

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS**

IN RE: HAIR RELAXER MARKETING SALES PRACTICES AND PRODUCTS LIABILITY LITIGATION	MDL No. 3060 Case No. 23 C 818 Judge Mary M. Rowland This document relates to: All Cases
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**PARTIES' STATUS REPORT FOR THE JANUARY 9, 2025
CASE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE**

Pursuant to the Court's Minute Order (ECF No. 952) following the November 14, 2024 status conference, the Parties submit this Joint Status Report "identifying the issues related to the bellwether process the parties will brief and propose a briefing schedule." Following the Court's direction at the November 14 status conference, the Parties again met and conferred on some of the bellwether process-related issues on Tuesday, November 26, 2024, and Sunday, December 8, 2024, and continued discussions via email until the filing of this Status Report. The Parties were unable to reach agreement on the issues set forth herein and were unable to agree to a briefing schedule, but the Parties are agreeable to continue their meet and confer efforts as certain issues are becoming more crystalized.

Defendants' Position:

As Defendants discussed with the Court at the November 15, 2024 Case Management Conference, this litigation has evolved significantly since the bellwether issues were initially briefed in January 2024. The current status of the litigation, the information that the plaintiffs have provided to date, and the stated intentions of the Court all have demonstrated the need for certain modifications to the proposal the Parties submitted almost a year ago. Defendants raised many of these issues with the plaintiffs during the meet-and-confer process. Contrary to the plaintiffs' characterization below, Defendants did not provide firm positions during meet and confer on any

of the identified issues and, thus, object to the mischaracterization of the issues in the plaintiffs' submission. Instead, during the meet and confer process, Defendants provided concepts to attempt to foster discussion of potential areas of agreement. When the plaintiffs rejected many of these concepts outright, and did not offer any counterproposal, no agreement could be reached on the issues and Defendants will, therefore, provide a more complete proposal for the Court's consideration at the time of briefing. What is evident, however, is that no one aspect of the bellwether process can be decided in isolation; the timing and substance of the selection process and any subsequent discovery are intertwined. For that reason, Defendants object to the plaintiffs' continuing efforts to force an immediate selection of bellwether cases for trial before discovery of the potential pool is complete and Defendants have had a reasonable opportunity to review and process the totality of the information that has been provided.

December 8 was the first time the plaintiffs' leadership shared any information as to the position of the various plaintiffs following the dismissal order regarding non-reproductive cancer claims (ECF No. 946), which Defendants have not yet been able to analyze in terms of its impact on the eligible bellwether pool. In addition, as has been discussed repeatedly during the Court call process (the "Cattle call"), many plaintiffs have not yet provided basic information about their claims and the Court very recently ordered Defendants to finalize review of 400 Plaintiff Fact Sheets ("PFS") by December 20, 2024 and set February 28, 2025 as the PFS discovery deadline for that process for all bellwether eligible plaintiffs. The selection of bellwether cases cannot occur *at least* until the February PFS discovery deadline has passed so that Defendants have a fair and reasonable opportunity to review and respond to the expected hundreds of amended fact sheets, and the plaintiffs cure all Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(g) compliance issues as ordered by the Court. Defendants are entitled to final discovery responses before selecting the cases to be

included in a trial pool, as discovery of facts regarding the claims for ultimate trial selection was one of the primary goals of the CMO 9 PFS process. Plaintiffs have filed thousands of cases against Defendants. Each defendant is entitled to discovery about the alleged claims, injuries and damages in those cases. Fairness dictates that Defendants have sufficient time to evaluate preliminary discovery to determine what constitutes a representative case that should be included in the bellwether pool. Thus, there remains time for the Parties and the Court to engage in a thoughtful discussion on the best way to frame this litigation going forward.

Plaintiffs seek to cut off the selection of cases prematurely, and limit the pool to the cases for which PFS are currently -- more than two months before the PFS discovery deadline -- “substantially complete.” Given the expedited PFS reviews that are underway by both Plaintiffs and Defendants and the February 28, 2025 deadline for all PFS discovery responses for the bellwether eligible pool of cases, there is no longer any reason to use the “substantially complete” standard, especially when the Court has recognized that a trial of these cases cannot occur until 2027 in any event.

In addition, there are other gateway issues (*e.g.*, which defendants are in which cases, which eligible plaintiffs will be dismissed, the injuries to be included in the bellwether pool, the timing of expert discovery and the scheduling of Science Day) that need to be addressed before the Parties and the Court can meaningfully address the remaining issues relating to the bellwether selection process. Plaintiffs continue to claim that all of those issues were already decided by the Court, which is simply not true, a dispute that is more appropriately addressed in the briefing that the Court is contemplating. While the Parties have not reached agreement on the scope of disputes for bellwether briefing, Defendants have identified the following issues on which they request briefing:

1. The process by which a more limited pool of cases will be selected for expedited, additional CMO9 written discovery (*e.g.*, ~300 cases);
2. The timing of and process for the selection of the 16 cases for the bellwether pool;
3. The types of alleged injuries to be included in the bellwether pool;
4. The timing of “Science Day”; and
5. The schedule for expert discovery, as to both general and specific causation.

While the parties have not agreed on the schedule for bellwether discovery once the initial selection of 16 cases is made, they are close enough to an agreement that Defendants anticipate a decision can be reached once the above issues are addressed.

Defendants request that the Court enter a briefing schedule that takes into account the December-January holidays. The Parties are already working through the end of December with ongoing dual joint status reports, the Court call PFS process, the deficiency reviews for 400+ PFS and preparation for the early January 2025 status conferences. No prejudice occurs by a robust briefing schedule that permits briefing after holiday celebrations. Thus, Defendants propose filing simultaneous briefs no earlier than January 23, 2025, allowing the Parties to be prepared to address any questions posed by the Court at the February 13, 2025, case management conference.

Defendants recognize the fulsome briefing below already undertaken by Plaintiffs and submitted herewith, briefing that was not requested by the Court. Given the Court’s instructions, Defendants have not responded in kind and are awaiting a briefing schedule after identifying the issues in dispute, as the Court requested. Should the Court require additional information now, Defendants respectfully request additional time to provide their position.

Plaintiffs' Leadership Committee Position Regarding Disputes Relating to the Bellwether Process.

As an initial matter, the PLC disputes the five purported bellwether issues enumerated by the Defendants, as well as the characterizations above that Defendants' positions on these issues might not be set; if their stated positions are not set now, when will they be set? What else can the PLC rely on? How can the PLC even brief Defendants' new or additional proposals if Defendants will not commit to them?

Nevertheless, the bellwether selection process has effectively been in limbo since the parties' prior briefing and the status conference regarding same on January 25, 2024. The 11-month delay has, in large part, been due to Defendants' representations that they needed to receive and review a significant percentage of "substantially complete" PFSs before they could select their 8 bellwether pool cases (of the agreed to 16 cases).

During the November 14, 2024, status hearing the parties represented that they would attempt to meet and confer to try to resolve the remaining disputes relating to the bellwether selection process, and report to the Court (in this December Joint Status Report) whether briefing would be required on these issues. It clearly will be.

Plaintiffs' position on the bellwether selection process has not changed since their prior briefing and arguments on the issues in January 2024 and intermittently at other hearings. Namely, the PSC still propose that:

1. By a date certain, the parties will each select any 8 cases (for a total of 16 bellwether pool cases) from the cases filed and served in this MDL before February 1, 2024;
2. The parties will take additional, case-specific discovery ("Phase II" discovery) on those bellwether pool cases over a period of 4 months (or 8 months which is what the defense originally requested);
3. Those cases will then be winnowed down to 5 trial cases, either by agreement or with input from the Court; and

4. The parties will take part in expert discovery and dispositive motion practice on those 5 trial cases (in a non-bifurcated manner).

That simple, straight-forward process is how bellwethers are conducted in the vast majority of mass tort MDLs.

Defendants' positions, however, have drastically changed since this issue was last addressed and each party's positions set forth in briefing and at various times in open court. Defendants' current proposal contradicts their prior agreements with the PLC *and representations to the Court*, raises long-dead disputes, and their new concepts would result in unnecessary additional delays, and ultimately, the work up and possible trial of potentially non-representative cases.

Plaintiffs do not agree that all of Defendants' newly-created issues need to be briefed before bellwether cases can be selected. The pertinent question at this point is simply: from what pool of cases should each side select their 8 cases for the 16 bellwethers? The parties need to walk before they run, and issues related to when Science Day and expert discovery and *Daubert*, including Defendants re-request to have general causation first, should not be used as a way to further delay the bellwether process, no matter how Defendants conflate the relevance of the issues. The PSC submits that the Court should front load and only hear argument on the issues that are pertinent to bellwether case selection.

Specifically, the Court should reject Defendants' new proposals relating to the following issues:

- **Limiting the cases eligible for bellwether selection to 320 *randomly-selected* cases.** But the Court has already acknowledged that the bellwether eligible cases would be chosen from the entire pool of Plaintiffs who filed and served before February 1, 2024—and specifically warned against the parties trying to artificially limit which cases were eligible for selection. Tr. of 3/7/24 at 53:5-11 (“THE COURT: Let me just say this. I started off by saying we are going to have plenty of cases in the bellwether. This is – they’re not trying to manipulate who is in the bellwether; you’re not trying to manipulate who is in the

bellwether. We're going to have plenty. We're going to have riches. *We're going to have 7,000 cases in the bellwether.*") (emphasis added). And Defendants themselves have repeatedly agreed that the pool of cases eligible for bellwether selection is comprised of *all cases* filed prior to February 1, 2024, where a substantially complete PFS has been provided—and have never suggested any sort of random selection of cases within that pool. *E.g.* Tr. of 1/25/24 at 27:3-22 (MR. GOODMAN: "We're willing to give on that. We can do filed and served by February 1. . ."); [ECF 415] ("The parties agree that only cases filed and served by 2/1/24 will be eligible as bellwether cases."). Finally, numerous courts have held that this sort of random selection results in cases that are *not* representative of the litigation as a whole. *E.g., In re: Testosterone Replacement Therapy Prod. Liab. Litig.* (MDL 2545) (Tr. of 11/30/2017 case management conference) (where Judge Kennelly recognized: "Random doesn't mean representative. Random means random. Coin can come up heads six times in a row. That's random. It's not representative.".)¹

- **Taking an additional 90 days of (unspecified) discovery on those randomly-selected cases prior to selecting bellwether cases.** Defendants argue that they do not have "basic information" about many Plaintiffs' claims. But the PFS in this case is extremely detailed (over 100 pages long), and, as of today, Defendants agree that—even by Defendants' own standards—there are 1,859 PFSs that qualify as "substantially complete." And that statistic only reflects the number of PFSs Defendants have chosen to review and confirm to be "substantially complete." There are more than 2000 other Plaintiffs who have responded to Defendants' PFS deficiency letters and attempted to cure any perceived deficiencies. Defendants have just not yet confirmed that those additional PFSs are complete. Moreover, the PFS allows "Phase II" discovery only "if [a plaintiff's] case has been designated for Phase II Discovery (e.g., [the plaintiff's] case is included in a bellwether selection pool)." Under the guise that it constitutes permissible "Phase II" discovery, Defendants now propose that they be given 90 days to take "additional discovery" on the (proposed) 320 randomly selected cases before bellwether selection. The record is clear, however, that no case-specific discovery—beyond what is required by the PFS—should be taken prior to bellwether selection. Moreover, Defendants have repeatedly acknowledged that pre-bellwether selection discovery is limited to the PFS. *E.g.* Tr. of 11/13/24 at 84:25-85:10 (MS. LEVINE: "[Non-bellwether cases] are never going to likely have discovery at all beyond the plaintiff fact sheets."). And it was previously agreed that "Phase II" discovery does not occur until bellwether cases have already been selected by the parties. Tr. of 11/17/23 at 10:9-12 (MS. LEVINE: "And there will be a Phase II that will be part of the bellwether process where additional discovery, typically including depositions and potentially other documents and issues, will come up. And that was negotiated."). In fact, Defendants admitted that the entire purpose of the PFS was to be "in lieu of" other case-specific discovery. Tr. of 1/25/24 at 43:7-12 ("MR. GOODMAN: This is in lieu of our interrogatories are these plaintiff fact sheets."). But now defendants seek a second layer of discovery before the bellwether cases are even selected.

¹ There is a significant body of caselaw from judges presiding over MDLs (past and present) about the fallacy and flaws of using any random nature towards the selection of cases into a bellwether process. If necessary, the PSC will provide citations to those opinions in any briefing on this issue.

- **Including any outlier cases, with non-representative injuries, in the bellwether pool simply because they are part of the 320 randomly-selected cases.** The PSC believes that the bellwether process should be laser-focused on the injury types that exist in the vast majority of cases in this MDL; namely: uterine, endometrial, and ovarian cancer. Defendants now seek to include cases in the bellwether process that allege “other injuries” beyond the cancer cases at the core of this litigation. There is simply no reason to include outlier injury cases in the 16 bellwether cases, as there is nothing “representative” about them and they do not serve as a “bellwether” to the thousands of remaining cases. Working up those cases for trial creates an unnecessary burden on the litigants and the Court. Indeed, Defendants previously represented to the Court that they would not argue that a (non-cancer) injury would qualify as a bellwether case unless more than 10% of the cases filed had that same specific injury.² Tr. of 1/25/24 at 46:3-23 (MR. GOODMAN: “If there are no injuries that meet that threshold of 10 percent other -- then the cancers will be the only cases that qualify for the 16.”). Defendants should, at the very least, be held to their promise to adhere to a threshold; and should not be permitted to select non-representative, outlier injuries for bellwether treatment.
- **Allowing the parties to strike a third of the other side’s bellwether selections (with each side selecting 12 cases, and then striking 4 of the other side’s cases).** Defendants’ previously agreed (*see* ECF 395 at 2) that the parties would each select 8 of the 16 cases. Now, Defendants propose that each side should select 12 cases so the other side can strike 4 of the 12. The parties should not be permitted to strike the other side’s bellwether picks. Simply put, the parties select cases that they believe are most representative of the thousands of other cases in this MDL. Allowing the opposing party to strike picks does nothing but take representative cases out of consideration. If a party selects a case that has no right to be in the bellwether pool, opposing counsel is free to raise it with the Court.

Defendants suggest that they have not made their positions official (see FN 1), but given their suggestion of positions, it has made the efforts of agreement through meeting and conferring very challenging with certain defendant and why their positions should be rejected. None of these propositions were ever previously discussed by the parties—and they directly contradict representations Defendants have made to the Court. [ECF No. 395] (Defendants’ Joint Submission Regarding Bellwether Selection) at 1-3, 6; *see, generally*, Defendants’ Proposed CMO [ECF No. 395-1].

² Defendants also agreed that this threshold is for a “particular injury”—not just that 10% of the total cases are non-cancer cases. Tr. of 1/25/24 at 49:5-19.

Moreover, as part of their new bellwether proposal, Defendants' re-raise several arguments already rejected (on numerous occasions) by the Court. To the extent there is any doubt as to the Court's resolution of those issues—and Plaintiffs contend there is not--those arguments should not be used to derail the bellwether selection process and should not be included in the Parties' briefing on the bellwether selection process. Specifically, the Court need not address Defendants' attempts to:

- **Insert a preliminary and advanced round of general causation briefing prior to the selection of the 5 trial cases.** The Court has rejected this argument on several occasions.³
- **Require plaintiffs to serve expert reports prior to the close of fact discovery on the issue of general causation.** Plaintiffs oppose Defendants' attempt to require expert disclosures prior to the completion of fact discovery and the selection of trial cases. Requiring general causation expert reports this Summer or Fall is not proper and would likely result in the multiple rounds of *Daubert* and summary judgment briefing that the Court has explicitly rejected multiple times.⁴
- **Address issues relating to Science Day.** Defendants request that Science Day occur in May 2025. While the Court previously ruled that Science Day will occur "at the end of fact discovery," [ECF 415], the PSC is prepared to meet and confer over the scope of Science Day and come to an agreed to date and time to conduct it the Summer or early Fall, of 2025. As such, Plaintiffs believe a workable schedule can be addressed, but this should not be part of a bellwether briefing and can be dealt with separate and apart from bellwether selection.

Plaintiffs could not, and do not, agree to these 11th-hour changes to the bellwether selection process. That is especially true for Defendants' about-face on issues that Plaintiffs believed were—at least in broad strokes—agreed to almost a year ago.

The PSC submits that the issues needing briefing are limited and straightforward, namely: (1) a process to select the 16 cases (ECF No. 395 at 1-3, 6; Plaintiffs' Proposed CMO [ECF 396-

³ Tr. of 1/25/2024 at 9:17-10:2; 28:1-4; 29:11-22.

⁴ ECF 415.

1] at Sect. III; Defendants' Proposed CMO [ECF 395-1] at 3-4) and (2) the timing to conduct this discovery ([ECF 395] at 6; [ECF 396] (Plaintiffs' Bellwether Submission) at 13-14).

To the extent the new disputes raised by Defendants need to be briefed—and are not summarily rejected by this Court—that should be done separately, and on an extended timeline. The PSC submits that briefing on the open bellwether issues (items Nos. 1 & 2, above) should be done via simultaneous submissions of briefing on December 17, 2024 at 5:00pm Central.

Dated: December 9, 2024

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Respectfully Submitted,

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