

1 Evan J. Smith, Esquire (SBN 242352)
2 Ryan P. Cardona, Esquire (SBN 302113)
3 BRODSKY & SMITH
4 9595 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 900
5 Beverly Hills, CA 90212
6 Telephone: (877) 534-2590
7 Facsimile: (310) 247-0160

8 *Attorneys for Plaintiff*

ELECTRONICALLY
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Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco

08/10/2022
Clerk of the Court
BY: LAURA SIMMONS
Deputy Clerk

9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
10 COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

11 EMA BELL,

12 Plaintiff,

13 vs.

14 DJECO-US, DJECO USA, LLC,
15 BARNES & NOBLE COLLEGE
16 BOOKSELLERS, LLC, BARNES &
17 NOBLE BOOKSELLERS, INC.,

18 Defendants.

Case No.:

CGC-22-601189

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

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

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

21 **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

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

28 2. This complaint is a representative action brought by Plaintiff in the public interest
of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People's right to be informed of the health
hazards caused by exposure to Di-isodecyl phthalate (DIDP), a toxic chemical found in DJECO
Children's Magic Coloring Sets sold and/or distributed by defendants DJECO-US, DJECO USA,

1 LLC (collectively “DJECO”), Barnes & Noble College Booksellers, LLC, and Barnes & Noble
2 Booksellers, Inc. (Collectively “Barnes & Noble” and collectively with DJECO, “Defendants”) in
3 California.

4 3. DIDP is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause reproductive
5 toxicity. On April 20, 2007, the State of California listed DIDP as a chemical known to the State
6 to cause reproductive toxicity and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations
7 since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 &
8 25249.10(b).

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

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

20 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendants distribute and/or offer for sale in California,
21 without a requisite exposure warning, DJECO Children’s Magic Coloring Sets (the “Products”)
22 that expose persons to DIDP when used for their intended purpose.

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

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

1 implies by its conduct that it imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use
2 in the State of California. Plaintiff alleges that defendant Barnes & Noble Booksellers, Inc. is a
3 “person” in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code sections
4 25249.6 and 25249.11.

5 **VENUE AND JURISDICTION**

6 16. Venue is proper in the County of San Francisco because one or more of the
7 instances of wrongful conduct occurred and continue to occur in this county and/or because
8 Defendants conducted, and continue to conduct, business in the County of San Francisco with
9 respect to the Products.

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

15 18. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because each defendant is either a
16 citizen of the State of California, has sufficient minimum contacts with the State of California, is
17 registered with the California Secretary of State as foreign corporations authorized to do business
18 in the State of California, and/or has otherwise purposefully availed itself of the California market.
19 Such purposeful availment has rendered the exercise of jurisdiction by California courts consistent
20 and permissible with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

21 **STATUTORY BACKGROUND**

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

25 20. To effect this goal, Proposition 65 requires that individuals be provided with a
26 “clear and reasonable warning” before being exposed to substances listed by the State of California
27 as causing cancer or reproductive toxicity. H&S Code § 25249.6 states, in pertinent part:
28

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

4 21. An exposure to a chemical in a consumer product is one “which results from a
5 person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other reasonably foreseeable use of a
6 consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a consumer service.” (27 CCR §
7 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the course of doing business ...
8 shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or transferred unless the product
9 is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

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

12 a. A warning that appears on a product’s label or other labeling.

13 b. Identification of the product at the retail outlet in a manner which provides
14 a warning. Identification may be through shelf labeling, signs, menus, or a combination
15 thereof.

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

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

23 23. Proposition 65 provides that any “person who violates or threatens to violate” the
24 statute may be enjoined in a court of competent jurisdiction. (H&S Code § 25249.7.) The phrase
25 “threaten to violate” is defined to mean creating “a condition in which there is a substantial

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 probability that a violation will occur.” (H&S Code § 25249.11(e).) Violators are liable for civil
2 penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day for each violation of the Act (H&S Code § 25249.7) for up to
3 365 days.

4 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

5 24. On April 20, 2007, the State of California listed DIDP as a chemical known to the
6 State to cause reproductive toxicity and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65
7 regulations since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8
8 & 25249.10(b).

9 25. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
10 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Product. The primary route of exposure is
11 through dermal absorption directly through the skin when consumers use, touch, or handle the
12 Products. Exposure through ingestion will occur by touching the Product with subsequent touching
13 of the user’s hand to mouth. No clear and reasonable warning is provided with the Products
14 regarding the health hazards of exposure to DIDP.

15 26. Defendants have manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell
16 and/or sold the Products in California since at least August 11, 2021. The Products continue to be
17 distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.

18 27. At all times relevant to this action, Defendants have knowingly and intentionally
19 exposed users of the Products to DIDP without first giving a clear and reasonable exposure
20 warning to such individuals.

21 28. As a proximate result of acts by each defendant, as a person in the course of doing
22 business within the meaning of H&S Code § 25249.11, individuals throughout the State of
23 California, including in San Francisco County, have been exposed to DIDP without a clear and
24 reasonable warning on the Products. The individuals subject to the violative exposures include
25 normal and foreseeable users and consumers that use the Products, as well as all others exposed to
26 the Products.

27 **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

1 29. On July 11, 2021, Plaintiff purchased the Product from Barnes & Noble. At the
2 time of purchase, Defendants did not provide a Proposition 65 exposure warning for DIDP or any
3 other Proposition 65 listed chemical in a manner consistent with H&S Code § 25603.1 as described
4 *supra*.

5 30. The Product was sent to a testing laboratory for phthalate testing to determine the
6 phthalate content of the Product.

7 31. On August 2, 2021, the laboratory provided the results of its analysis. Results of
8 this test determined the Product exposes users to DIDP (the “Chemical Test Report”).

9 32. Plaintiff provided the Chemical Test Report and Product to an analytical chemist
10 to determine if, based on the findings of the Chemical Test Report and the reasonable and
11 foreseeable use of the Product, exposure to DIDP will occur at levels that require Proposition 65
12 warnings under the Clear and Reasonable Warnings section 25601 of Title 27 of the California
13 Code of Regulations.

14 33. On August 11, 2021, Plaintiff received from the analytical chemist an exposure
15 assessment report which concluded that persons in California who use the Products will be exposed
16 to levels of DIDP that require a Proposition 65 exposure warning.

17 34. On August 11, 2021, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety
18 Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendants concerning the exposure of California citizens to
19 DIDP from use of the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendants
20 and to the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District attorneys and
21 City Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein the herein
22 violations allegedly occurred.

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

28

1 45. Defendants have knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the
2 Products exposes individuals to DIDP, and Defendants intend that exposures to DIDP will occur
3 by their deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale and offering
4 of the Products to consumers in California

5 46. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this
6 Complaint.

7 47. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b), as a consequence of the above
8 described acts, Defendants are liable for a maximum civil penalty of \$2,500 per day per violation.

9 48. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(a), this Court is specifically
10 authorized to grant injunctive relief in favor of Plaintiff and against Defendants.

11 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

12 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants and requests the following
13 relief:

14 A. That the court assess civil penalties against each defendant in the amount of \$2,500
15 per day for each violation for up to 365 days in accordance with Health and Safety Code §
16 25249.7(b);

17 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendants mandating
18 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Products;

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

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

22 Dated: August 10, 2022

BRODSKY & SMITH

23 By: 

24 Evan J. Smith (SBN242352)

Ryan P. Cardona (SBN302113)

25 9595 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 900

Beverly Hills, CA 90212

26 Telephone: (877) 534-2590

27 Facsimile: (310) 247-0160

28 *Attorneys for Plaintiff*