16. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendant because Defendant is either a citizen of
27 the State of California, has sufficient minimum contacts with the State of California, is registered
28 with the California Secretary of State as foreign corporations authorized to do business in the State

1 of California, and/or has otherwise purposefully availed itself of the California market. Such
2 purposeful availment has rendered the exercise of jurisdiction by California courts consistent and
3 permissible with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

4 STATUTORY BACKGROUND

5 17. The people of the State of California declared in Proposition 65 their right “[t]o be
6 informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive
7 harm.” (Section 1(b) of Initiative Measure, Proposition 65.)

8 18. To effect this goal, Proposition 65 requires that individuals be provided with a
9 “clear and reasonable warning” before being exposed to substances listed by the State of California
10 as causing cancer or reproductive toxicity. H&S Code § 25249.6 states, in pertinent part:

11 No person in the course of doing business shall knowingly and intentionally expose any
12 individual to a chemical known to the state to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity without
13 first giving clear and reasonable warning to such individual...

14 19. An exposure to a chemical in a consumer product is one “which results from a
15 person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other reasonably foreseeable use of a
16 consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a consumer service.” (27 CCR §
17 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the course of doing business ...
18 shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or transferred unless the product
19 is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

20 20. Pursuant to H&S Code § 25603.1, the warning may be provided by using one or
21 more of the following methods individually or in combination:¹

- 22 a. A warning that appears on a product’s label or other labeling.
- 23 b. Identification of the product at the retail outlet in a manner which provides
24 a warning. Identification may be through shelf labeling, signs, menus, or a combination
25 thereof.

26
27 ¹ Alternatively, a person in the course of doing business may elect to comply with the warning
28 requirements set out in the amended version of 27 CCR 25601, *et.seq.* as amended on August 30,
2016, and operative on August 30, 2018.

1 c. The warnings provided pursuant to subparagraphs (a) and (b) shall be
2 prominently placed upon a product's labels or other labeling or displayed at the retail outlet
3 with such conspicuousness, as compared with other words, statements, designs, or devices
4 in the label, labeling or display as to render it likely to be read and understood by an
5 ordinary individual under customary conditions of purchase or use.

6 d. A system of signs, public advertising identifying the system and toll-free
7 information services, or any other system that provides clear and reasonable warnings.

8 21. Proposition 65 provides that any "person who violates or threatens to violate" the
9 statute may be enjoined in a court of competent jurisdiction. (H&S Code § 25249.7.) The phrase
10 "threaten to violate" is defined to mean creating "a condition in which there is a substantial
11 probability that a violation will occur." (H&S Code § 25249.11(e).) Violators are liable for civil
12 penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day for each violation of the Act (H&S Code § 25249.7) for up to
13 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00).

14 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

15 22. On October 1, 1992, the state of California listed lead as a chemical known to cause
16 cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations since that time. Cal. Code
17 Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 & 25249.10(b). On February 27,
18 1987, the State of California listed lead as a chemical known to cause adverse developmental and
19 reproductive effects in both males and females. In summary, the Listed Chemical was listed under
20 Proposition 65 as a chemical known to the State to cause cancer and adverse developmental and
21 reproductive effects in both males and females.

22 23. The consumer exposures that are the subject of this Complaint result from through
23 dermal absorption. Increased duration of contact, microwaving, increased acidity, and increased
24 food temperatures in contact with the glazed food contact surface will result in increased levels of
25 lead transferred into food. When foods contaminated with lead due to contact with the Products
26 are consumed, lead ingestion will occur which will increase BLLs.

1 24. Defendant has processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell and/or sold the
2 Products in California since at least July 16, 2020. The Products continue to be distributed and
3 sold in California without the requisite warning information.

4 25. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant has knowingly and intentionally
5 exposed users and/or consumers of the Products to lead without first giving a clear and reasonable
6 exposure warning to such individuals.

7 26. As a proximate result of acts by Defendant, as a person in the course of doing
8 business within the meaning of H&S Code § 25249.11, individuals throughout the State of
9 California, including in Alameda County, have been exposed to lead without a clear and reasonable
10 warning on the Products. The individuals subject to the violative exposures include normal and
11 foreseeable users and consumers that use the Products, as well as all others exposed to the Products.

12 **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

13 27. On July 16, 2020, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety
14 Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendant concerning the exposure of California citizens to lead
15 contained in the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendant and to
16 the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District attorneys and City
17 Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein the herein
18 violations allegedly occurred.

19 28. The Notice complied with all procedural requirements of Proposition 65 including
20 the attachment of a Certificate of Merit affirming that Plaintiff’s counsel had consulted with at
21 least one person with relevant and appropriate expertise who reviewed relevant data regarding lead
22 exposure, and that counsel believed there was meritorious and reasonable cause for a private
23 action.

24 29. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff’s best information and belief, none of
25 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted a
26 cause of action against Defendant under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which are
27 the subject of the Notice.

28

1 30. Plaintiff is commencing this action more than sixty (60) days from the date of the
2 Notice to Defendant, as required by law.

3 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

4 **(By Plaintiff against Defendant for the Violation of Proposition 65)**

5 31. Plaintiff hereby repeats and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 30 of
6 this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

7 32. Defendant has, at all times mentioned herein, acted as distributor, and/or retailer of
8 the Product.

9 33. The Products contain lead, a hazardous chemical found on the Proposition 65 list
10 of chemicals known to be hazardous to human health.

11 34. The Product does not comply with the Proposition 65 warning requirements.

12 35. Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times
13 herein, and at least since July 16, 2020, continuing until the present, that Defendant has continued
14 to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Product to lead
15 without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

16 36. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
17 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Products. Consequently, the primary route of
18 exposure to these chemicals is through ingestion and/or dermal contact. Increased duration of
19 contact, microwaving, increased acidity, and increased food temperatures in contact with the
20 glazed food contact surface will result in increased levels of lead transferred into food. When foods
21 contaminated with lead due to contact with the Products are consumed, lead ingestion will occur
22 which will increase BLLs.

23 37. Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that such exposures will
24 continue every day until clear and reasonable warnings are provided to purchasers and users or
25 until this known toxic chemical is removed from the Products.

26 38. Defendant has knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the
27 Products exposes individuals to lead, and Defendant intends that exposures to lead will occur by
28

1 its deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale and offering of the
2 Products to consumers in California

3 39. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this
4 Complaint.

5 40. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b), as a consequence of the above
6 described acts, Defendant is liable for a maximum civil penalty of \$2,500 per day per violation.

7 41. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(a), this Court is specifically
8 authorized to grant injunctive relief in favor of Plaintiff and against Defendant.

9 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

10 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant and requests the following
11 relief:

12 A. That the court assess civil penalties against each Defendant in the amount of \$2,500
13 per day for each violation for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per
14 violation of \$912,000.00) in accordance with Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b);

15 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendant mandating
16 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Products;

17 C. That the court grant Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs of suit, in the
18 amount of \$50,000.00.

19 D. That the court grant any further relief as may be just and proper.

20 Dated: November 11, 2020

BRODSKY & SMITH, LLC

21 By: _____

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