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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF ALAMEDA

PATRICIA O'CONNOR and STEVEN
RODRIGUEZ, as individuals and on behalf of all
others similarly situated,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

WHOLE FOODS MARKET CALIFORNIA,
INC., a California corporation; and DOES 1
through 50, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No. 22CV008620

[Hon. Noël Wise, Department 21]

**PLAINTIFFS' NOTICE OF MOTION AND
MOTION FOR FINAL APPROVAL OF
CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT;
MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND
AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT**

[Filed concurrently with Declaration of Larry W. Lee; Declaration of Simon L. Yang; Declaration of Emil Davtyan; Declaration of Patricia O'Connor; Declaration of Steven Rodriguez; Declaration of Yami Burns; [Proposed] Order and Final Judgment]

Date: June 18, 2024
Time: 1:30 p.m.
Department: 21

Reservation ID: 120997891563

Complaint Filed: March 18, 2022

1 **TO THE COURT, DEFENDANT, AND ITS COUNSEL OF RECORD:**

2 **PLEASE TAKE NOTICE** that on June 18, 2024, at 1:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the
3 matter may be heard in Department 21, of the above-entitled court located at 1221 Oak Street, Oakland,
4 California 94612, Plaintiffs Patricia O'Connor and Steven Rodriguez will and hereby do move for an
5 Order:

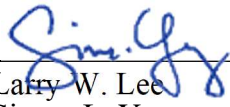
- 6 1. granting final approval to the Joint Stipulation of Class Action and PAGA Settlement, as
7 modified by the Amendment to Joint Stipulation of Class Action and PAGA Settlement
8 (collectively, the "Agreement") in this action;
- 9 2. approving distribution of the settlement funds to Settlement Class Members and Aggrieved
10 Employees pursuant to the terms of the Agreement;
- 11 3. approving Plaintiffs' request for a service award of \$10,000.00 to each Class Representative
12 pursuant to the terms of the Agreement;
- 13 4. approving Class Counsel's request for an award of attorneys' fees of 33⅓% of the
14 \$1,200,000.00 Gross Settlement Amount, or \$400,000.00, and reimbursement of litigation
15 costs of \$2,143.07 pursuant to the terms of the Agreement;
- 16 5. approving Plaintiffs' request for payment of the settlement administration costs to Phoenix
17 Settlement Administrators in the amount of \$11,500.00 pursuant to the terms of the
18 Agreement;
- 19 6. approving Plaintiffs' request for payment to the Labor & Workforce Development Agency of
20 \$225,000.00 pursuant to the terms of the Agreement; and
- 21 7. entering final judgment as to all members of the Settlement Class and the State of California
22 (including the Labor and Workforce Development Agency) in this action.

23 This motion is made pursuant to Rule 3.769 of the California Rules of Court, which provides for
24 Court approval of the settlement of a purported class action and allows the Court to grant final
25 certification of a class for settlement purposes. The overwhelmingly positive Class response—as shown
26 by the lack of any objections to the settlement and just one opt out—supports that the settlement is fair,
27 reasonable, and adequate, and should be granted final approval.

1 This motion will be based on the attached Memorandum of Points and Authorities, the
2 supporting Declarations of Larry W. Lee, Simon L. Yang, Emil Davtyan, Plaintiff Patricia O'Connor,
3 Plaintiff Steven Rodriguez, and Yami Burns of Phoenix Settlement Administrators, upon the oral
4 arguments of counsel (should there be any), and on the complete records and file herein.

5 DATED: May 23, 2024

DIVERSITY LAW GROUP, P.C.

6 By: 
7 Larry W. Lee
8 Simon L. Yang
9 Attorneys for Plaintiffs
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1 **MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES**

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SUMMARY OF MOTION

On March 18, 2022, Plaintiffs Patricia O'Connor and Steven Rodriguez filed this class and Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 ("PAGA") action against Defendant, Whole Foods Market California, Inc. The lawsuit alleges Defendant failed to furnish wage statements that accurately show all applicable hourly rates to non-exempt employees who were paid overnight wages.

Plaintiffs now seek the Court's final approval of the Joint Stipulation of Class Action and PAGA Settlement, as modified by the Amendment to Joint Stipulation of Class Action and PAGA Settlement (the "Agreement"). The Agreement provides for a \$1,200,000.00 fund to be created for the benefit of the Class, from which attorneys' fees, litigation costs, service awards to the Class Representatives, payment to the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA"), and costs of settlement administration are to be paid. The net settlement fund remaining after these deductions will be paid to Settlement Class Members and Aggrieved Employees.

The history of this litigation was previously detailed in Plaintiffs' Preliminary Approval Motion. On February 28, 2024, the Court preliminarily approved this settlement. It directed distribution of the Notice of Class Action Settlement ("Class Notice") and scheduled the hearing for final approval of settlement (the "Preliminary Approval Order").

As directed by the Court, the Administrator, Phoenix Settlement Administrators, distributed the Class Notice to 772 Class Members. Declaration of Yami Burns on behalf of Phoenix Settlement Administrators ("Admin Decl.") ¶ 5. Not a single objection was submitted. *Id.* ¶ 8. Just one request for exclusion was received. *Id.* ¶ 7. As such, there is a 99.87% participation rate. *Id.* ¶ 10. Based on the Class Members' response, an inference can be made that the Class supports the Court's Preliminary Approval Order finding that the Agreement is fair and reasonable.

In addition to the results of the notice process, the points discussed in Plaintiffs' Preliminary Approval Motion also support final approval of the settlement:

- The settlement provides a total settlement sum of \$1,200,000.00;
- The settlement is fair given that Class Members will receive (*after* deductions for fees, costs, etc.) a substantial amount of money (on average, each Settlement Class Member will receive approximately \$604.87, *see* Admin Decl. ¶ 12, and an additional \$97.15 as an Aggrieved Employee, *see* Admin Decl. ¶ 13);

- Class Members did not need to submit claim forms to participate in the settlement, but are being paid automatically;
- The allocation reflects that payment of claims will be paid to all Class Members in proportion to the number of relevant wage statements received by each Class Member during the Class Period;
- Plaintiffs conducted significant investigation in this case, including extensive informal discovery and exchanges of information by Plaintiffs and Defendant of class data for the entire class necessary for Plaintiffs to fully evaluate this case; and
- California’s LWDA will also be the beneficiary of this settlement as it will receive \$225,000.00, should this settlement be granted final approval.

Accordingly, the Court should grant Final Approval consistent with the Preliminary Approval Order.

DISCUSSION

I. Class Members Were Provided Notice of the Settlement.

The notice procedures required by the Preliminary Approval Order have been followed and satisfy all due process rights of Class Members. The Preliminary Approval Order contemplated that Phoenix Settlement Administrators would serve as the Administrator. It also contemplated that the Class Notice would be sent to all Class Members by first class mail, as specified in the Agreement.

As clearly stated in the Admin Declaration, notice was provided to Class Members, as required by the Preliminary Approval Order. On March 5, 2024, the Administrator received a Class Member mailing list from Defendant’s counsel that included 772 Class Members. Admin Decl. ¶ 3. On March 15, 2024, each of the persons identified on the mailing list were sent the Class Notice via first class mail. *Id.* ¶ 5. The Class Notice provided Class Members with Class Counsel’s contact information, where they could further seek information regarding the settlement, leave questions for the Administrator, and update their addresses. *Id.* Ex. A. From the date of mailing, zero mailed Class Notices were returned to the Administrator. *Id.* ¶ 6. In other words, no Class Notices were undeliverable.

Plaintiffs provided the “best notice practicable” in this case as necessary to protect the due process rights of class members. *See Phillips Petroleum Co. v. Shutts*, 472 U.S. 797, 811-12 (1985) (providing “best notice practicable” with description of the litigation and explanation of opt-out rights satisfies due process); *Eisen v. Carlisle & Jacquelin*, 417 U.S. 156, 174-75 (1974) (explaining individual notice must be sent to class members who can be identified through reasonable means); *Mullane v. Central Hanover Bank & Trust Co.*, 339 U.S. 306, 314 (1950) (stating best practicable notice is that

1 which is “reasonably calculated, under all the circumstances, to apprise interested parties of the
2 pendency of the action and afford them an opportunity to present their objections”).

3 Here, Class Members were mailed a notice that explained the settlement and allowed Class
4 Members to seek information, ask questions, and object, if so desired. As such, proper notice has been
5 given to the Class Members. Thus, the Court may determine the fairness and adequacy of the settlement
6 and enter its Order granting final approval, secure in the knowledge that all absent Class Members have
7 been given the opportunity to participate fully in the claims, exclusion, and the approval process.

8 **II. The Fair, Adequate, and Reasonable Settlement Should Be Given Final Approval.**

9 **A. The Strength of the Case and Likelihood of Class Certification Support Approval.**

10 The Court already addressed the requirements for certifying a class for settlement purposes in its
11 Order granting preliminary approval. Plaintiffs briefly address the requirements again here.

12 **1. The Class Is Ascertainable.**

13 “Whether a class is ascertainable is determined by examining (1) the class definition, (2) the size
14 of the class, and (3) the means available for identifying the class members.” *Reyes v. San Diego County*
15 *Board of Supervisors*, 196 Cal. App. 3d 1263, 1271 (1987); *see also* Code Civ. Proc. § 382.

16 Here, the Class includes any current or former non-exempt employees who worked for
17 Defendant in the State of California and received overnight wages at any time during the Class Period.
18 Agreement ¶ 1.6. The Class Period is from March 18, 2021, through November 28, 2021. *Id.* ¶ 1.8.

19 There are 772 individuals that comprise the Class. Admin Decl. ¶ 3.¹ This is more than the
20 minimum required to certify a class. Within the context of manageability, the issue is whether there
21 exists sufficient means for identifying class members at the remedial stage. *Reyes*, 196 Cal. App. 3d at
22 1274-75. Here, Class Members have already been identified and have already been sent notice.

23 **2. There Is a Community of Interest.**

24 The “community of interest” requirement embodies three separate factors: (1) predominant
25 common questions of law or fact; (2) class representatives whose claims are typical of the class; and (3)
26 class representatives who can adequately represent the class. *Richmond v. Dart Industries, Inc.*, 29 Cal.

27
28 ¹ All Class Members are also Aggrieved Employees. Agreement ¶ 1.3. The PAGA Period is the same as
the Class Period. *Id.* ¶ 1.18.

3d 462, 470 (1981); *Reese v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 73 Cal. App. 4th 1225, 1234 (1999).

a. There Are Predominant Common Questions of Law and Fact.

“The ultimate question in every case of this type [class actions] is whether ... the issues which may be jointly tried, when compared with those requiring separate adjudication, are so numerous and substantial that the maintenance of a class action would be advantageous to the judicial process and to the litigants.” *Lockheed Martin Corp. v. Superior Court*, 29 Cal. 4th 1096, 1104-05 (2003).

Here, Plaintiffs allege that Defendant, as a matter of common corporate policy, practice, or procedure, failed to furnish wage statements that accurately itemize and show all applicable hourly rates to non-exempt employees who were paid overnight wages. While Defendant denies that liability could be established on a class-wide basis and contends instead that liability would need to be conducted on a case-by-case basis, common questions predominate Plaintiffs’ theory of liability.

b. Plaintiffs’ Claims Are Typical of the Class Claims.

A class representative’s claim must be “typical” but not necessarily identical to the claims of other class members; it is sufficient that the representative is similarly situated so that he or she will have the motive to litigate on behalf of the class. *Classen v. Weller*, 145 Cal. App. 3d 27, 45 (1983). Courts look to “whether the action is based on conduct which is not unique to the named Plaintiff” and whether other class members were injured by the same conduct. *Hanon v. Dataproducts Corp.*, 976 F.2d 497, 508 (9th Cir. 1992). The purpose of the typicality requirement “is to assure that the interest of the named representative aligns with the interests of the class.” *Id.* at 508.

Plaintiffs allege that they were subjected to the same payroll policies and wage statement practices as all other Class Members. Specifically, like other members of the Class, Plaintiffs allege they received wage statements that did not show all applicable hourly rates of pay when they were paid overnight wages. Declaration of Patricia O’Connor (“O’Connor Decl.”) ¶ 2; Declaration of Steven Rodriguez (“Rodriguez Decl.”) ¶ 2. In sum, Plaintiffs allege they were subjected to the same policies and practices as other Class Members. Plaintiffs’ claims thus are typical to those of Class Members.

c. Plaintiffs Adequately Represented the Class.

The class representative, through qualified counsel, must be capable of “vigorously and tenaciously” protecting the interests of the class members. *Simons v. Horowitz*, 151 Cal. App. 3d 834,

1 846 (1984). Here, Plaintiffs do not have any interests adverse to the Class, nor have any such issues been
2 raised or presented. Plaintiffs have taken all necessary steps to represent the interests of the Class,
3 including providing information and documents to their counsel and reviewing pleadings in this case.
4 O'Connor Decl. ¶¶ 3-5; Rodriguez Decl. ¶¶ 3-5. For such reasons, Plaintiffs have adequately represented
5 Class Members.

6 **B. Defendant's Allegations and Position on Class Certification Support Approval.**

7 Defendant asserts that even assuming that a class could have been certified, Plaintiffs would be
8 unable to establish classwide liability. For example, Defendant contended that liability under Section
9 226(e) would be subject to defenses requiring proof of injuries resulting from knowing and intentional
10 violations.² Likewise, Defendant contended that PAGA penalties in any event would be subject to
11 discretionary reductions. Based thereon, Defendant continues to maintain that it is not liable for the
12 allegations made by Plaintiffs or for the amounts alleged by Plaintiffs.

13 **C. Risks, Expenses, and Complexity of Further Litigation Support Approval.**

14 Plaintiffs believe that a class can be certified. However, Plaintiffs also believe in the fairness of
15 the settlement when factoring in the uncertainty and risks involved in not prevailing on the theory of
16 liability alleged in the Complaint, the possibility of non-certification, and the potential for appeals.

17 There is always a risk that the court will not grant certification of the class. As Defendant alleges
18 that a class could not have been certified, there was at least a considerable risk that Plaintiffs would not
19 have obtained the total amount of damages alleged, and a significant number of complex issues that
20 would have necessitated substantial expenditure of time and expenses. Therefore, the risks, expenses,
21 and complexity of further litigation warrant granting of this motion.

22 **D. The Settlement Terms and Negotiation—as Well as the Class Member Response—**
23 **All Support the Conclusion that the Settlement is Fair, Adequate, and Reasonable.**

24 Without reiterating the details in the Preliminary Approval Motion showing that the Agreement
25 (and the negotiation process that led up to it) is fair and adequate, Plaintiffs highlight the following facts.
26 The Agreement was the product of negotiation between highly able and experienced attorneys on both
27 sides who possessed the relevant data and extensive legal research which they had carefully analyzed.

28 _____
² Except as otherwise noted, all "Section" references are to the Labor Code.

1 Declaration of Larry W. Lee (“Lee Decl.”) ¶¶ 4-5.

2 Following notice to the Class, not a single objection to the settlement was received. Admin Decl.
3 ¶ 8. The Court may appropriately infer that the class action settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable,
4 given that not a single Class Member has submitted an objection. *See Class Plaintiffs v. City of Seattle*,
5 955 F.2d 1268, 1291 (9th Cir. 1992). Indeed, the Class Member response suggests the preliminarily
6 approved settlement should now be granted final approval.

7 **III. Well-Established Legal Principles Support Final Approval of the Settlement.**

8 On a motion for final approval of a class action settlement under Code of Civil Procedure section
9 382 and Rule 3.769 of the California Rules of Court, a court’s inquiry is whether the settlement is “fair,
10 adequate and reasonable.” *Officers for Justice v. Civil Serv. Comm’n*, 688 F.2d 615, 625 (9th Cir. 1982).
11 A settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable, and therefore merits final approval, when “the interests of
12 the class are better served by the settlement than by further litigation.” *See Manual for Complex*
13 *Litigation, Fourth* § 21.6 at 309 (Fed. Jud. Ctr., 4th ed. 2004) (“MCL”). The law favors settlement,
14 particularly in class actions and other complex cases, where substantial resources can be conserved by
15 avoiding the time, cost, and rigors of formal litigation. *See* 4 Alba Conte & Herbert B. Newberg,
16 *Newberg on Class Actions* § 11.41 (4th ed. 2002); *Class Plaintiffs v. City of Seattle*, 955 F.2d 1268,
17 1276 (9th Cir. 1992); *Van Bronkhorst v. Safeco Corp.*, 529 F.2d 943, 950 (9th Cir. 1976).

18 Although the Court possesses “broad discretion” in determining that a proposed class action
19 settlement is fair, the Court’s role must be limited to the extent necessary to reach a reasoned judgment
20 that the agreement is not the product of fraud or overreaching by, or collusion between, the negotiating
21 parties, and that the settlement, taken as a whole, is fair, reasonable, and adequate to all concerned. *See*
22 *Officers for Justice*, 688 F.2d at 625. Accordingly, the Court should give due regard to what is otherwise
23 a “private consensual agreement” between the parties. *Id.*; *see also Church v. Consolidated Freightways*,
24 *Inc.*, 1993 WL 149840 (N.D. Cal. 1993); *In re Wash. Pub. Power Supply Sys. Sec. Litig.*, 720 F. Supp.
25 1379 (D. Ariz. 1989), *aff’d sub nom.*; *City of Seattle*, 955 F.2d 1268; MCL § 21.6 at 309 (“The judicial
26 role in reviewing a proposed settlement is critical, but limited to approving the proposed settlement,
27 disapproving it, or imposing conditions on it. The judge cannot rewrite the agreement”).

28 As the Court of Appeal has cautioned:

1 It cannot be overemphasized that neither the trial court in approving the settlement nor
2 this Court in reviewing that approval have the right or duty to reach any ultimate
3 conclusions on the issues of fact and law which underlie the merits of the dispute. It is
4 well settled that in the judicial consideration of proposed settlements, ‘the [trial] judge
does not try out or attempt to decide the merits of the controversy,’ [citation] and the
appellate court ‘need not and should not reach any dispositive conclusions on the
admittedly unsettled legal issue.

5 *7-Eleven Owners for Fair Franchising v. Southland Corp.*, 85 Cal. App. 4th 1135, 1146 (2000).

6 A court’s review and approval of a PAGA settlement is subject to a similar standard as that for
7 class action settlement approval. A court should evaluate a PAGA settlement to determine whether it is
8 fair, reasonable, and adequate in view of PAGA’s purposes to remediate present labor law violations,
9 deter future ones, and to maximize enforcement of state labor laws. *Moniz v. Adecco USA, Inc.*, 72 Cal.
10 App. 5th 56, 77 (2021).

11 **A. The Settlement is Presumed to Be Fair**

12 The Court should begin with the presumption that the settlement is fair and should be approved:

13 [A] presumption of fairness exists where: (1) the settlement is reached through arm’s-
14 length bargaining; (2) investigation and discovery are sufficient to allow counsel and the
15 court to act intelligently; (3) counsel is experienced in similar litigation; and (4) the
percentage of objectors is small.

16 *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.*, 48 Cal. App. 4th 1794, 1802 (1996); *accord*, *Ellis v. Naval Air Rework*
17 *Facility*, 87 F.R.D. 15, 18 (N.D. Cal. 1980); *In re Wash. Pub Power Supply*, 720 F. Supp. at 1387.

18 The settlement in the case at bar warrants approval and carries a presumption of fairness. As
19 previously noted in the application for Preliminary Approval, this current settlement was negotiated at
20 arm’s length. Lee Decl. ¶¶ 4-5. Class Counsel engaged in extensive factual investigation before settling,
21 including the exchange of extensive informal discovery and class data enabling Class Counsel to
22 evaluate the full extent of Defendant’s potential liability. *Id.* ¶ 4. Further, Class Counsel is highly
23 experienced in this type of litigation. As shown in the supporting declarations, Class Counsel has
24 significant experience in class actions and employment wage and hour matters. *Id.* ¶¶ 6-8; Declaration of
25 Simon L. Yang (“Yang Decl.”) ¶¶ 4-7; Declaration of Emil Davtyan (“Davtyan Decl.”) ¶¶ 4-8.

26 **B. Two-Way Costs and Other Risks Inherent in Litigation Favor Final Approval.**

27 To assess the fairness, adequacy, and reasonableness of a class action settlement, the Court also
28 should weigh the immediacy and certainty of substantial settlement proceeds against the risks inherent in

1 continued litigation. *See also In re General Motors Corp.*, 55 F.3d 768, 806 (3d Cir. 1995) (“present
2 value of the damages plaintiffs would likely recover if successful, appropriately discounted for the risk
3 of not prevailing, should be compared with the amount of the proposed settlement”); *Girsh v. Jepson*,
4 521 F.2d 153, 157 (3d Cir. 1975); *Boyd v. Bechtel Corp.*, 485 F. Supp. 610, 616-17 (N.D. Cal. 1979).

5 If Plaintiffs pursued this case without settlement and failed to prevail, Plaintiffs would have been
6 potentially responsible for Defendant’s costs. Likewise, any other current or former employees that
7 bring individual claims also would face the uncertainty of prevailing and the possibility of paying costs
8 to Defendant. For that reason, many of these current and former employees likely would not pursue
9 claims. This lawsuit thus achieves a true benefit for the Class that they otherwise might not get or even
10 seek as individuals. Here, given that a fair and reasonable settlement has been reached, neither Plaintiffs
11 nor any of the Class Members will be required to pay for Defendant’s litigation costs.

12 The risks of this case were weighed by Class Counsel and should be considered a significant
13 factor by the Court in its determination of final approval. Class Counsel obtained a significant settlement
14 for the Class that resulted in a fair recovery which at the same time provides for finality and no risk of
15 costs by the Class Members or Class Representative.

16 **C. The Complexity, Expense, and Likely Duration of Continued Litigation Against**
17 **Defendant Favor Final Approval.**

18 Another factor considered by courts in approving a settlement is the complexity, expense, and
19 likely duration of the litigation. *See Officers for Justice*, 688 F.2d at 625; *Girsh*, 521 F.2d at 157. In
20 applying this factor, courts weigh the benefits of settlement against the expense and delay involved in
21 achieving a favorable result at trial. *Young v. Katz*, 447 F.2d 431, 433-34 (5th Cir. 1971).

22 The Agreement affords the Class prompt, fair relief while avoiding significant legal and factual
23 battles that otherwise may have prevented the Class from obtaining any recovery at all. While Class
24 Counsel believe the Class Members’ claims are meritorious and can be successfully litigated, they are
25 experienced and fully understand the inherent risks and uncertainty involved with such matters as the
26 resolution of class certification, the outcome of a potential trial, and the outcome of any appeals that
27 would inevitably follow should the Class prevail at trial. Class Counsel has also assessed the same risks
28 in connection with the current settlement. Because the settlement provides immediate and substantial

1 relief, without the attendant risks and delay of continued litigation—not to mention the threat of
2 litigation fees and costs—Class Counsel believe that the settlement warrants the Court’s final approval.

3 While continued litigation could have led to appeals on several issues, the settlement that was
4 reached provides to all Class Members—regardless of their means—fair relief in a prompt and efficient
5 manner. Were the Court to deny final approval, the Class Members would be left without a remedy as a
6 practical matter and courts across the State would have to address the issues presented here in a
7 piecemeal, costly, and time-consuming manner. The settlement in this case is therefore consistent with
8 the “overriding public interest in settling and quieting litigation” that is “particularly true in class action
9 suits.” *See Van Bronkhorst*, 529 F.2d at 950; *see also 4 Newberg* § 11.41. Here, litigation of this case
10 through trial and appeals would require extended litigation.

11 **D. The Opinion of Experienced Counsel Favors Final Approval.**

12 Class Counsel supports the settlement as fair, reasonable, and adequate, as in the best interest of
13 the Class Members as a whole (and in light of PAGA’s purposes). Lee Decl. ¶ 5; Yang Decl. ¶ 2;
14 Davtyan Decl. ¶ 9. Similarly, counsel for Defendant is in favor of this settlement. The endorsement of
15 qualified and well-informed counsel of a settlement as fair, reasonable, and adequate is entitled to
16 significant weight by the Court. *See Officers for Justice*, 688 F.2d at 625; *Ellis*, 87 F.R.D. at 18; *Boyd*,
17 485 F. Supp. at 617; *Linney v. Cellular Alaska P’ship*, 151 F.3d 1234, 1242 (9th Cir. 1998).

18 **IV. The Proposed Payments and Procedures Should Be Approved.**

19 **A. The Proposed Procedure for Uncashed Settlement Checks Should Be Approved.**

20 As referenced in the Motion for Preliminary Approval, to the extent any uncashed settlement
21 funds remain after 180 days, the Parties have agreed that the funds (upon the expiration date) would be
22 distributed pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 384 with 100% of the sum to be paid to Legal
23 Aid at Work. Agreement ¶ 5.4. None of the settlement funds will revert to Defendant.

24 **B. The Requested Class Representative Service Award Should Be Approved.**

25 Class Representatives Patricia O’Connor and Steven Rodriguez each request a service award of
26 \$10,000.00. Plaintiffs met with Class Counsel to provide substantive information regarding Defendant’s
27 practices. O’Connor Decl. ¶ 3; Rodriguez Decl. ¶ 3. Plaintiffs provided invaluable information,
28 evidence, and documents that resulted in this settlement.

1 In addition to the invaluable services that they provided and approximately 90.0 hours Plaintiffs
2 collectively devoted to the litigation on behalf of the Class, O'Connor Decl. ¶ 3; Rodriguez Decl. ¶ 3,
3 Plaintiffs took significant risks, both professionally and monetarily, in acting as Class Representatives to
4 seek benefits for the Class. Because the claims Plaintiffs alleged involved the payment of costs to the
5 prevailing party, Plaintiffs could have possibly faced paying the costs of Defendant had they not
6 prevailed in this action. Moreover, Plaintiffs understood that an individual case would have resolved
7 much faster than a class action and involved much less financial risk than a class action. Despite this,
8 Plaintiffs agreed to pursue this case on behalf of the Class. *Id.* ¶ 8.

9 Also, given that future employers are much less likely to hire individuals who have filed
10 employment-related lawsuits, particularly cases of this nature, the Class Representative also faces
11 significant risk in not being able to find suitable employment—all as a result of filing of this case against
12 Defendant. Plaintiffs took these risks upon themselves to the benefit of the Class. O'Connor Decl. ¶ 8;
13 Rodriguez Decl. ¶ 8. Class Members did not have to file individual lawsuits and bear the risks of
14 payment of costs if they did not prevail, nor did they have to face the potential for retaliation and not
15 getting future employment had they filed a lawsuit which is a public record. These are significant
16 benefits that weigh in favor of granting the requested award. Moreover, this litigation has resulted in a
17 significantly valuable benefit to the Class, and Plaintiffs took on substantial risks in helping to get this
18 financial benefit to the Class. As such, the award should be granted to Plaintiffs for their commitment,
19 dedication, and risks taken for this litigation.

20 Equally important, Plaintiffs provided a general release and waiver of the protections of Civil
21 Code section 1542. O'Connor Decl. ¶ 9; Rodriguez Decl. ¶ 9. This is a more extensive release than that
22 provided by the Class at large and also supports the request for the award. To pursue the alleged claim
23 on behalf of the Class, Plaintiffs elected not to pursue other claims against Defendant; to secure the
24 benefits for the Class in this settlement, Plaintiffs must waive all other claims without any other
25 compensation.³

26 ³ Courts have routinely granted approval of settlements containing such incentive awards. *See Van*
27 *Vranken v. Atlantic Richfield Co.*, 901 F. Supp. 294, 299-300 (N.D. Cal. 1995) (incentive award of
28 \$50,000); *In re Dun & Bradstreet Credit Servs. Customer Litig.*, 130 F.R.D. 366, 374 (S.D. Ohio 1990)
(two incentive awards of \$55,000, and three incentive awards of \$35,000); *Brotherton v. Cleveland*, 141

1 **C. The Requested Attorneys’ Fees Should Be Approved.**

2 **1. The Percentage of the Fund Method Supports the Requested Fees.**

3 Class Counsel seeks a fee award calculated at 33⅓% of the total value of the settlement for the
4 successful prosecution and resolution of this action. California state and federal courts have recognized
5 that an appropriate method for determining award of attorneys’ fees is based on a percentage of the total
6 value of benefits to class members by the settlement. *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.*, 91 Cal. App. 4th
7 224, 254 (2001); *Serrano v. Priest*, 20 Cal. 3d 25, 34 (1977); *Boeing Co. v. Van Gemert*, 444 U.S. 472,
8 478 (1980); *Vincent v. Hughes Air West, Inc.*, 557 F.2d 759, 769 (9th Cir. 1997). The purpose of this
9 equitable doctrine is to avoid unjust enrichment to the Class and to “spread litigation costs
10 proportionally among all the beneficiaries so that the active beneficiary does not bear the entire burden
11 alone.” *Vincent*, 557 F.2d at 769.

12 The California Supreme Court has provided guidance regarding the award of attorneys’ fees in
13 wage and hour class action settlements. Under California law, the award of attorneys’ fees in common
14 fund wage and hour class action settlements should start with the percentage method. *See Laffitte v.*
15 *Robert Half Int’l*, 1 Cal. 5th 480, 503 (2016) (“We join the overwhelming majority of federal and state
16 courts in holding that when class action litigation establishes a monetary fund for the benefit of the class
17 members, and the trial court in its equitable powers awards class counsel a fee out of that fund, the court
18 may determine the amount of a reasonable fee by choosing an appropriate percentage of the fund
19 created”). Under the percentage of the fund method, a court’s objective remains to “mimic the market”
20 in fixing a reasonable fee. *See Gaskill v. Gordon*, 160 F.3d 361, 363 (7th Cir. 1998) (Posner, J.) (“When
21 a fee is set by a court rather than by contract, the object is to set it at a level that will approximate what
22 the market will set The judge, in other words, is trying to mimic the market in legal services.”).

23 First, the fee award representing 33⅓% of the fund clearly falls within that range and is
24 consistent with other rulings of other courts and comprehensive surveys of class action settlements and
25 fee awards. Attorneys’ fees awards of 35% of the fund are within the expected range in the “market in

26 *F. Supp. 2d 907, 913-14 (S.D. Ohio 2001) (granting a \$50,000 incentive award); Enter. Energy Corp. v.*
27 *Columbia Gas Transmission Corp.*, 137 F.R.D. 240, 251-52 (S.D. Ohio 1991) (\$50,000 awarded to each
28 class representative); *Glass v. UBS Fin. Servs.*, 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 8476, at *51-52 (N.D. Cal. Jan.
27, 2007) (awarding \$25,000 incentive award in FLSA overtime wages class action); *Cook v. Niedert*,
142 F.3d 1004, 1016 (7th Cir. 1998) (affirming \$25,000 incentive award to class representative).

1 legal services. *See* Fitzpatrick, *An Empirical Study of Class Action Settlements and Their Fee Award*, 7
2 J. Empirical Leg. Stud. 811, 833 (2010) (analyzing 444 cases between 2006-2007 and concluding that
3 “[m]ost fee awards were between 25 percent and 35 percent”).⁴

4 Second, the results delivered by Class Counsel also support the requested percentage of the fund.
5 Here, Plaintiffs and their counsel secured a \$1,200,000.00 settlement. As detailed in the Preliminary
6 Approval Motion, **the \$1,200,000.00 settlement obtained approximately 71.78% of the potential**
7 **total recovery of \$1,671,850.00.** *See* Preliminary Approval Motion at 6:13-19. Each Settlement Class
8 Member will release claims related to Section 226 violations only, but on average, **each Settlement**
9 **Class Member will receive more than \$700**—\$604.87 as a Settlement Class Member and an additional
10 \$97.15 as an Aggrieved Employee, *see* Admin Decl. ¶¶ 12-13. These are excellent results.

11 Third, “the response of the class members to attorneys’ fee notice, though not decisive, is
12 relevant to the ... reasonable determination” regarding fees. *Swedish Hospital v. Shalala*, 1 F.3d 1261,
13 1272 (D.C. Cir. 1993). A positive response rate tends to suggest that the court’s “approximation of the
14 market” for fees is well supported. *Id.* at 1269. Here, the Class Notice specifically notified the Class that
15 Class Counsel would be seeking \$400,000.00 in attorneys’ fees. Again, there were no objections.

16 Fourth, it is recognized that one of the primary factors justifying an enhanced attorney’s fees
17 reward is the attendant risks inherent in the litigation. As observed in *City of Detroit v. Grinnell Corp.*:

18 No one expects a lawyer whose compensation is contingent upon his success to charge, when
19 successful, as little as he would charge a client who had agreed to pay for his services, regardless
20 of success. Nor, particularly in complicated cases producing large recoveries, is it just to make a
fee depend solely on the reasonable amount of time expended.

21 495 F.2d 448, 470 (2d Cir. 1974). Here, it is clear that a settlement fund of \$1,200,000.00 has been
22 created. For Class Counsel, the fees here were wholly contingent in nature and the case presented far
23 more risk than the usual contingent fee case. Among the risks was the cost inherent in class action
24 litigation, as well as a long battle with a corporate Defendant who had retained a premier and highly

25
26 ⁴ Such a fee award mimics the market and “is supported by the fact that typical contingency fee
27 agreements provide that class counsel will recover 33% if the case is resolved before trial and 40% if the
28 case is tried.” *Fernandez v. Victoria Secret Stores LLC*, 2008 WL 8150856, at *16 n.59 (C.D. Cal. July
21, 2008) (citing Brickman, *Effective Hourly Rates of Contingency-Fee Lawyers: Competing Data and
Non-Competitive Fees* (Fall 2003) 81 Wash U. L. Q. 653, 659 n. 11). Indeed, a fee award of 35% of the
fund is consistent with “empirical studies [that] show that ... fee awards in class actions average around
one-third of the recovery.” *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.*, 162 Cal. App. 4th 43, 66 n.11 (2008).

1 experienced defense firm. For such reasons, Class Counsel’s request for attorneys’ fees in the amount of
2 \$400,000.00 is fair, reasonable, and adequate.

3 **To be certain, Class Counsel in this matter faced particular risks in litigating this matter.**

4 There were two related matters with arguably overlapping claims—*Franke v. Whole Foods Market*
5 *California, Inc.*, San Francisco County Superior Court Case No. CGC-20-586827 (“*Franke*”), and
6 *Vuchkov v. Whole Foods Market California, Inc.*, Alameda County Superior Court Case No.
7 RG21092593 (“*Vuchkov*”). Yang Decl. ¶ 3. Both matters created plausible scenarios in which Defendant
8 would argue that Plaintiffs’ claims were precluded by settlements in those matters. *Id.* Nonetheless,
9 Plaintiffs and Class Counsel did not agree to resolve the matter at an initial mediation on October 18,
10 2022, at a value that would be unfair to the Class. *Id.* Instead, Plaintiffs and Class Counsel continued
11 litigating until obtaining an excellent result for the Class at the second mediation on June 7, 2023. *Id.*

12 **2. The Lodestar Cross-Check Supports the Requested Fees.**

13 The amount requested is reasonable for an additional reason. While the primary method
14 employed to determine fees is the percentage method, courts have discretion to use the lodestar method
15 to “cross-check” the amount of fees calculated by way of percentage. The *Laffitte* court emphasized,
16 however, that “the lodestar calculation, when used in this manner, does not override the trial court’s
17 primary determination of the fee as a percentage of the common fund and thus does not impose an
18 absolute maximum or minimum on the potential fee award.” *Laffitte*, 1 Cal. 5th at 505 (emphasis
19 added); *In re Rite Aid Corp. Secs. Litig.*, 396 F.3d 294, 306-307 (3d Cir. 2005) (“[The lodestar cross-
20 check does not trump the primary reliance on the percentage of common fund method”).

21 Courts find reasonable multipliers in a lodestar cross-check can “range from 2 to 4 or even
22 higher.” *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.*, 91 Cal. App. 4th 224, 255 (2001).⁵ Indeed, the intermediate
23 court in *Laffitte*—after finding that “2 to 4” is a reasonable range for multipliers on a cross-check—
24 affirmed a 2.13 multiplier. *Laffitte*, 231 Cal. App. 4th at 881-82.⁶ Moreover, the Ninth Circuit has cited

26 ⁵ *Accord Chavez*, 162 Cal. App. 4th at 60 (applying a 2.5 multiplier on a lodestar cross-check); *Sutter*
27 *Health Uninsured Pricing Cases*, 171 Cal. App. 4th 495, 512 (2009) (applying a 2.52 multiplier on a
28 cross-check); *City of Oakland v. Oakland Raiders*, 203 Cal. App. 3d 78 (1988) (affirming a 2.34
multiplier without remand).

⁶ The intermediate court opinion was affirmed in full upon review by the California Supreme Court.

1 with approval a comprehensive study of fees awarded by the percentage method showing that the
2 majority of multipliers awarded are “in the 1.5-3.0” range. *See Vizcaino v. Microsoft Corp.*, 290 F.3d
3 1043, 1051 (9th Cir. 2002) (affirming a multiplier of 3.65 in an employment class action case and
4 analyzing the multiplier awarded in over 30 cases).⁷

5 With respect to Class Counsel’s lodestar, at least 322.0 hours have been expended by Class
6 Counsel litigating this case. Lee Decl. ¶ 10, Ex. B; Yang Decl. ¶ 9, Ex. A; Davtyan Decl. ¶ 13.
7 Moreover, Class Counsel expects to incur approximately 31.0 hours of anticipated time spent to attend
8 the final approval hearing, secure final approval, submit post-final approval compliance papers, as well
9 as respond to post-final approval phone calls and correspondence from the Administrator, defense
10 counsel, and Class Members. *Id.* Courts are quite liberal in the evidence required to prove an attorney’s
11 hours. Detailed time records are not required; an attorney’s testimony alone may suffice: “Testimony of
12 an attorney as to the number of hours worked on a particular case is sufficient evidence to support an
13 award of attorney fees, even in the absence of detailed time records.” *Martino v. Denevi*, 182 Cal. App.
14 3d 553, 559 (1986).

15 Reasonable hours include, in addition to time spent during litigation, the time spent before the
16 action is filed, including time spent interviewing the clients, investigating the facts and the law, and
17 preparing the initial pleadings. *New York Gaslight Club, Inc. v. Carey*, 447 U.S. 54, 62 (1980). The fee
18 award should also include fees incurred to establish and defend the attorneys’ fee claim. *Serrano v.*
19 *Unruh*, 32 Cal. 3d 621, 639 (1982). The hours for which Plaintiffs’ Counsel seeks compensation involve
20 only these types of tasks. Thus, the number of hours for which fees are sought is reasonable.

21 A reasonable hourly rate is the prevailing rate charged by attorneys of similar skill and
22 experience in the relevant community. *PLCM Group, Inc. v. Drexler*, 22 Cal. 4th 1084, 1095 (2000).
23 The court may consider other factors when determining a reasonable hourly rate, *e.g.*, the attorney’s skill

24 ⁷ Federal district courts applying California law have likewise routinely approved cross-check
25 multipliers between 2.0 and 3.0 in employment cases. *See, e.g., Willner v. Manpower Inc.*, 2015 WL
26 3863625, at *7 (N.D. Cal. June 22, 2015) (affirming a 2.10 multiplier on settlement of California Labor
27 Code violations); *Dyer v. Wells Fargo Bank, N.A.*, 303 F.R.D. 326, 334 (N.D. Cal. 2014) (approving
28 attorneys’ fees that resulted in lodestar multiplier of 2.83); *Hopkins v. Stryker Sales Corp.*, 2013 WL
496358, at *5 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 6, 2013) (approving a multiplier of 2.76 in settlement of Labor Code
violations). Other courts have found even higher multipliers to be reasonable by comparison to other
cases. *See Craft v. County of San Bernardino*, 624 F. Supp. 2d 1113, 1125-26 (C.D. Cal. 2008)
(approving a 5.2 multiplier after surveying a large body of cases affirming a higher multiplier).

1 and experience, the nature of the work performed, the relevant area of expertise and the attorney's
2 customary billing rates. *Flannery v. California Highway Patrol*, 61 Cal. App. 4th 629, 632-33 (1998).

3 Here, Here, Mr. Lee's hourly rate is \$800. Lee Decl. ¶ 10. Mr. Yang's hourly rate is \$750. Yang
4 Decl. ¶ 8. Mr. Davtyan's hourly rate is \$695. Davtyan Decl. ¶ 14. Plaintiffs' Counsel's skill and
5 experience justify the requested rates. As shown in the supporting declarations, Plaintiffs' Counsel has
6 significant experience in the area of employment and wage and hour class and representative actions.
7 Plaintiffs' Counsel's practices focus on representing employees in employment matters, particularly
8 wage and hour cases on a contingency basis. Lee Decl. ¶¶ 6-8; Yang Decl. ¶¶ 4-7; Davtyan Decl. ¶¶ 4-8.

9 Based on the rates and 353.00 total hours, the lodestar for Class Counsel through the finalization
10 of this settlement will be approximately \$266,110.00. Lee Decl. ¶ 10; Yang Decl. ¶ 9; Davtyan Decl. ¶
11 14. The requested attorneys' fees result in a modest multiplier of approximately 1.50. Again, the
12 requested fees are reasonable and fair, based on the factors described above. The cross-check also
13 supports the requested fees.

14 **D. The Court Should Approve the Request for Reimbursement of Costs.**

15 The request for reimbursement of costs, in the amount of \$2,143.07 is fair and reasonable. As set
16 forth in Plaintiffs' counsel's declaration, the costs were all directly incurred in the prosecution of this
17 action. Lee Decl. ¶ 9, Ex. A. As such, this request should be approved.

18 **E. The Administrator's Fees and Costs Should Be Approved.**

19 Pursuant to the terms of the Agreement, the fees and costs of the Administrator, Phoenix
20 Administrators, are to be paid out of the class settlement funds. As shown in the Declaration of Yami
21 Burns, the settlement administration fees expended in this matter amount to a total of \$11,500.00.
22 Admin Decl. ¶ 15, Ex. B. For such reasons, it is requested that the Administrator's fees be approved.

23 **V. Notice to the LWDA Has Been Provided.**

24 On March 5, 2024, Plaintiffs uploaded the Order Granting Plaintiffs' Motion for Preliminary
25 Approval of Class Action Settlement to the LWDA's website. Lee Decl. ¶ 13. Concurrent with the filing
26 of this motion, Plaintiffs also have uploaded the final approval motion to the LWDA. *Id.*

1 **CONCLUSION**

2 Plaintiffs respectfully submit that the standards for final approval have been met and the terms of
3 the Agreement are fair, adequate, and reasonable. Accordingly, Plaintiffs respectfully request that the
4 Court enter an Order in the form proposed and submitted.

5 DATED: May 23, 2024

DIVERSITY LAW GROUP, P.C.

6 By: _____

7 Simon L. Yang

8 Attorneys for Plaintiffs
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