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ELECTRONICALLY
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Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco

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Clerk of the Court
BY: JEFFREY FLORES
Deputy Clerk

9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

CGC-26-637640

10 COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

11 PRECILA BALABBO,

12 Plaintiff,

13 vs.

14 BUMBLE BEE FOODS, LLC,

15 Defendant.

Case No.:

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

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

16 Plaintiff Precila Balabbo (“Plaintiff”), by and through her attorneys, alleges the following
17 cause 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 canned shrimp, including but not
28 limited to *Bumble Bee*® tiny shrimps, sold and/or distributed by defendant Bumble Bee Foods,
LLC (“Bumble Bee” or “Defendant”) in California.

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

7 4. Proposition 65 requires all businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate
8 within California or sell products therein to comply with Proposition 65 regulations. Included in
9 such regulations is the requirement that businesses must label any product containing a Proposition
10 65-listed chemical that will create an exposure above safe harbor levels with a “clear and
11 reasonable” warning before “knowingly and intentionally” exposing any person to any such listed
12 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 manufactured, sold, packaged, and/or distributed
20 canned shrimp, including but not limited to *Bumble Bee*® tiny shrimps (the “Products”), in
21 California, without a requisite exposure warning, Products that expose persons to lead when
22 consumed.

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

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

1 of violations of Proposition 65 in any Court of competent jurisdiction; therefore, this Court has
2 jurisdiction over this lawsuit.

3 16. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendant because Defendant is either a citizen of
4 the State of California, has sufficient minimum contacts with the State of California, is registered
5 with the California Secretary of State as foreign corporations authorized to do business in the State
6 of California, and/or has otherwise purposefully availed itself of the California market. Such
7 purposeful availment has rendered the exercise of jurisdiction by California courts consistent and
8 permissible with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice. Public policy further
9 supports this conclusion.

10 STATUTORY BACKGROUND

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

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

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

21 19. In this case, exposures are caused by consumer products. A “Consumer Product” is
22 defined as “any article, or component part thereof, including food, that is produced, distributed, or
23 sold for the personal use, consumption or enjoyment of a consumer.” (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 27, §
24 25600.1, subd. (d).) Food includes “dietary supplements” as defined in California Code of
25 Regulations, title 17, section 10200. (*Id.* at subd. (g).) An exposure to a chemical in a Consumer
26 Product is one “which results from a person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other
27 reasonably foreseeable use of a consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a
28 consumer service.” (27 CCR § 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the

1 course of doing business ... shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or
2 transferred unless the product is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

23 22. On October 1, 1992, the state of California listed lead as a chemical known to cause
24 cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations since that time. Cal. Code
25

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 Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 & 25249.10(b). On February 27,
2 1987, the State of California listed lead as a chemical known to cause birth defects or other
3 reproductive harm. In summary, lead was listed under Proposition 65 as a chemical known to the
4 State to cause cancer and birth defects or other reproductive harm.

5 23. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
6 acquisition, and recommended consumption of the Products. The primary route of exposure to lead
7 is through ingestion. When foods contaminated with lead are consumed, ingestion of lead will
8 occur. No clear and reasonable warning is provided with the Products regarding the health hazards
9 of exposure.

10 24. Defendant has processed, marketed, manufactured, packaged, distributed, offered
11 to sell and/or sold the Products in California since at least August 16, 2023. Upon information and
12 belief, the Products are consistently in the stream of commerce and available to consumers for
13 purchase in the City and County of San Francisco and the alleged Proposition 65 violations
14 necessarily occurred here. The Products continue to be distributed, marketed, sold, and offered for
15 sale in California without the requisite warning information.

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

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

25 **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

26 27. Plaintiff purchased the Products from Defendant in California. At the time of
27 purchase, Defendant did not provide a Proposition 65 exposure warning for lead or any other
28

1 Proposition 65 listed chemical in a manner consistent with H&S Code § 25603.1 as described
2 *supra*.

3 28. The Products were sent to a testing laboratory to determine if, and what amount of,
4 lead a consumer would be exposed to per serving size.

5 29. The laboratory provided the results of its analysis. Results of this test determined
6 that consumption of a serving size of the Products will expose California consumers to lead amount
7 above established safe harbor levels (the “Chemical Test Report”).

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

13 31. On August 16, 2023, Plaintiff received from the analytical chemist an exposure
14 assessment report which concluded that persons in California who consume the Products will be
15 exposed to levels of lead that require a Proposition 65 exposure warning.

16 32. On August 16, 2023, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety
17 Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendant concerning the exposure of California citizens to lead
18 contained in the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendant and to
19 the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District attorneys and City
20 Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein the herein
21 violations allegedly occurred.

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

27 34. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff’s best information and belief, none of
28 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted a

1 cause of action against Defendant under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which are
2 the subject of the Notice.

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

5 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

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

7 36. Plaintiff hereby repeats and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 35 of
8 this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

9 37. Defendant has, at all times mentioned herein, acted as manufacturer, packager,
10 marketer, distributor, and/or retailer of the Products.

11 38. Consumption of the Products will expose consumers to lead, hazardous chemicals
12 found on the Proposition 65 list of chemicals known to be hazardous to human health.

13 39. The Product does not comply with the Proposition 65 warning requirements. The
14 violations of Proposition 65 alleged herein are ongoing and continuous and will continue to occur
15 into the future.

16 40. Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times
17 herein, and since at least August 16, 2023, continuing through the present, that Defendant has
18 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California consumers of the Products to lead
19 without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

20 41. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
21 acquisition, and recommended consumption of the Products. The primary route of exposure to lead
22 is through ingestion. When foods contaminated with lead are consumed, ingestion of lead will
23 occur. No clear and reasonable warning is provided with the Products regarding the health hazards
24 of exposure.

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

1 43. Defendant has knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable consumption
2 of the Products exposes individuals to lead, and Defendant intends that exposures to lead will occur
3 by its deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, manufacturing, packaging,
4 marketing, distribution, sale and offering of the Products to consumers in California

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

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

9 46. 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 Defendant.

11 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

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

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

17 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendant 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: June 5, 2026

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