

Law Office of Karen J. Sloat, APC ("LOOKS")

Caring For Clients While Pursuing Justice

LOOKS NEWS

New 2024 Law Updates!

Business owners must stay informed about the latest changes in the legal landscape. California, known for its robust legislation in the field of employment law, has introduced a large number of new laws for 2024, including these four noteworthy laws:

1. **AB 2188:** This law was passed in 2022 but takes effect on January 1, 2024. The law amends the Fair Employment and Housing Act ("FEHA") by making it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an applicant or employee for (1) the use of marijuana "off the job and away from the workplace" and (2) for an employer-required drug screening test that finds the person to have nonpsychoactive cannabis metabolites in their system.
2. **SB 699:** Going into effect January 1, 2024, this law makes it unlawful for employers to enter or attempt to enforce noncompete agreements and provides employees with a right to seek injunctive relief and civil penalties if the law is violated.
3. **SB 553:** This bill requires every California employer with at least one employee to "establish, implement, and maintain ... a workplace violence prevention plan." This law also mandates that employers log workplace incidents, address such incidents, and respond to concerns about workplace violence. While the law doesn't take effect until July 1, 2024, employers should plan in advance to comply with the numerous requirements.
4. **SB 616:** This bill, effective January 1, 2024, increases annual paid sick leave for all employees by requiring 24 hours to accrue after 120 days of work, and a total of five days, or 40 hours, to accrue after the employee works 200 calendar days. This bill also increases carry-over leave from 48 to 80 hours, among other changes to existing law.


We invite you to visit our website to delve deeper into these and other new California laws for 2024 and to stay updated on other critical legal developments, including laws, cases, and regulations. There, you will find comprehensive updates and in-depth information about changes to the legal landscape in 2024 to ensure your business remains compliant.

Karen Cares...

It's the season for Thanksgiving! Even in tough times, we can be grateful for many things, if we pause to consider how fortunate we really are. Living here, with incredible weather, opportunities for jobs and personal and professional growth, and the Valley's beauty, is a blessing. Our firm is here to bless you even more, with counsel and guidance on how to improve your business, avoid litigation, or get excellent support during litigation. We're grateful to have you in our community!


~ Karen J. Sloat





Law Office of Karen J. Sloat, APC
Serving Statewide

PRE-ORDER YOUR COMPANY'S 2024 EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK



EMPLOYERS: IT'S TIME TO UPDATE YOUR HANDBOOK, OR GET A NEW HANDBOOK THAT COMPLIES WITH 2024 LAWS. WE OFFER TAILORED HANDBOOKS FOR YOUR BUSINESS, IN YOUR INDUSTRY, WITH YOUR POLICIES. WE HAVE A SEPARATE LEAVE OF ABSENCE MANUAL FOR QUICK REFERENCE BY EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS. ASK FOR OUR HANDBOOK PACKAGE DETAILS TODAY!

Do you give "bonuses" or "gifts" for the holidays, or periodically, out of your generosity? Under California law, these perks are almost always compensation or "wages" that should be reported on payroll and/or may affect an employee's "regular hourly rate" of pay. Contact us today for advice on your generous giving to staff, so we can help you comply with law and still bless your employees.



Recipe by:
Evelyn Blanco, J.D.

Ingredients

For the Tamales:

- 3 cups corn flour (Masa Harina, found in International Aisle or Latino Supermarket)
- 1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice (adjust to your liking)
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- 2/3 cup coconut oil
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup brown sugar (dark brown)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups coconut milk (room temperature)
- 1/2 cup warmed up coconut milk
- 1/2 cup pumpkin puree (unsweetened)

To Serve (optional)

- Maple syrup for drizzling
- Coconut whipped cream



Ingredients

- 1/2 pound bulk pork sausage (Jimmy Dean Sage pork breakfast sausage - if you find this, you can eliminate adding the sage below)
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1/2 cup finely chopped celery
- 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored and diced
- 1 teaspoon rubbed sage
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 12 oz bag herb seasoned cubed stuffing (recommended: Pepperidge Farm)
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries or Craisins
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 1/2 cups original chicken stock

Pumpkin Pie Tamales: A New Twist on an Old Classic

Directions:

1. Preparation: Soak the dried corn husks in a large pot or bowl of warm water for 30 minutes. While the corn husks are soaking, prepare the tamale dough.
2. Dry Ingredients: In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the corn flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking powder, and a pinch of salt. Set aside.
3. Wet Ingredients: In another large bowl, cream the coconut oil, sugar, and brown sugar until smooth and well combined. Stir in the vanilla extract.
4. Combine: Gradually mix 1 1/2 cups of coconut milk into the creamed sugar mixture. Once integrated, slowly add in the dry ingredients, mixing until just combined.
5. Add Pumpkin Puree: Fold in the pumpkin puree until the mixture is uniform. Your dough should be sticky yet manageable. If it's too dry, add a little of the warmed coconut milk a bit at a time until you reach the desired consistency.
6. Corn Husk Filling: Once your corn husks are soft and pliable from soaking, shake off any excess water. Lay one out flat, with the wide end facing you. Take about 2-3 tablespoons of the tamale mixture and spread it out evenly over the corn husk, leaving a border around the edges. Fold one side of the husk over, then the other side, overlapping them. Then fold the pointy top down. Repeat until all your dough is used up.
7. Steam the Tamales: Fill a pot with 1-2 inches of water and place a steamer basket on top, ensuring water isn't touching the bottom of the basket. Stand the tamales upright (open end facing upwards) in the steamer basket. Bring the water to a boil and cover the pot. Reduce the heat to medium and steam the tamales for 50-60 minutes or until the dough easily pulls away from the husk.
8. Serve: Allow the tamales to cool for a few minutes before serving. Drizzle with maple syrup and top with a dollop of coconut whipped cream for an indulgent touch. Enjoy!

The Wolfes' Sausage Cranberry Apple Stuffin' Muffins

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Spray 12 regular-size muffin cups (you do not use cupcake papers) with no-stick cooking spray. Set aside.
2. Cook and crumble sausage in medium skillet on a medium heat until no longer pink. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate and allow to drain. Melt butter in the same skillet on medium heat. Add onions; cook and stir for 2 to 3 minutes. Add celery and apple; cook and stir until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in Sage and Garlic Powder; cook and stir for about 1 minute or until fragrant.
3. Transfer the onion mixture to a large bowl. Add cooked sausage, bread cubes, and dried cranberries. Stir in eggs and stock until well mixed and stuffing is moistening-spoon stuffing mixture into prepared muffin cups. Gently press stuffing into cups and form slightly mounded tops.
4. Bake 20 to 22 minutes or until golden. Cool for 5 to 10 minutes in a pan on a wire rack. Run a knife or spatula around each cup to the loosen stuffing muffins. Use a spoon to release muffins from the cups gently. Serve warm.

“My family LOVES these stuffin’ muffins!”

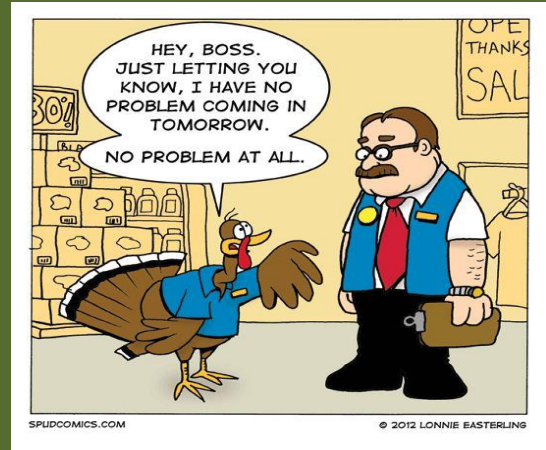
Recipe by:
Michelle M. Wolfe, Esq.



Good News for Business Owners!

This Thanksgiving Season, business owners have an extra reason to give thanks. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is taking a determined stance against fake reviews, proposing a new rule to level the playing field for legitimate businesses. The FTC's new proposed rule, unanimously supported by the Commission, targets deceptive review practices such as fake reviews, suppression of honest negative feedback, and paying for positive reviews. Under this rule, violators could face civil penalties, marking a significant step towards deterring dishonest practices.

But that's not all – in a recent development, in June 2023, Google filed a lawsuit against an alleged scammer for running an elaborate scheme flooding its search engine with fake businesses and reviews. Google's Complaint accuses the scammer of creating fake online listings and bolstering them with fictitious reviews. Google alleges the scammer had 350 fake business profiles and 14,000 fake reviews created in just the past two years. Google's proactiveness not only protects consumers but also serves to protect genuine business owners.



Labor Laughs!



A Blessing or a Curse? The U.S. Supreme Court Addresses Religious Workplace Accommodations

This summer, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) issued a significant decision in *Groff v. DeJoy*, 600 U.S. 447 (2023), bolstering protections for workers asking for religious accommodations. Employers now have a higher hurdle to clear when determining whether an employee's religious accommodation request would cause an undue burden on their business. A mail carrier argued that it was too easy for his employer to reject his request for Sundays off under a decades-old legal test that gave employers considerable leeway. SCOTUS clarified in a unanimous decision a higher standard under a federal law requiring an employer to show that "the burden of granting an accommodation would result in substantial increased costs in relation to the conduct of its particular business." In light of the clarified, heightened standard, employers should consider a plan to ensure compliance. We recommend:

1. Adjusting any policies, practices, and written materials you have in place that lay out your approach to religious accommodation requests to adapt to the clarified standard.
2. Train your managers to be prepared to expect increased religious accommodation requests. Specifically, we expect to see employers face increased requests for scheduling changes, time off, prayer breaks, job reassignments, modifications to dress codes and grooming policies, and designations of private locations in the workplace for religious observances.
3. Engage in a cooperative and interactive dialogue with employees when they present a request for religious accommodation. Once you grant an accommodation request, your work isn't over. Follow up with the employee regularly to ensure the accommodation is working for them – and with their supervisor to determine if adjustments are needed.
4. If you deny a request, provide written reasoning for the decision so your position is clear. Some courts or agency investigators may not favor cursory rejections that don't provide context or reasoning. Documentation will be essential.
5. Coordinate with your legal counsel to evaluate your evidence of the "substantial increased cost" or difficulty to your particular organization necessary to deny a religious accommodation request under the new federal standard.

We can help you comply with the new legal standard when an employee requests religious accommodation. We can also review any recent religious accommodations you have granted – or rejected – and determine whether you need to adjust any decisions you have made, given the new standard.



Or Current Resident

This is an advertisement.



Ready for 2024 Sexual Harassment and Abusive Conduct Prevention training under the new laws? We offer in-person or online for supervisors and subordinates at convenient times.



Training available in English & Spanish

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Evelyn Blanco, J.D.

Our employee of this quarter is Evelyn Blanco, J.D., our Law Clerk extraordinaire. Evelyn has been an outstanding “returning” employee who effectively, tirelessly and enthusiastically researches, writes, investigates and approaches her job with zeal! Congratulations, Evelyn!



"My experience with Karen Sloat and the team was excellent. I am very pleased. My problem was as if it was their problem. The firm was concerned and very helpful in every aspect of the case. I never once felt worried or on the fence per say. I had the highest degree of confidence all through this journey with explanations, discussions and guided advice but yet left decisions to me and explained the options. Very thoroughly advised! I would highly recommend Karen Sloat's legal team to anyone and will use again."

-Ron W.
Business Owner