

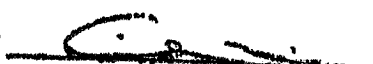
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FILED
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO
SAN BERNARDINO DISTRICT

JAN 28 2022

BY 
GLORIA MARIN, DEPUTY

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO**

ERIKA LIZETH MERINO ALEJANDRO, on
behalf of the State of California and other
aggrieved persons,

Plaintiff,

vs.

SANTA EASTVALE, INC. DBA PANINI
KABOB GRILL, a corporation; and DOES 1
through 10, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: **CIV SB 2202254**

**PAGA REPRESENTATIVE ACTION
COMPLAINT:**

1. Civil Penalties Under PAGA [Cal. Lab.
Code § 2699, et seq.]

**FILE BY FAX
PER CAC
2.303**

1 Plaintiff Erika Lizeth Merino Alejandro (“Plaintiff”), based upon facts that either have
2 evidentiary support or are likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity for
3 further investigation and discovery, alleges as follows:

4 **INTRODUCTION & PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

5 1. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendant SANTA EASTVALE, INC. DBA
6 PANINI KABOB GRILL and DOES 1 through 10 (SANTA EASTVALE, INC. DBA PANINI
7 KABOB GRILL and DOES 1 through 10 are collectively referred to as “Defendants”) for civil
8 penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code §§ 2698 *et*
9 *seq.* (“PAGA”) stemming from Defendants’ failure to pay for all hours worked (minimum,
10 straight time, and overtime wages), failure to provide meal periods, failure to authorize and
11 permit rest periods, failure to pay all earned wages twice per month, failure to maintain accurate
12 records of hours worked and meal periods, failure to timely pay final wages, failure to furnish
13 accurate wage statements, and failure to indemnify for necessary business expenditures.

14 2. For over 50 years, California’s courts and legislature have recognized that this
15 State’s wage-and-hour laws serve a compelling public interest of fostering a stable job market.
16 Wages are not ordinary debts. Because of the economic position of the average worker and his
17 or her family, it is essential to the public welfare that employers obey the wage-and-hour laws so
18 that employees are promptly paid the minimum/overtime wages that the Legislature has required
19 for employees. So fundamental are California’s wage-and-hour laws that the Legislature has
20 criminalized certain types of violations. In extending extra protection to deter violations of these
21 underlying statutes—since Plaintiff is not seeking general and/or special damages, restitution or
22 other damages other than civil penalties—California has enacted the PAGA to permit an
23 individual to bring an action for PAGA penalties only, which is the precise and sole nature of this
24 action.

25 3. All California employees during the relevant statutes of limitations who are or
26 were harmed by Defendants’ illegal practices are “Aggrieved Employees.” The Aggrieved
27 Employees worked for Defendants as hourly-paid or non-exempt employees within the
28 applicable statutory period.

4. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendants seeking only to recover penalties on behalf of all Aggrieved Employees that worked for Defendants, and on behalf of the State of California. Plaintiff does not seek to recover anything other than penalties as permitted by California Labor Code Section 2699 at this time. To the extent that statutory violations are mentioned for wage violations, Plaintiff does not seek underlying general and/or special damages for those violations, but simply penalties as permitted by California Labor Code Section 2699, declaratory relief, and injunctive relief for herself and all Aggrieved Employees as permitted by the PAGA.

5. Defendants own/owned and operate/operated an industry, business, and establishment within the State of California, including San Bernardino County. As such, and based upon all the facts and circumstances incident to Defendants' business in California, Defendants are subject to the California Labor Code, Wage Orders issued by the Industrial Welfare Commission ("IWC"), and the California Business & Professions Code.

6. On information and belief, Defendants, and each of them were on actual and constructive notice of the improprieties alleged herein and intentionally refused to rectify their unlawful policies. Defendants' violations, as alleged above, during all relevant times herein were willful and deliberate.

7. At all relevant times, Defendants were and are legally responsible for all of the unlawful conduct, policies, practices, acts and omissions as described in each and all of the foregoing paragraphs as the employers of Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees. Further, Defendants are responsible for each of the unlawful acts or omissions complained of herein under the doctrine of “respondeat superior”.

THE PARTIES

A. Plaintiff

8. Plaintiff is a resident of San Bernardino County, California, who worked for Defendants in San Bernardino County, California from approximately January 2021 to approximately June 2021.

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1 **B. Defendants**

2 9. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based upon that information and belief
3 alleges, that Defendant SANTA EASTVALE, INC. DBA PANINI KABOB GRILL is, and at all
4 times herein mentioned, was:

5 (a) A corporation qualified to do business and actually conducting business in
6 numerous counties throughout the State of California, including in San
7 Bernardino County; and,

8 (b) The former employer of Plaintiff, and the current and/or former employer
9 of the Aggrieved Employees because Defendant SANTA EASTVALE,
10 INC. DBA PANINI KABOB GRILL suffered and permitted Plaintiff and
11 the Aggrieved Employees to work, and/or controlled their wages, hours, or
12 working conditions.

13 10. Plaintiff does not know the true names or capacities of the persons or entities sued
14 herein as Does 1-10, inclusive, and therefore sues said Defendants by such fictitious names.
15 Each of the Doe Defendants was in some manner legally responsible for the damages suffered by
16 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees as alleged herein. Plaintiff will amend this complaint to
17 set forth the true names and capacities of these Defendants when they have been ascertained,
18 together with appropriate charging allegations, as may be necessary.

19 11. At all times mentioned herein, the Defendants named as Does 1-10, inclusive, and
20 each of them, were residents of, doing business in, availed themselves of the jurisdiction of,
21 and/or injured a significant number of the Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees in the State of
22 California.

23 12. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that at all relevant times
24 each Defendant, directly or indirectly, or through agents or other persons, employed Plaintiff and
25 the other employees and exercised control over their wages, hours, and working conditions.
26 Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that, at all relevant times, each Defendant
27 was the principal, agent, partner, joint venturer, officer, director, controlling shareholder,
28 subsidiary, affiliate, parent corporation, successor in interest and/or predecessor in interest of

1 some or all of the other Defendants, and was engaged with some or all of the other Defendants in
2 a joint enterprise for profit, and bore such other relationships to some or all of the other
3 Defendants so as to be liable for their conduct with respect to the matters alleged below. Plaintiff
4 is informed and believes and thereon alleges that each Defendant acted pursuant to and within the
5 scope of the relationships alleged above, that each Defendant knew or should have known about,
6 and authorized, ratified, adopted, approved, controlled, aided and abetted the conduct of all other
7 Defendants.

8 **ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL CAUSES OF ACTION**

9 13. Plaintiff Erika Lizeth Merino Alejandro worked for Defendants in San Bernardino
10 County, California from approximately January 2021 to approximately June 2021. At all times,
11 Defendants paid Plaintiff an hourly wage and classified her as non-exempt from overtime.

12 14. Throughout Plaintiff's employment, Defendants committed numerous labor code
13 violations under state law. As discussed below, Plaintiff's experience working for Defendants
14 was typical and illustrative.

15 **A. Failure to Pay for All Hours Worked, Including Minimum, Straight Time,**
16 **and Overtime Wages**

17 15. Under California law, an employer must pay for all hours worked by an employee.
18 "Hours worked" is the time during which an employee is subject to the control of an employer,
19 and includes all the time the employee is suffered or permitted to work, whether or not required
20 to do so.

21 16. Labor Code § 510 provides that employees in California shall not be employed
22 more than eight hours in any workday or forty (40) hours in a workweek unless they receive
23 additional compensation beyond their regular wages in amounts specified by law.

24 17. Labor Code §§ 1194 and 1198 also provide that employees in California shall not
25 be employed more than eight hours in any workday unless they receive additional compensation
26 beyond their regular wages in amounts specified by law. Additionally, Labor Code § 1198 states
27 that the employment of an employee for longer hours than those fixed by the IWC is unlawful.

28 18. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants maintained a policy and practice of

1 not paying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all hours worked, including minimum,
2 straight time, and overtime wages. Defendants required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees
3 to work “off-the-clock,” uncompensated, by, for example, requiring Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
4 Employees to work unpaid prior to clocking in for the workday and during legally required meal
5 periods. Some of this unpaid work should have been paid at the overtime rate. In failing to pay
6 for all hours worked, Defendants also failed to maintain accurate records of the hours Plaintiff
7 and the Aggrieved Employees worked.

8 **B. Failure to Provide Meal Periods**

9 19. Under California law, employers have an affirmative obligation to relieve
10 employees of all duty in order to take their first 30-minute, duty-free by the end of their fifth
11 hour of work in a workday, and to allow employees to take their second 30-minute, duty-free
12 meal period by the end of their tenth hour of work. Further, employees are entitled to be paid
13 one hour of additional wages for each workday they were not provided with a required meal
14 period(s).

15 20. Despite these legal requirements, Defendants wrongfully failed to provide Plaintiff
16 and the Aggrieved Employees with legally compliant meal periods. Defendants regularly, but
17 not always, required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work in excess of five consecutive
18 hours a day without providing a 30-minute, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal period for every
19 five hours of work, or without compensating Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for meal
20 periods that were not provided by the end of the fifth hour of work or tenth hour of work.
21 Instead, Defendants continued to assert control over Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees by
22 requiring, pressuring, or encouraging them to perform work tasks which could not be completed
23 without working in lieu of taking mandatory meal periods, or by denying Plaintiff and the
24 Aggrieved Employees permission to take a meal period. Accordingly, Defendants’ policy and
25 practice was not to provide meal periods to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees in compliance
26 with California law.

27 21. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are thus entitled to be paid one hour of
28 additional wages for each workday he or she was not provided with a required meal period(s).

Defendants, however, regularly failed to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees the additional wages to which they were entitled for meal periods that were not provided.

C. Failure to Authorize and Permit Rest Periods

22. Employers are required by California law to authorize and permit breaks of ten uninterrupted minutes for each four hours of work or major fraction of four hours (i.e. more than two hours). Thus, for example, if an employee's work time is six hours and ten minutes, the employee is entitled to two rest breaks. Each failure to authorize rest breaks as so required is itself a violation of California's rest break laws.

23. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants has wrongfully failed to authorize and permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to take legally compliant rest periods. Defendants regularly required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work in excess of four consecutive hours a day without Defendants authorizing and permitting them to take a 10-minute, uninterrupted, duty-free rest period for every four hours of work (or major fraction of four hours), or without compensating Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for rest periods that were not authorized or permitted. Instead, Defendants continued to assert control over Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees by requiring, pressuring, or encouraging them to perform work tasks which could not be completed without working in lieu of taking mandatory rest periods, or by denying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees permission to take a rest period. Accordingly, Defendants' policy and practice was to not authorize and permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to take rest periods in compliance with California law.

24. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are thus entitled to be paid one hour of additional wages for each workday he or she was not authorized and permitted to take all required rest periods. Defendants, however, regularly failed to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees the additional wages to which they were entitled for rest periods and that they were not authorized and permitted to take.

D. Failure to Pay All Earned Wages Twice Per Month

25. Based on Defendants' failure to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all wages as discussed above, Defendants also violated Labor Code § 204.

1 26. Labor Code § 204 requires employers to pay employees all earned wages two
2 times per month. Throughout the statutory period, employees were entitled to be paid twice a
3 month at their regular rates, including all meal period premium wages owed, rest period premium
4 wages owed, and wages owed for overtime hours worked. However, during all such times,
5 Defendants systematically failed and refused to pay the employees all wages due, and failed to
6 pay those wages twice a month, in that employees were not paid all wages for all meal periods
7 not provided by Defendants, all wages for all rest periods not authorized and permitted by
8 Defendants, and all wages for all hours worked. As a result, Defendants owe employees the
9 legally required wages not paid, and Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees suffered damages in
10 those amounts.

11 **E. Failure to Maintain Accurate Records of Hours Worked and Meal Periods**

12 27. Plaintiff seeks penalties under California Labor Code § 1174(d). Pursuant to
13 California Labor Code § 1174.5, any person, including any entity, employing labor who willfully
14 fails to maintain accurate and complete records required by California Labor Code § 1174 is
15 subject to a penalty under § 1174.5. Pursuant to the applicable IWC Order § 7(A)(3), every
16 employer shall keep time records showing when the employee begins and ends each work period.
17 Meal periods and total hours worked daily shall also be recorded

18 28. Defendants, however, failed to maintain accurate records of hours worked and all
19 meal periods taken or missed by Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees.

20 29. Defendants' failure to provide and maintain records required by the California
21 Labor Code and IWC Wage Orders deprived Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees the ability to
22 know, understand and question the accuracy and frequency of meal periods, and the accuracy of
23 their hours worked stated in Defendants' records. Therefore, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
24 Employees had no way to dispute the resulting failure to pay wages, all of which resulted in an
25 unjustified economic enrichment to Defendants. As a direct result, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
26 Employees have suffered and continue to suffer, substantial losses related to the use and
27 enjoyment of such wages, lost interest on such wages and expenses and attorney's fees in seeking
28 to compel Defendants to fully perform its obligation under state law, all to their respective

1 damage in amounts according to proof at trial. As a result of Defendants' knowing failure to
2 comply with the California Labor Code and applicable IWC Wage Orders, Plaintiff and the
3 Aggrieved Employees have also suffered an injury in that they were prevented from knowing,
4 understanding, and disputing the wage payments paid to them.

5 **F. Failure to Timely Pay All Wages at Termination**

6 30. Labor Code §§ 201 and 202 provide that if an employer discharges an employee,
7 the wages earned and unpaid at the time of discharge are due and payable immediately, and that
8 if an employee voluntarily leaves his or her employment, his or her wages shall become due and
9 payable not later than seventy-two (72) hours thereafter, unless the employee has given seventy-
10 two (72) hours previous notice of his or her intention to quit, in which case the employee is
11 entitled to his or her wages at the time of quitting.

12 31. Within the applicable statute of limitations, the employment of Plaintiff and many
13 other Aggrieved Employees ended, i.e., was terminated by quitting or being discharged, and the
14 employment of others will be terminated. However, during the relevant time period, Defendants
15 failed, and continue to fail to pay Plaintiff and terminated Aggrieved Employees, without
16 abatement, all wages required to be paid by Labor Code sections 201 and 202 either at the time
17 of discharge, or within seventy-two (72) hours of their leaving Defendants' employment. These
18 unpaid wages include wages for unpaid work time (including minimum, straight time, and
19 overtime wages), missed meal period premium wages, and missed rest period premium wages.

20 32. Defendants' conduct violates Labor Code §§ 201 and 202. Labor Code § 203
21 provides that if an employer willfully fails to pay wages owed, in accordance with sections 201
22 and 202, then the wages of the employee shall continue as a penalty wage from the due date, and
23 at the same rate until paid or until an action is commenced; but the wages shall not continue for
24 more than thirty (30) days.

25 33. Accordingly, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover from
26 Defendants their additionally accruing wages for each day they were not paid, at their regular
27 hourly rate of pay, up to thirty (30) days maximum pursuant to Labor Code § 203.

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1 **G. Failure to Furnish Accurate Itemized Wage Statements**

2 34. Labor Code § 226(a) provides that every employer shall furnish each of his or her
3 employees an accurate itemized wage statement in writing showing nine pieces of information,
4 including: (1) gross wages earned, (2) total hours worked by the employee, (3) the number of
5 piece-rate units earned and any applicable piece rate if the employee is paid on a piece-rate basis,
6 (4) all deductions, provided that all deductions made on written orders of the employee may be
7 aggregated and shown as one item, (5) net wages earned, (6) the inclusive dates of the period for
8 which the employee is paid, (7) the name of the employee and the last four digits of his or her
9 social security number or an employee identification number other than a social security number,
10 (8) the name and address of the legal entity that is the employer, and (9) all applicable hourly
11 rates in effect during the pay period and the corresponding number of hours worked at each
12 hourly rate by the employee. An employee is presumed to suffer an injury if this information is
13 missing. (Labor Code § 226(e)(2)(B)(iii).)

14 35. The statute further provides: “An employee suffering injury as a result of a
15 knowing and intentional failure by an employer to comply with subdivision (a) is entitled to
16 recover the greater of all actual damages or fifty dollars (\$50) for the initial pay period in which a
17 violation occurs and one hundred dollars (\$100) per employee for each violation in a subsequent
18 pay period, not to exceed an aggregate penalty of four thousand dollars (\$4,000), and is entitled
19 to an award of costs and reasonable attorney’s fees.” (Labor Code § 226(e)(1).)

20 36. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants failed to furnish Plaintiff and the
21 Aggrieved Employees with accurate, itemized wage statements showing all applicable hourly
22 rates, and all gross and net wages earned (including correct hours worked, correct wages for meal
23 periods that were not provided in accordance with California law, and correct wages for rest
24 periods that were not authorized and permitted to take in accordance with California law).

25 37. Because Defendants violated Labor Code § 226, Plaintiff and similarly Aggrieved
26 Employees suffered injury and damage to their statutorily protected rights. Accordingly,
27 Plaintiff and similarly Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover from Defendants the greater
28 of their actual damages caused by Defendants’ failure to comply with Labor Code § 226(a), or an

1 aggregate penalty not exceeding four thousand dollars (\$4,000) dollars per employee.

2 **H. Failure to Indemnify for Necessary Expenditures**

3 38. Labor Code § 2802(a) provides that employers shall indemnify his or her
4 employees for all necessary business expenditures or losses that have been incurred by the
5 employees in direct discharge of his or her duties. Throughout the statute of limitations period
6 applicable to this cause of action, Defendants wrongfully required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
7 Employees to pay expenses that they incurred in direct discharge of their duties for Defendants.
8 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees regularly paid out-of-pocket for necessary employment-
9 related expenses in the form of work attire. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees incurred
10 substantial expenses as a direct result of performing their job duties for Defendants, but
11 Defendants failed to indemnify Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for these employment-
12 related expenses.

13 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

14 **(Against all Defendants for Civil Penalties Under the Private Attorneys General Act of**
15 **2004, Cal. Lab. Code § 2698 et seq.)**

16 39. Plaintiff incorporates by reference and re-alleges all preceding paragraphs as
17 though fully set forth herein.

18 40. At all times herein mentioned, Defendants were subject to the Labor Code of the
19 State of California and the applicable IWC Orders.

20 41. California Labor Code § 2699(a) specifically provides for a private right of action
21 to recover penalties for violations of the Labor Code: “Notwithstanding any other provision of
22 law, any provision of this code that provides for a civil penalty to be assessed and collected by
23 the Labor and Workforce Development Agency or any of its departments, divisions,
24 commissions, boards, agencies, or employees, for a violation of this code, may, as an alternative,
25 be recovered through a civil action brought by an aggrieved employee on behalf of himself or
26 herself and other current or former employees pursuant to the procedures specified in Section
27 2699.3.”

28 42. Plaintiff has exhausted her administrative remedies pursuant to California Labor

Code § 2699.3. On November 23, 2021, she gave written notice by online filing to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) and by certified mail to Defendants of the specific provisions of the Labor Code that Defendants have violated against Plaintiff and current and former Aggrieved Employees, including the facts and theories to support the violations. Plaintiff also paid the filing fee on November 23, 2021. Plaintiff’s PAGA case number is LWDA-CM-854152-21 (*Merino Alejandro v. Santa Eastvale, Inc. dba Panini Kabob Grill*).

43. The statute of limitations is tolled while a plaintiff exhausts his or her administrative remedies with California’s LWDA prior to suit, which is required by the statute. (*See* Labor Code § 2699.3(d).)

44. The statute of limitations is also tolled from April 6, 2020 to October 1, 2020 pursuant to Rule 9(a) of the Emergency Rules Related to COVID-19.

45. More than sixty-five (65) days has elapsed since Plaintiff provided notice, but the LWDA has not indicated that it intends to investigate Defendants’ Labor Code violations discussed in the notice. Accordingly, Plaintiff may commence a civil action to recover penalties under Labor Code § 2699 pursuant to § 2699.3 for the violations of the Labor Code described in this Complaint. These penalties include, but are not limited to, penalties under California Labor Code §§ 210, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1, and 2699(f)(2).

46. Based on the conduct described in this Complaint, Plaintiff is entitled to an award of civil penalties on behalf of the State of California and similarly Aggrieved Employees of Defendants. The exact amount of the applicable penalties, in all, is in an amount to be shown according to proof at trial. These penalties are in addition to all other remedies permitted by law.

47. In addition, Plaintiff seeks an award of reasonable attorney’s fees and costs pursuant to Labor Code § 2699(g)(1), which states, “Any employee who prevails in any action shall be entitled to an award of reasonable attorney’s fees and costs.”

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Plaintiff, on behalf of all similarly aggrieved employees, prays for relief and judgment against Defendants, jointly and severally, as follows:

1. That the Court declare, adjudge and decree that Defendants violated the California

1 Labor Code by failing to pay for all hours worked (minimum, straight time, and overtime wages),
2 failing to provide meal periods, failing to authorize and permit rest periods, failing to pay all
3 earned wages twice per month, failing to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal
4 periods, failing to timely pay final wages, failing to furnish accurate wage statements, and failing
5 to indemnify for necessary business expenditures;

6 2. An award of civil penalties on behalf of herself and all similarly aggrieved
7 employees pursuant to PAGA;

8 3. Pre-judgment and post-judgment interest at the maximum rate allowed;

9 4. Attorneys' fees and costs reasonably incurred;

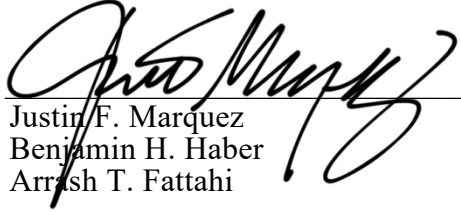
10 5. Injunctive and declaratory relief to the extent allowed by PAGA; and,

11 6. Such other and further relief that the Court deems proper.

12
13 Respectfully submitted,

14 Dated: January 28, 2022

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM

15
16 By: 

Justin F. Marquez
Benjamin H. Haber
Arrish T. Fattahi

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18 Attorneys for Plaintiff
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