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Attorneys for Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham and Ninette Amaya and the Class

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES – SPRING STREET COURTHOUSE

IMAHNI ISIS CUNNINGHAM, and NINETTE AMAYA, individually, and on behalf of other members of the general public similarly situated;

Plaintiffs,

vs.

SERVICON SYSTEMS, INC., an unknown business entity; and DOES 1 through 100, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No. 20STCV35595

Honorable Carolyn B. Kuhl
Department SSC-12

CLASS ACTION

PLAINTIFFS' NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR FINAL APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT, CLASS COUNSEL FEES PAYMENT, CLASS COUNSEL LITIGATION EXPENSES, CLASS REPRESENTATIVE SERVICE PAYMENT, AND PAGA REPRESENTATIVE PAYMENT; MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT THEREOF

[Declarations of Class Counsel (Yasmin Hosseini and Raul Perez); Declaration of Class Representatives (Imahni Cunningham, Ninette Amaya, and Christopher Bell); Declaration of Settlement Administrator (Kevin Lee); and [Proposed] Final Approval Order and Judgment filed concurrently herewith]

Date: November 13, 2024
Time: 10:30 a.m.
Department: SSC-12

Complaint Filed: September 17, 2020
FAC Filed: October 12, 2022
SAC Filed: March 27, 2024
Trial Date: None Set

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Attorneys for Plaintiff Christopher Bell and the Class

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on November 13, 2024 at 10:30 a.m., in Department SSC-12 of the above-entitled Court, located at 312 North Spring Street, Los Angeles, California 90012, Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham, Ninette Amaya, and Christopher Bell (together, "Plaintiffs" or "Class Representatives") will and hereby do move for an order granting final approval of:

1. The Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement ("Settlement," "Agreement," "Settlement Agreement") on the grounds that the Settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable because:

- A Net Settlement Amount of approximately **$628,031.64** will be fully distributed to all Class Members who do not submit a timely and valid Request for Exclusion from the Class Settlement ("Settlement Class Members");
- **No objections or Requests for Exclusion** was submitted to the settlement administrator, Phoenix Class Action Administration Solutions ("Administrator" or "Phoenix");

2. Payment in the amount of $595,000.00, of which seventy percent (70%) shall be awarded to Lawyers *for* Justice, PC and thirty percent (30%) shall be awarded to Capstone Law APC (together, "Class Counsel"), representing thirty-five percent (35%) of the Gross Settlement Amount, for attorneys' fees, which is reasonable and justified on a percentage-basis;

3. Payment in the amount of **$18,968.36** to Class Counsel for litigation costs;

4. Payment in the amount of **$28,000.00** to the Settlement Administrator for Administration Costs;

5. Payment in the amount of **$10,000.00** each to Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham and Ninette Amaya, as Class Representatives Service Payments, for their time and effort in representing the Class;

6. Payment in the amount of **$10,000.00** to Plaintiff Christopher Bell, as the PAGA Representative Service Payment, for his time and effort in representing the Aggrieved Employees and the State of California; and

7. Allocation of the penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code section 2698, *et seq*., ("PAGA") in the amount of $400,000.00, of which

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seventy-five percent (75%), or **$300,000.00** will be paid to the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") ("LWDA PAGA Payment") and twenty-five percent (25%), or **$100,000.00**, will be distributed to all current and former hourly-paid or non-exempt employees of Defendant in California employed during the PAGA Period ("Aggrieved Employees").

This Motion is made pursuant to Rule 3.769 and Rule 3.1113(e) of the California Rules of Court, which require approval by the Court of a class action settlement and permit the Court to extend the page limit for memoranda.

This motion is based upon the following Memorandum of Points and Authorities; the Declarations of Class Counsel (Yasmin Hosseini and Raul Perez), Class Representatives (Imahni Isis Cunningham and Ninette Amaya, and Christopher Bell), Administrator (Kevin Lee of Phoenix) in support thereof; the pleadings and other records on file with the Court in this matter; and such evidence and oral argument as may be presented at the hearing on this Motion.

Dated: October 21, 2024

LAWYERS *for* JUSTICE, PC

By: ______________________

Yasmin Hosseini
Attorneys for Plaintiff and the Class

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TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

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No table of authorities entries found.Other Authorities

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. SUMMARY OF MOTION

Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham, Ninette Amaya, and Christopher Bell (together, "Plaintiffs") seek final approval of: (1) the Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00[1]; (2) attorneys' fees in the amount of 35% of the Gross Settlement Amount, or $595,000.00 ("Class Counsel Fees Payment"), and reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses in the amount of $18,968.36 ("Class Counsel Litigation Expenses")[2] to Lawyers *for* Justice, PC and Capstone Law APC ("Class Counsel"); (3) Administration Costs in the amount of $28,000.00 to Phoenix Class Action Administration Solutions ("Administrator" or "Phoenix")[3]; (4) the Class Representatives Service Payments of $10,000.00, each, to Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham and Ninette Amaya ($20,000.00)[4]; (5) the PAGA Representative Service Payment of $10,000.00 to Plaintiff Christopher Bell[5]; and (6) allocation of $400,000.00 for penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code § 2698, *et seq* ("PAGA") ("PAGA Penalties").[6]

Plaintiff seeks relief on behalf of the following Class:

> All current and former hourly-paid or non-exempt non-union employees of Defendant in California who are not subject to arbitration agreements and who are or were employed during the Class Period ("Class" or "Class Members").[7]

This matter involved ongoing investigations, formal and informal discovery, review and analysis of a large volume of documents and data prior to and during settlement negotiations. This matter has required 841.60 hours of attorney time by Class Counsel. As will be demonstrated herein, the request for attorneys' fees, which represents thirty five percent (35%) of the Gross Settlement Amount, is fully supported by the use of the percentage-fee method. Courts have

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[1] Class Action and PAGA Settlement and Release ("Settlement Agreement"), § 1.21.
[2] *Id.*, § 3.2.2.
[3] *Id.*, § 3.2.3.
[4] *Id.*, § 3.2.1.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Id.*, § 3.2.4.
[7] *Id.*, § 1.5. "Class Period" is defined as the period from September 17, 2016 to October 17, 2023. *See id.*, § 1.11.

historically awarded fees of up to fifty percent (50%) of the recovery. The requested attorneys' fees are also supported under the lodestar cross-check method.[8]

Plaintiff moves for final approval of the Class Representative Service Payments in the amount of $10,000.00 each to Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham and Ninette Amaya, and a PAGA Representative Service Payment in the amount of $10,000.00 to Plaintiff Christopher Bell, to compensate Plaintiffs for the time and effort that they expended spearheading the lawsuit on behalf of the Class, Aggrieved Employees, and the State of California. Plaintiffs also move for final approval of the payment to the Administrator in the amount of $28,000.00 for Administration Costs. Plaintiff also moves for final approval of the allocation of $400,000.00 for the PAGA Penalties, of which seventy-five percent (75%), i.e., $300,000.00, will be paid to the California Labor Workforce and Development Agency ("LWDA") for its portion of the PAGA Penalties ("LWDA PAGA Payment"), and twenty-five percent (25%), i.e., $100,000.00, will be distributed to will be distributed to Aggrieved Employees on a *pro rata basis*, based on PAGA Pay Periods during the PAGA Period (i.e., Individual PAGA Payment).[9]

The requests for Class Counsel Fees Payment, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, Class Representative Service Payments, PAGA Representative Service Payment, Administration Costs, and the allocation for PAGA Penalties were fully disclosed in the Court Approved Notice of Class Action Settlement and Hearing Date for Final Court Approval ("Class Notice") that was mailed to the Class Members. Most importantly, as of the date of this Motion, *not a single Class Member has objected to any aspect of the Class Settlement, including the requested Class Counsel Fees Payment, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, Class Representative Service Payments, PAGA Representative Payment, Administration Costs or the allocation for PAGA Penalties.*

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[8] Applying a reasonable rate of $850 to 401.20 hours of work performed by Lawyers *for* Justice, PC and in addition to the base lodestar of $285,530.00 for work performed by Capstone Law APC, the total enhanced lodestar fees are $626,550.00, and Class Counsel seeks an attorneys' fees award of $595,000.00.

[9] Settlement Agreement, §3.2.4. "PAGA Period" is defined as the period from September 14, 2019 to October 17, 2023. *See id.*, § 1.29.

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The Settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable, and is the product of arm's-length, good-faith negotiations by experienced counsel. Accordingly, the Court should grant final approval of the Settlement, and award Class Counsel Fees Payment, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, Class Representative Service Payments, PAGA Representative Service Payment, Administration Costs, and the allocation for PAGA Penalties in the amounts as fully disclosed to the Class and as requested herein.

In order to efficiently present the Court with adequate information to determine whether to grant final approval of the Settlement and award Class Counsel Fees Payment, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, Class Representative Service Payments, PAGA Representative Service Payment, Administration Costs, and the allocation for PAGA Penalties, Plaintiff also moves for an order permitting the filing of this single consolidated memorandum, although it exceeds the page limit established by California Rules of Court, Rule 3.1113(d), instead of filing several separate motions.

II. PROCEDURAL HISTORY AND FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Defendant provides exemplary custodial, environmental, and maintenance services for complex facilities. Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham, Ninette Amaya, and Christopher Bell are former employees of Defendant.

On September 14, 2020, Plaintiff Imahni Isis Cunningham ("Plaintiff Cunningham") provided written notice to the California Labor & Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and Defendants of her intent to pursue civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act, Cal. Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq.

On September 17, 2020, Plaintiff Cunningham filed a Class Action Complaint for Damages in the Los Angeles County Superior Court ("Court"), thereby commencing the above-captioned lawsuit ("Cunningham Class Action").

On November 18, 2020, Plaintiff Cunningham filed a Complaint for Damages and Enforcement Under the Private Attorneys General Act, California Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq. in the Los Angeles County Superior Court Case No. 20SMCV01779 ("Cunningham PAGA Action").

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On November 18, 2020, Plaintiff Christopher Bell ("Plaintiff Bell") provided written notice to the California Labor & Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and Defendants of his intent to pursue civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act, Cal. Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq.

On January 26, 2021, Plaintiff Bell filed a Complaint for Damages and Enforcement Under the Private Attorneys General Act, California Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq. in the Kern County Superior Court Case No. BCV-100173, which was transferred to Los Angeles County Superior Court as Case No. 23STCV27083 ("Bell PAGA Action").

On March 22, 2022, Plaintiff Amaya provided written notice to the LWDA and Defendants of her intent to pursue civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act, Cal. Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq.

On October 10, 2022, Plaintiff Cunningham filed the First Amended Class Action Complaint for Damages in the Cunningham Class Action, adding Plaintiff Ninette Amaya ("Plaintiff Amaya") as a named plaintiff.

On October 26, 2022, Plaintiff Amaya filed a Complaint for Damages and Enforcement Under the Private Attorneys General Act, California Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq. in the Los Angeles County Superior Court Case No. 22TRCV01038 ("Amaya PAGA Action").

On February 9, 2024, the Parties filed a Joint Stipulation to Consolidate the Cunningham Class Action (Case No. 20STCV35595), Cunningham PAGA Action (Case No. 20SMCV01779), Bell PAGA Action (Case No. 23STCV27083) and Amaya PAGA Action (Case No. 22TRCV01038), seeking to consolidate the Cunningham Class Action, Cunningham PAGA Action, Bell PAGA Action, and Amaya PAGA Action (collectively, the "Actions"), which was denied by the Court and the Parties were asked to file a proposed consolidated complaint.

On March 23, 2024, the Court entered an order granting the Parties' Joint Stipulation Granting Plaintiffs Leave to File Second Amended Consolidated Complaint. On March 27, 2024, Plaintiff Cunningham filed a Second Amended Consolidated Class Action Complaint for Damages and Enforcement Under the Private Attorneys General Act, California Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq.

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(“Operative Complaint”), thereby consolidating the Cunningham Class Action, Cunningham PAGA Action, Bell PAGA Action, and Amaya PAGA Action.

Plaintiffs’ core allegation is that Defendant has violated the California Labor Code by engaging in a uniform practice and procedure, with respect to Plaintiffs, Class Members, and Aggrieved Employees, of, *inter alia*, failing to pay all overtime and minimum wages, failing to provide compliant meal and rest periods and associated premium pay, failing to timely pay wages during employment and upon termination of employment, failing to provide compliant wage statements, failing to maintain requisite payroll records, and failing to reimburse necessary business expenses, and thereby engaged in unfair business practices in violation of California Business and Professions Code section 17200, *et seq.* and conduct that gives rise to penalties pursuant to PAGA. Plaintiffs contend that they, and the Class Members, are entitled to, *inter alia*, unpaid wages, penalties (including and not limited to, penalties pursuant to PAGA), and attorneys’ fees.

Defendant has denied, and continue to deny, any liability and wrongdoing of any kind associated with any of the allegations in the Actions, and further denies that the Actions are appropriate for class treatment or representative adjudication for any purpose other than settlement.

The Parties have actively litigated the Actions since the Cunningham Class Action commenced on September 17, 2020. The Parties ultimately reached the Settlement described herein to resolve the Actions in their entirety.

On February 14, 2024, Plaintiff filed a Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement and supporting documents (“Motion for Preliminary Approval”).

On April 17, 2024, the Court raised multiple points of inquiry at the hearing on Plaintiffs’ Motion for Preliminary Approval of Settlement. On May 17, 2024, Plaintiff filed a Supplemental Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini in Support of the Motion for Preliminary Approval, and [Revised Proposed] Order Granting Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement.

On April 30, 2024, Defendant filed the Answer to Plaintiffs’ Second Amended Consolidated Class Action Complaint for Damages and Enforcement Under the Private Attorneys General Act, California Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq.

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On June 3, 2024, Court issued a Minute Order Granting Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement ("Preliminary Approval Order"), thereby preliminarily approving the terms of the Settlement, the Class Notice, and the proposed administration procedures and associated deadlines.

Plaintiff now moves for final approval of Class Counsel Fees Payment, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, Class Representative Service Payments, PAGA Representative Service Payment, Administration Costs, and the allocation for PAGA Penalties.

III. SUMMARY OF THE SETTLEMENT TERMS AND PLAN OF DISTRIBUTION

Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement, Defendant has agreed to pay a Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00, and also fund the amounts necessary to fully pay Defendant's share of payroll taxes.[10] Subject to approval by the Court, the Net Settlement Amount will be calculated by deducting the following amounts from the Gross Settlement Amount: (1) Class Counsel Fees Payment and Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, consisting of attorneys' fees in the amount of $595,000.00 and reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses in the amount of $18,968.36, to Class Counsel; (2) Class Representative Service Payments in the amount of $10,0000.00 each to Plaintiffs Cunningham and Amaya; (3) PAGA Representative Service Payment in the amount of $10,000.00 to Plaintiff Bell; (4) Administration Costs in the amount of $28,000.00 to Phoenix; and (4) PAGA Penalties in the amount of $400,000.00.[11] The Net Settlement Amount, which is estimated to be $628,031.64, will be distributed in accordance with the Settlement Agreement and there is no reversion to Defendant.[12]

The Administrator will determine each Class Member's *pro rata* share of the Net Settlement Amount ("Individual Settlement Share"), according to the following methodology: the Administrator will divide the final Net Settlement Amount by the Workweeks of all Settlement

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[10] Settlement Agreement, § 3.1.
[11] *Id.*, §§ 1.27, 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3 and 3.2.4.
[12] This amount is higher than the amount stated in Paragraph 13 of the accompanying Declaration of Kevin Lee of Phoenix Class Action Administration Solutions in Support of Motion for Class Action Settlement ("Phoenix Declaration") because the Administrator's calculation assumes that Class Counsel will obtain litigation costs and expenses in the maximum amount of $22,000.00, which is allocated under the Settlement. However, Class Counsel seeks the amount of only $11,686.62 for reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses to Lawyers *for* Justice, PC and $7,281.74 for reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses to Capstone Law APC (for a total of $18,968.36), and the total difference of $3,031.64 will remain part of the Net Settlement Amount.

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Class Members to yield the "Final Workweek Value," and multiply each Settlement Class Member's individual Workweeks by the Final Workweek Value to yield his or her Individual Settlement Share.[13]

The Administrator will determine each Aggrieved Employee's *pro rata* share of 25% the PAGA Penalties ("Individual PAGA Payment"), according to the following methodology: the Administrator will divide the 25% portion of the PAGA Penalties allocated to Aggrieved Employees, i.e., $100,000.00, by the total number of PAGA Pay Periods worked by all Aggrieved Employees during the PAGA Period resulting in the PAGA Pay Period Value and then multiply the PAGA Pay Period Value by the number of PAGA Pay Periods worked by each individual Aggrieved Employee during the PAGA Period.[14]

Class Members had sixty (60) calendar days from the initial mailing of the Class Notice ("Response Deadline") to submit a Request for Exclusion, Objection and/or dispute of the Workweeks and/or PAGA Pay Periods.[15] The Response Deadline was August 31, 2024.[16] ***As of the date of this Motion, the Settlement Administrator has not received any written objections to the Class Settlement or requests to be excluded from the Class Settlement ("Requests for Exclusion") from Class Members.***[17]

Each Settlement Class Member's Individual Settlement Share will be allocated as follows: twenty percent (20%) as wages (the "Wage Portion"), which will be reported on an IRS Form W-2; and the remaining eighty percent (80%) as interest and penalties (the "Non-Wage Portion"), which will be reported on an IRS Form 1099.[18] Settlement Class Members assume full responsibility and liability for any employee taxes owed on their Individual Settlement Payment (i.e., payment of their Individual Settlement share net of these taxes and withholdings.[19] Defendant will separately pay any and all employer taxes owed on the Wage Portions of the Individual

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[13] Settlement Agreement, § 3.2.5(b).
[14] *Id.*, § 3.2.6.
[15] *Id.*, § 1.42.
[16] Phoenix Decl., ¶¶ 8, 9, & 10.
[17] *Id.*, ¶¶ 8 & 9; Per the Phoenix Declaration, one (1) Request for Exclusion was submitted by a PAGA-only individual, who may not request to be excluded from the PAGA Settlement, therefore there are no Requests for Exclusion from the Class Settlement.
[18] Settlement Agreement, § 3.2.7.
[19] Ibid.

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Settlement Shares.[20] Any payment for an Individual PAGA Payment will be allocated as one hundred percent (100%) penalties, will not be subject to taxes or withholdings, and will be reported on an IRS Form-1099, if necessary.[21]

The face of each check shall prominently state the date (not less than one hundred eighty (180) calendar days after the date of mailing) when the check will be voided.[22] For any Class Member whose Individual Settlement Payment check or Individual PAGA Payment check is uncashed and cancelled after the void date, the Administrator shall transmit the funds represented by such checks to the California Controller's Unclaimed Property Fund in the name of the Class Member, thereby leaving no "unpaid residue" subject to the requirements of California Code of Civil Procedure Section 384, subd. (b).[23] All Settlement Class Members and Aggrieved Employees shall be bound by the terms and conditions of this Settlement Agreement regardless of whether or not they cash or otherwise negotiate their Individual Settlement Payment check and/or Individual PAGA Payment check.[24]

IV. <u>THE SETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION PROCESS</u>

The Court-appointed Settlement Administrator, Phoenix Class Action Administration Solutions, has taken all necessary steps to effectuate the notice and settlement administration process, as set forth in the Court's Preliminary Approval Order.

On June 18, 2024, Defendant's counsel provided Phoenix a data file containing each Class Member's full name, last-known mailing address, Social Security Number, hire and termination dates reflecting the number of Class Period Workweeks and PAGA Pay Periods, dates worked for Defendant during the period of September 17, 2016 to November 17, 2020, and any other information required by the Administrator to effectuate the terms of this settlement agreement (collectively, "Class Data").[25] The Class Data contained data for three thousand two hundred ninety-two (3,292) unique individuals, of which six hundred forty-three (643) individuals

[20] Settlement Agreement, § 3.1.
[21] *Id.*, § 3.2.7.
[22] *Id.*, § 4.4.1.
[23] *Id.*, § 4.4.3.
[24] *Id.*, § 7.5.
[25] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 3.

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identified as Class Members and three thousand one hundred twenty-seven (3,127) individuals were identified as Aggrieved Employees.[26] The mailing addresses contained in the Class List were processed and updated utilizing the National Change of Address Database ("NCOA") maintained by the U.S. Postal Service.[27] The NCOA contains requested changes of address filed with the U.S. Postal Service. In the event that any individual had filed a U.S. Postal Service change of address request, the address listed with the NCOA would be utilized in connection with the mailing of the Class Notice.[28]

On July 2, 2024, Phoenix mailed the Class Notice via U.S. First Class Mail to all three thousand two hundred ninety-two (3,292) Class Members and Aggrieved Employees in the Class Data.[29]

A total of twenty-three (23) Class Notices were returned to Phoenix.[30] Of these, none were returned with a forwarding address.[31] Phoenix performed a computerized skip trace on the twenty-three (23) returned Class Notices that did not have a forwarding address, in an effort to obtain an updated address for the purpose of re-mailing the Class Notice.[32] As a result of this skip trace, twenty-three (23) updates addresses were obtained and the Class Notices were promptly re-mailed to those Settlement Class Members, via U.S. First Class Mail.[33] A total of twenty-three (23) Class Notices have been re-mailed.[34] As of the date of Phoenix's declaration, no Class Notices have been deemed undeliverable.[35]

As of the date of this Motion, the Administrator has not received any objections.[36] As of the date of this Motion, the Administrator has not received any Requests for Exclusion from the Class Settlement.[37]

To date, there are six hundred and forty-three (643) Class Members who did not submit a

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[26] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 3.
[27] *Id.*, ¶ 4.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *Id.*, ¶ 5.
[30] *Id.*, ¶ 6.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] *Id.*
[34] *Id.*
[35] *Id.*, ¶ 7.
[36] *Id.*, ¶ 9.
[37] *Id.*, ¶ 8.

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timely and valid Request for Exclusion ("Settlement Class Members"), and who will be paid their portion of the Net Settlement Amount.[38] Pursuant to the terms of the Settlement, the Net Settlement Amount of approximately $628,031.64 will be distributed to Settlement Class Members in accordance with the terms of the Settlement.[39] The highest Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $4,717.46 and the average Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $972.01.[40] The highest Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $79.92 and the average Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $31.98.[41]

V. **<u>THE COURT SHOULD GRANT FINAL APPROVAL OF THE CLASS ACTION AND PAGA SETTLEMENT.</u>**

The trial court has broad discretion to determine whether a class action settlement is fair and reasonable. *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 52. To determine whether the settlement is fair and reasonable, courts consider relevant factors such as:

> the strength of plaintiffs' case, the risk, expense, complexity and likely duration of further litigation, the risk of maintaining class action status through trial, the amount offered in settlement, the extent of discovery completed and the stage of the proceedings, the experience and views of counsel, the presence of a governmental participant, and the reaction of the class members to the proposed settlement.

Dunk v. Ford Motor Co. (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1801. "The list of factors is not exclusive and the court is free to engage in a balancing and weighing of the factors depending on the circumstances of each case." *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 245. "Due regard should be given to what is otherwise a private consensual agreement between the parties." *Dunk*, *supra*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1801.

The proponent of the settlement has the burden to show that it is fair and reasonable. *Wershba, supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 245. At the final approval stage, a presumption of fairness exists where, as here: "(1) the settlement is reached through arm's-length bargaining; (2) investigation

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[38] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 11.
[39] *Id.*, ¶ 13.
[40] *Id.*, ¶ 14. The actual average and highest Individual Settlement Payments will be larger than the amounts stated in the Phoenix Declaration because the Net Settlement Amount is larger due to Class Counsel's request for the reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses is less than $22,000 (the difference between the amount sought and the amount authorized under the Settlement, $3,031.64, will be part of the Net Settlement Amount). See n.7, *supra*.
[41] *Id.*, ¶ 15.

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and discovery are sufficient to allow counsel and the court to act intelligently; (3) counsel is experienced in similar litigation; and (4) the percentage of objectors is small." *Dunk*, *supra*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1802. In reviewing a class settlement, the court need not reach any ultimate conclusions on the issues of fact and law that underlie the merits of the dispute. *7-Eleven Owners for Fair Franchising v. Southland Corp.* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 1135, 1146. The inquiry is not whether the settlement agreement is the best one that class members could have possibly obtained, but whether the settlement, taken as a whole, is "fair, adequate, and reasonable." *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 55. A settlement need not obtain 100 percent of the damages sought in order to be fair, reasonable, and ultimately, meaningful. *Wershba*, *supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 251. Even if the proposed settlement affords relief that is substantially narrower than it would be if the cases were to be successfully litigated, that is no bar to a class settlement because the public interest may indeed be served by a voluntary settlement in which each side gives ground in the interest of avoiding prolonged litigation. *Id*.

A. <u>The Settlement Resulted from Arm's-Length Negotiations Based Upon Extensive Investigation and Informal Discovery.</u>

The Parties actively litigated the matter since the Cunningham Class Action commenced on September 17, 2020. Class Counsel conducted significant investigation and formal and informal discovery into the facts of the cases, to assess the veracity, strength, and scope of the claims, and was preparing for class certification and trial prior to reaching the Settlement.[42]

The Parties conducted significant formal and informal discovery and investigation into the facts of the case, and also formally and informally exchanged a large volume of information, documents, and data throughout the course of the litigation and in connection settlement negotiations.[43] The volume of data and documents that Class Counsel reviewed and analyzed included and was not limited to: employment records of Plaintiffs, Defendant's Employee Handbook, a sampling of time data, internal memoranda, operations and employment practices, forms (including but not limited to Self-Identification Form, Meal Period Waiver, Rest Break

[42] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 6.
[43] Ibid.

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Notice), procedures, and policies (including but not limited to Commitment to Non-Discrimination and Non-Harassment, Attire and Grooming Policy), among other information and documents.[44] Class Counsel propounded multiple sets of formal written discovery requests onto Defendant (specifically, Requests for Production of Documents (Sets One and Two), Special Interrogatories (Sets One, Two, and Three), and Form Interrogatories-General (Set One)), and the Parties eventually agreed to engage in, and did engage in, extensive formal and informal discovery. Class Counsel had the opportunity to interview Plaintiffs and other Class Members to gather facts and to identify potential witnesses.[45] Class Counsel also developed liability, damages, violation, and penalties valuation models in the course of litigation and in connection with settlement negotiations and met and conferred with Defendant's counsel on numerous occasions, e.g., to discuss issues relating to the pleadings, case management, discovery, *Belaire-West* process, and the production of documents and data prior to settlement.[46] Class Counsel reviewed and analyzed information, documents, and data obtained from Plaintiff, Defendant, and other sources.[47] Other work performed by Class Counsel included, and was not limited to, case strategy and analysis; researching, drafting, reviewing, and/or revising the pleadings, and settlement documents; and preparing for and attending court proceedings, and settlement negotiations, among other tasks.[48]

After conducting significant investigation of the facts and law during the prosecution of the case, counsel for the Parties engaged in extensive settlement negotiations to try to resolve the case.[49] Although the Parties did not engage in mediation, they continued to engage in extensive Settlement negotiations to reach the Settlement described herein.[50] In the course of settlement negotiations, the Parties exchanged class information, documents, and data, and discussed all aspects of the cases, including and not limited to, the risks and delays of further litigation, the risks to the Parties of proceeding with class certification and trial, the law relating to class certification, off-the-clock theory, meal and rest periods, representative PAGA claims, and wage-and-hour

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44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Hosseini Decl., ¶ 6.
49 *Id.*, ¶ 8.
50 Ibid.

enforcement, as well as the evidence produced and analyzed, and the possibility of appeals, among other things.[51] During all settlement discussions, the Parties conducted their negotiations at arm's length in an adversarial position.[52] Arriving at a settlement that was acceptable to the Parties was not easy.[53] Defendant and its counsel felt very strongly about Defendant ability to prevail on the merits and to avoid class certification.[54] Defendant and its counsel felt strongly about Defendant's ability to avoid class certification and representative adjudication and prevail on the merits, while Plaintiff and Class Counsel believed that they would be able to obtain class certification and prevail at trial.[55] After conducting significant formal and informal discovery and investigations and settlement negotiations, the Parties agreed that the cases were well-suited for settlement given the legal issues relating to Plaintiffs' principal claims, as well as the costs and risks to the Parties that would attend further litigation.[56]

The Settlement takes into account the strengths and weaknesses of each side's position and the uncertainty of how the case might have concluded at certification, trial, and/or appeals. Class Counsel analyzed a large volume of information, documents, and data obtained from Defendant, Plaintiffs, and other sources, and performed research regarding applicable law, which is evolving as it relates to certification, off-the-clock theory, meal and rest periods, representative PAGA claims, wage-and-hour enforcement, Plaintiffs' claims, and Defendant's defenses thereto, as well as facts discovered.[57] The Settlement was based on this large volume of facts, evidence, and investigation.[58] Additionally, Class Counsel have extensive experience in handling complex wage-and-hour actions, including significant experience in employment class action litigation.[59]

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B. <u>The Risks Inherent in Continued Litigation Favor Final Approval of the</u>

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 7.
[58] *Id.*, ¶¶ 6-8.
[59] *Id.*, ¶¶ 13-18.

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Settlement.

The Settlement, which provides for a Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00, represents a fair, adequate, and reasonable resolution of the case, given the risks inherent in litigating class and representative claims through certification proceedings, trial, and/or appeals.[60] The Settlement was calculated using information and data uncovered through extensive case investigation, formal and informal discovery, and the exchange of information in the context of ongoing settlement negotiations.[61] Had the action not settled, Defendant would have vigorously challenged class certification, manageability of representative adjudication, and liability. Defendant contended that individualized questions of fact predominated over any common issues, and these issues would pose challenges to certification and representative adjudication. Defendant would have likely argued again at trial, if any, that Plaintiffs' claims were not appropriate for class-wide and/or representative adjudication. On the other hand, Defendant also faced the risk of the Court certifying a class and allowing a jury to decide Plaintiffs' claims on a class-wide or representative basis. Additionally, preparation for trial would have been expensive for all parties.

It is preferable to reach an early resolution of a dispute because such resolutions save time and money that would otherwise go to litigation. If this matter had settled after further litigation, the settlement amount would have taken into account the additional costs incurred, and there might have been less money available for Class Members and Aggrieved Employees after all was said and done. This is not just an abstract contention. The risks and expenses of further litigation outweighed any benefit that might have been gained otherwise. These risks of further litigation include a determination that the claims were unsuitable for class treatment and/or representative adjudication, failure to obtain certification, class de-certification after certification of a class, allowing a jury to decide the claims asserted in the cases, and the real possibility of no recovery after years of litigation. Additionally, the Parties were moving into the phase of the litigation where they would have to conduct a significant amount of additional discovery, including and not limited to, depositions of Defendants' Person Most Knowledgeable designees, expert witnesses, and

[60] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 21.
[61] *Id.*, ¶¶ 7-11.

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percipient witnesses, such as managers, supervisors, and other current and former employees throughout the State of California. Additional discovery would have certainly arisen, which would have cost the Parties additional time and money. In contrast, the Settlement provides real and significant benefits for the Class here and now, while avoiding the further expenses, risks, and delay of prolonged litigation with only the possibility of recovery.

It would be grossly inefficient for such a large class of current and former employees to bring individual actions to recover from Defendant for the alleged violations of wage-and-hour laws. Moreover, the potential individual recovery that could be obtained by a Class Member would not be significant enough to provide him or her with the incentive to sue. By granting final approval of the Settlement, the Court can approve a resolution that provides a certain and substantial recovery for Class Members.

C. <u>The Settlement Is Fair, Reasonable, and Adequate.</u>

The Settlement, which provides for a Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00, represents a fair, reasonable, and adequate resolution of the case. The Settlement was calculated using information and data uncovered through extensive case investigation, formal and informal discovery, and the exchange of information in the context of conducting ongoing settlement negotiations. The Settlement takes into account the potential risks and rewards inherent in any case and, in particular, in this matter. Moreover, considering all of the facts in the case, the Gross Settlement Amount represents a considerable recovery.

Even after deducting Class Counsel Fees Payment in the amount of $595,000.00, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment in the amount of $18,968.36, Class Representative Service Payments in the amount of $10,000.00 (for a total of $20,000.00), PAGA Representative Service Payment in the amount of $10,000.00, Administration Costs in the amount of $28,000.00, and the allocation of PAGA Penalties of $400,000.00 from the Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00, the Net Settlement Amount is currently estimated to be $628,031.64.[62] Under the Settlement Agreement, the Gross Settlement Amount will be fully paid out, in accordance with the

[62] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 13.

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terms of the Settlement. As discussed in Section III, *supra*, each Class Member will be paid a *pro rata* share of the Net Settlement Amount, based on the number of Workweeks credited to him or her, and each Aggrieved Employee will be paid a *pro rata* share of 25% of the PAGA Penalties, based on the number of PAGA Pay Periods during the PAGA Period credited to him or her.[63] To date, there are six hundred and forty-three (643) Settlement Class Members, representing one hundred percent (100%) of the Class Members.[64] The highest Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $4,717.46 and the average Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $972.01.[65] The highest Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $79.92 and the average Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $31.98.[66] These are significant individual recoveries, particularly in light of the risks of litigation.

At the final approval stage, "[a]n allocation formula need only have a reasonable, rational basis [to warrant approval], particularly if recommended by experienced and competent class counsel." *In re American Bank Note Holographics, Inc., Securities Litigation* (S.D.N.Y. 2001) 127 F.Supp.2d 418, 429-30. The *pro rata* allocation here is a fair and reasonable way to distribute the Net Settlement Amount. In light of the above considerations, Class Counsel believes that the Settlement as a whole is fair, reasonable, and adequate, and in the best interest of the Class Members, the State of California, and Aggrieved Employees.[67] Although the recommendations of Class Counsel are not conclusive, the Court can properly take the recommendations into account, particularly if Class Counsel appears to be competent, has experience with this type of litigation, and significant discovery and investigation have been completed, as is the case here. Conte & Newberg, *Newberg on Class Actions* (4th Ed., 2002) § 11.47. Accordingly, the Court should grant final approval of the Settlement.

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D. <u>The Class Was Represented by Competent Counsel.</u>

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[63] Settlement Agreement, §§ 3.2.5 and 3.2.6.
[64] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 13.
[65] *Id.*, ¶ 14.
[66] *Id.*, ¶ 15.
[67] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 21.

Class Counsel has extensive experience in employment class action law and complex wage-and-hour litigation.[68] Lawyers *for* Justice, PC and Capstone Law APC have been appointed class counsel in numerous complex wage-and-hour cases, and has recovered millions of dollars for individuals in California.[69] Both parties' counsel were capable of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Class Members' claims against Defendant and the benefits of the Settlement under the circumstances of the case and in the context of a private, consensual settlement agreement.

E. <u>There Are No Objections to the Class Settlement.</u>

The Settlement has been well received by the Class – ***not a single Class Member objected to the Class Settlement.***[70] Specifically, no objections have been made as to the Gross Settlement Amount or requested Class Counsel Fees Payment, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, Class Representative Service Payments, PAGA Representative Service Payment, Administration Costs, or the allocation for PAGA Penalties. California courts have consistently found that a small number of objectors indicates the class's support for a settlement and strongly favors final approval. *Wershba*, *supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 250-51 (final approval granted despite 20 objectors); *7-Eleven Owners, supra*, 85 Cal.App.4th at 1152-53 (final approval granted despite 9 objectors).

Here, the lack of any objections speaks volumes about the fairness, reasonableness, and adequacy of this Settlement. Accordingly, the Settlement as a whole is presumed to be fair, reasonable, and adequate, and the Court should grant final approval of the Settlement in its entirety. *Dunk*, *supra*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1802.

VI. <u>THE ATTORNEYS' FEES REQUESTED IS FAIR AND REASONABLE AND SHOULD BE APPROVED.</u>

A. <u>Legal Standard for Attorneys' Fees in a Class Action Settlement.</u>

Trial courts have "wide latitude" in assessing the value of attorneys' fees and their decisions will "'not be disturbed on appeal absent a manifest abuse of discretion.'" *Lealao v.*

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[68] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 13-18.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 12.

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Beneficial Cal., Inc. (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 19, 41; *Ketchum v. Moses* (2001) 24 Cal.4th 1122, 1132 (The "experienced trial judge is the best judge of the value of professional services rendered in his court[.]"); *Cellphone Termination Fee Case*s (2009) 180 Cal.App.4th 1110, 1118. Where the amount of a settlement is a "certain easily calculable sum of money," California courts may calculate attorneys' fees as a reasonable percentage of the settlement. Weil and Brown, California Practice Guide, *Civil Procedure Before Trial*, Chapter 14, § 14:145; *see also Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 503; *Dunk, supra*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1808. The percentage-of-the-benefit approach is preferred in class and representative actions because "it better approximates the workings of the marketplace than the lodestar approach." *Lealao, supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 49.

California law provides that an attorneys' fees award should be equivalent to fees paid in the legal marketplace for the result achieved and risk incurred. *Id.* at 47-50; *Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l, Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 503. In *Lealao*, the court held that when an action leads to a recovery that can be "monetized" with a reasonable degree of certainty, the trial court should "ensure that the fee awarded is within the range of fees freely negotiated in the legal marketplace in comparable litigation." *Lealao, supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 50. Fee awards that are too small will "chill the private enforcement essential to the vindication of many legal rights and obstruct the representative actions that often relieve the courts of the need to separately adjudicate numerous claims." *Lealao, supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 53.

"The ultimate goal . . . is the award of a 'reasonable' fee to compensate counsel for their efforts, irrespective of the method of calculation." *Consumer Privacy Cases* (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 545, 557-58 (quoting *Apple Computer, Inc. v. Superior Court, supra*, 126 Cal.App.4th at 1270). It is not an abuse of discretion to choose one method over another as long as the method chosen is applied consistently using percentage figures and/or rates that accurately reflect the marketplace. In cases where class members present claims against a settlement amount and the settlement agreement provides that the defendant agrees to paying the attorneys a percentage of the same, use of that percentage method is appropriate. *Lealao, supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 32.

Historically, courts have awarded fees as high as fifty percent (50%) of the settlement,

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depending on the circumstances of the case. Conte & Newberg, *Newberg on Class Actions* (4th Ed., 2002) § 14.03; *see also In re Ampicillin Antitrust Litig.* (D.D.C. 1981) 526 F.Supp. 494 (awarding attorneys' fees in the amount of 45% of the settlement amount of $7.3 million); *Beech Cinema, Inc. v. Twentieth-Century Fox Film Corp.* (S.D.N.Y. 1979) 480 F.Supp. 1195 (awarding approximately 53% of the settlement amount as attorneys' fees). California courts routinely approve class action attorneys' fees awards "averag[ing] around one-third of the recovery." *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 66 n.11 (lower court found 20 to 40 percent range of contingency fee in marketplace was appropriate in class actions); *see also Laffitte*, 1 Cal.5th at 488 & 506 (approving fee award of 1/3 of common fund of $19 million).

B. <u>A Fee Award of a Percentage of the Entire Fund Is Appropriate.</u>

California and federal courts have long recognized that an appropriate method for determining the award of attorneys' fees is based on a percentage of the total value of benefits made available to class members by the settlement. *Laffitte*, 1 Cal.5th at 503; *Boeing Co. v. Van Gemert* (1980) 444 U.S. 472, 478; *Paul, Johnson, Alston & Hunt v. Graulty* (9th Cir. 1989) 886 F.2d 268, 272; *Vincent v. Hughes Air West, Inc.* (9th Cir. 1977) 557 F.2d 759, 769; *Serrano v. Priest* (1977) 20 Cal.3d 25, 34.[71] The purpose of this equitable doctrine is to spread litigation costs proportionally among all the beneficiaries so that the active beneficiary does not bear the entire burden alone. See *Vincent*, *supra*, 557 F.2d at 769.

When a litigant's efforts result in a settlement from which others may derive benefits, the litigant may require the passive beneficiaries to compensate those whose efforts brought about the settlement. See, R. Pearle, *California Attorney Fee Awards* (CEB, 1993) § 7A, p. 5-7 (permitting attorneys' fees and costs to be paid out of the settlement or directly on behalf of the other parties enjoying the benefit of the settlement). Both state and federal courts have embraced this doctrine. See *Serrano*, *supra*, 20 Cal.3d at 35; *Crampton v. Takegoshi* (1993) 17 Cal.App.4th 308, 317; *Vincent*, *supra*, 557 F.2d at 769.

[71] The California Supreme Court has urged trial courts to consider class action federal authority. *Green v. Obledo* (1981) 29 Cal.3d 126, 146; *Vasquez v. Superior Court* (1971) 4 Cal.3d 800, 821.

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The propriety of calculating and awarding attorneys' fees as a percentage of a monetary settlement that has, by litigation, been preserved or recovered for the benefit of others, has been confirmed by the California Supreme Court. *Laffitte, supra,* 1 Cal.5th 480 at 486 & 506. The California Supreme Court has taken the position that "[t]rial courts have discretion to conduct a lodestar cross-check on a percentage fee," "they also retain the discretion to forgo a lodestar cross-check and use other means to evaluate the reasonableness of a requested percentage fee[,]" and "[t]he percentage […] method survives in California." *Id.* (internal quotes omitted).

Courts have consistently recognized that class and representative action litigation is increasingly necessary to protect the rights of individuals whose injuries and/or damages are too small to economically justify legal action on an individual basis. Accordingly, in determining a reasonable fee award, courts award fees to serve as an economic incentive for lawyers to pursue such litigation in order to achieve increased access to the judicial system for meritorious claims and to enhance deterrents to wrongdoing. This is especially true in situations where multiple similar alleged wrongs would not be economically feasible to pursue individually, such as here. See A. Conte, *Attorney Fee Awards* (2d Ed., 1993) 104, at 6.

When the cases were originally filed, not only was it inescapably contingent, but the prospect of a long, drawn-out battle with a defendant represented by experienced counsel, was almost a certainty. By taking on this "battle" on a contingency basis, Class Counsel risked substantial economic loss if the results were not successful. This substantial risk is the reason that the courts approve the use of the percentage method when a settlement is obtained by the efforts of class counsel. *See Vizcaino v. Microsoft* (9^{th} Cir. 2002) 290 F.3d 1043, 1048-49 (discussing the risks of engaging in litigation without certainty of compensation).

Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement, Defendant will pay a Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00 on a non-reversionary basis. The requested attorneys' fees are thirty-five percent (35%) of the total value of the monetary settlement. In light of Class Counsel's successful prosecution and resolution of the cases, the requested attorneys' fees are appropriate and reasonable.

Compensating class counsel in class litigation on a percentage basis makes good sense

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because: (1) it is consistent with the private marketplace where contingent fee attorneys are customarily compensated on such a basis; (2) it aligns the interests of class counsel and absent class members in achieving the maximum possible resolution of the cases; and (3) it encourages the most efficient and expeditious resolution of the litigation by providing an incentive for early, yet reasonable, settlement. The requested attorneys' fees in this matter satisfy all of those factors and should be approved on a percentage basis.

The percentage method is consistent with, and is intended to mirror, the practice in the private marketplace where contingent-fee attorneys typically negotiate percentage-fee arrangements with their clients. The named plaintiffs' agreement to pay a contingent fee is powerful evidence of a reasonable fee. One of the best ways to demonstrate the value of counsel's work to the class is to review the consideration agreed to be paid by the named plaintiff. If the named plaintiff has employed counsel on a contingency-fee basis, it would indeed be inequitable for the members of the class, who will enjoy the benefits of the settlement without incurring the risks of bringing the claim, to pay less than the named plaintiff. In this case, Plaintiffs have agreed to a contingency fee of at least thirty-five percent (35%) of the recovery.[72]

Furthermore, a percentage-fee award is not dependent on a determination of the actual amount claimed by those entitled—it is the creation of the settlement that is the crucial fact. In *Winslow v. Harold G. Ferguson Corp.*, the California Supreme Court expressly held that "it is equitable that [the attorney's] compensation and expenses should come from the entire fund saved for all classes concerned before it is distributed." *Winslow v. Harold G. Ferguson Corp.* (1944) 25 Cal.2d 274, 284. Likewise, *Lealao* expressly held that a percentage-based fee "may be calculated on the basis of the total fund made available rather than the actual payments made to the class." *Lealao*, *supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 51; *see also Boeing*, *supra*, 444 U.S. at 478 ("a litigant or a lawyer who recovers" a settlement "for the benefit of persons other than himself or his client is entitled to a reasonable attorneys' fee from the fund as a whole").

[72] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 9.

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In *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, in determining reasonable attorneys' fees, the Court of Appeal valued a settlement based on the total value of the settlement made available to class members by the efforts of counsel, decided in favor of granting fees as a percentage of the total value of the settlement, and rejected an objection that the fees be awarded based on the exact amount claimed by class members. *Id.* at 247.

Class Counsel has obtained a substantial recovery on behalf of Plaintiffs, the Class, Aggrieved Employees, and the State of California, and the results achieved justify an attorneys' fees award that is the equivalent of the standard market fee and that is consistent with the contingency-fee agreement entered into by and between Plaintiffs and Class Counsel. Thus, the requested attorneys' fees are appropriate.

C. <u>The Attorneys' Fees Requested Is Reasonable Based on the Factors Considered in Determination of Fee Awards.</u>

In *Camden I Condominium Association, Inc. v. Dunkel*, the court identified twelve factors to be considered in determining whether fee awards are reasonable: (1) the time and labor required; (2) the novelty and difficulty of the questions involved; (3) the skill required to perform the legal services properly; (4) the preclusion of other employment by the attorney due to the acceptance of the case; (5) the customary fee; (6) whether the fee is fixed or contingent; (7) time limitation imposed by the client or the circumstances; (8) the amount involved and results obtained; (9) the experience, reputation and ability of the attorney; (10) the undesirability of the case; (11) the nature and length of the professional relationship with the client; and (12) awards in similar cases. *Camden I Condominium Association, Inc. v. Dunkel* (11th Cir. 1991) 946 F.2d 768, 772.

Each and every one of these factors favors the attorneys' fees sought here; however, some of the most relevant factors to this Court's fee determination will be addressed herein. The Class Counsel Fees Payment in the amount of $595,000.00 (which is 35% of the Gross Settlement Amount) is commensurate with the time, effort, and expense dedicated to the case, the contingent nature of Class Counsel's fee and the risks taken in commencing the case, the skill and determination required, the results that Class Counsel have achieved, and the value of the settlement that Class Counsel have obtained for the Class Members.

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1. Time & Labor.

Class Counsel used its experience and skills, and dedicated the full extent of resources, to litigate and bring this matter to a successful conclusion on behalf of the Class. Moreover, as demonstrated in the supporting declarations, Class Counsel have extensive experience in the handling of class actions and complex litigation cases.[73]

As outlined in the Declarations of Yasmin Hosseini and Raul Perez, Class Counsel have fully and actively participated in litigation of the cases.[74] Prior to commencing the lawsuit, Class Counsel had conducted a significant amount of investigation into the factual and legal issues, Defendant's business, and its operations and employment policies, practices, and procedures.[75] During the litigation of the action, Class Counsel had the opportunity to interview Plaintiffs and other Class Members; reviewed and analyzed a large volume of pages of information, documents and data obtained from Defendant, Plaintiffs, and other sources; and prepared liability, damages, penalties, and valuation calculations.[76] Class Counsel also met and conferred with Defendant's counsel over the issues relating to pleadings, discovery, and the production of information, documents and data, among other things; engaged in settlement negotiations with Defendant's counsel; and prepared for and attended court proceedings and settlement negotiations.[77]

Class Counsel has dedicated staffing and monetary resources necessary to prosecute this matter diligently and with maximum efficiency and has fully and actively participated in the litigation process. The Task and Time Chart, which is attached as EXHIBIT A to the accompanying Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini, sets forth in detail the hours that Lawyers *for* Justice, PC and Capstone Law APC has spent performing tasks on behalf of Plaintiffs and the Class.[78] The Task and Time Chart is thorough and comprehensive, and was prepared so that the Court can peruse it without having to set forth each and every task in the body of this Motion. The Court is respectfully referred to the chart, which sets forth the history of the work performed by

[73] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 13-18.
[74] *Id.*, Exh. A.
[75] *Id.*, ¶ 7.
[76] *Id.*, ¶¶ 6 and 7.
[77] Hosseini Decl., 6.
[78] *Id.*, Exh. A.

Class Counsel, commencing with the pre-filing analysis and research, and continuing up to settlement and final approval. Class Counsel has spent 841.60 hours performing tasks and to obtain a significant recovery on behalf of Plaintiffs, the Class, the Aggrieved Employees, and the State of California.[79] These hours were required to bring this matter to its successful conclusion. In light of the value of time expended and the carrying of costs involved in litigating this cases, the requested attorneys' fees are fair, adequate, and reasonable.

2. The Skill Required to Perform Legal Services Properly.

The skill required to properly litigate the case is evident not only in the results achieved, but in the steps necessary to reach those results. Defendant retained well-respected counsel to represent its defenses. More specifically, Defendant and its counsel felt very strongly about Defendant's ability to obtain a denial of certification and to prevail on the merits. Plaintiffs and Class Counsel believed that they would have obtained class certification and prevailed at trial.

Class Counsel undertook significant investigation, analysis, and research prior to filing this case, during the litigation, and prior to settlement negotiations. Class Counsel took steps to prepare the matter for class certification and representative adjudication and had every intention of taking the cases to trial on a class-wide basis if Defendant did not offer an appropriate class-wide settlement. Despite all of the obstacles that had to be overcome, as demonstrated in the Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini and Raul Perez, Class Counsel used its extensive experience in the handling of class actions and complex wage-and-hour litigation matters in order to obtain the Settlement with maximum efficiency.[80]

3. The Value of the Settlement for the Class Members.

The Settlement represents an excellent resolution of the action, given the risks inherent in litigating the cases through certification proceedings, trial, and/or appeals. Had the cases not settled, Defendant would have vigorously challenged certifiability, manageability of representative adjudication, and liability. Defendant, however, faced risks if the Court certified a

[79] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 11-12.
[80] *Id.*, ¶¶ 13-18.

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class and allowed a jury to decide the claims. Additionally, preparing the cases for trial would have been expensive for the Parties.

The Settlement at this stage is preferred over continued litigation because such resolutions save time and money that would otherwise go to litigation. The risks and expenses of further litigation outweighed any benefit that might have been gained otherwise. The Settlement provides an immediate recovery, as opposed to an uncertain result in the future after prolonged litigation involving expert discovery, trial preparation, class certification proceedings, and appellate review of those proceedings. The Settlement offers present relief and/or recovery to Settlement Class Members, the State of California, and Aggrieved Employees while avoiding the further expense, risk, and delay in obtaining possible recovery at an unknown time in the future.

As a result of this litigation and settlement negotiations, Defendant agreed to pay a Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00 to settle the matter. After deducting the Class Counsel Fees Payment ($595,000.00), Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment ($18,968.36), Class Representative Service Payments ($10,000.00 to Plaintiffs Cunningham and Amaya, for a total of $20,000.00), PAGA Representative Service Payment ($10,000.00), Administration Costs ($28,000.00), and the allocation PAGA Penalties ($400,000.00) from the Gross Settlement Amount, it is currently estimated that the Net Settlement Amount is approximately $628,031.64.[81] The Net Settlement Amount will be fully distributed in accordance with the terms of the Settlement. The highest Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $4,717.46 and the average Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $972.01.[82] The highest Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $79.92 and the average Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $31.98.[83] The Settlement offers significant monetary relief to the Settlement Class Members, the State of California, and Aggrieved Employees.

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4. Whether the Fee Is Fixed or Contingent.

[81] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 13.
[82] *Id.*, ¶ 14.
[83] *Id.*, ¶ 15.

Plaintiffs entered into a contingency fee agreement with Class Counsel, and the representation of the Class provided by Class Counsel has been wholly contingent. Class Counsel took on the case without knowing whether any recovery would be obtained. Class Counsel has collectively invested 841.60 hours of time to obtain relief on behalf of Plaintiff, Class Members, the State of California, and Aggrieved Employees.[84] Class Counsel has also collectively incurred litigation costs and expenses in the amount of $18,968.36.[85]

Class Counsel has borne all of the risks and costs of litigation and will not receive any compensation until recovery is obtained.[86] Class Counsel is well-experienced in wage-and-hour class action and complex litigation and used that experience to obtain a great result.[87] The skill and determination that Class Counsel has shown, along with the results obtained, justify the requested Class Counsel Fees Payment and Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment. Considering the amounts requested, the work performed, and the risks incurred, the requested fees and costs are reasonable and should be awarded.

In determining the reasonableness of a fee award in a class action settlement, whether or not representation is provided on a contingency basis is an important factor:

> A contingent fee must be higher than a fee for the same legal services paid as they are performed. The contingent fee compensates the lawyer not only for the legal services he renders but for the loan of those services. A lawyer who both bears the risk of not being paid and provides legal services is not receiving the fair market value of his work if he is paid only for the second of these functions. If he is paid no more, competent counsel will be reluctant to accept fee award cases.

Cates v. Chiang (2013) 213 Cal.App.4th 791, 823 (internal quotes and citations omitted). Class Counsel litigated the case on a contingent basis with all of the concomitant risk factors inherent in such an uncertain undertaking. Had Class Counsel not been successful, the time that Class Counsel have devoted to litigating the case would have been for naught, and would not have produced any fee or any reimbursement of costs or expenses.

5. The Amount Involved and the Results Achieved.

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[84] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 11 and Exh. A.
[85] *Id.*, ¶ 19.
[86] Ibid.
[87] *Id.*, ¶¶ 13-18.

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The results achieved, in light of the difficulties inherent in similar cases and the specific difficulties faced in this matter, are considerable. The Settlement has yielded a positive response from the Class Members—no Class Members objected to the Class Settlement.[88]

The court in *Camden* noted that, "a key element of the common fund case is that fees are […] taken from the fund […] and a common fund is itself the measure of success … [and] represents the benchmark on which a reasonable fee will be awarded." *Camden*, 946 F. 2d 768, fn. 28 (citing *Court Awarded Attorney Fees, Report of the Third Circuit Task Force* (October 8, 1985) 108 F.R.D. 237 and Newberg, *Attorney Fee Awards* § 2.07 (1986)).

Here, the results achieved and obtained on behalf of Plaintiff and the Class are reasonable in light of the risks inherent in further litigating this matter. Class Counsel's efforts have resulted in a settlement that provides for a Gross Settlement Amount of $1,700,000.00.[89] The Gross Settlement Amount will be fully paid out, in accordance with the terms of the Settlement Agreement. The highest Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $4,717.46 and the average Individual Settlement Share is currently estimated to be $972.01.[90] The highest Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $79.92 and the average Individual PAGA Payment is currently estimated to be $31.98.[91]

6. The Reputation and Ability of the Attorneys.

Lawyers *for* Justice, PC and Capstone Law APC are recognized class action law firms that employed their attorneys' knowledge, skills, and experience in bringing this matter to a successful conclusion. Class Counsel have years of complex and class action litigation experience, have recovered millions of dollars on behalf of thousands of individuals in California, and has successfully handled numerous significant wage-and-hour class action and complex cases.[92]

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D. <u>The Lodestar Methodology Also Justifies Approval of the Requested Fees,</u>

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[88] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 9.
[89] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 9.
[90] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 14.
[91] *Id.*, ¶ 15.
[92] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 13-18.

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Because Class Counsel Has Performed Work That Is of Significant Value Based On Reasonable Hours and Prevailing Hourly Rates of Compensation.

While the percentage-of-the-benefit approach is endorsed as the better approximation of the workings of the marketplace than the lodestar approach, courts may also use the lodestar method to "cross-check" the results of the other. See *Laffitte*, *supra*, 1 Cal.5th at 505 (explaining that "[a] lodestar cross-check is simply a quantitative method for bringing a measure of the time spent by counsel into the trial court's reasonableness determination"); see also, e.g., *Vizcaino*, 290 F.3d at 1050 ("[W]hile the primary basis of the fee award remains the percentage method, the lodestar may provide a useful perspective on the reasonableness of a given percentage award."). Importantly, "the lodestar calculation . . . does not override the trial court's primary determination of the fee as a percentage" of the settlement amount and "does not impose an absolute maximum or minimum on the potential fee award." *Laffitte*, *supra*, 1 Cal.5th at 505.

The lodestar is calculated based on reasonable hours at reasonable prevailing hourly rates for the attorneys. *Ketchum*, *supra*, 24 Cal.4th at 1131-32. Under California law, counsel is entitled to compensation for every hour reasonably spent on the matter. *Id.* at 1133.

1. The Number of Hours Spent on the Litigation was Reasonable.

The reasonableness of hours is assessed by "the entire course of the litigation, including pretrial matters, settlement negotiations, discovery, litigation tactics, and the trial itself[.]" *Vo v. Las Virgenes Municipal Water Dist.* (2000) 79 Cal.App.4th 440, 447.

As discussed above, the case was highly contested and required a significant amount of time and labor. Defendant made it clear very early on that it disputed all of the allegations of the case and disputed that the matter was appropriate for class or representative treatment. Defendant raised affirmative defenses and denied liability, and the pursuit of the cases involved gathering and analyzing data not only from Defendant but also from the Class Members. The handling of the case involved a great amount of effort, and also required and involved the exercise of a high level of skill, which Class Counsel has as a result of its extensive experience in employment class actions and complex wage-and-hour litigation. Long and difficult battles would have followed as the cases moved toward certification and trial, including taking and defending depositions of Defendant's

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Person Most Knowledgeable designees, percipient witnesses, and experts, propounding additional discovery requests and conducting additional document production, and engaging in extensive motion practice. As Class Counsel geared up for these battles, Class Counsel undertook intense preparation in an attempt to resolve the entire matter through settlement negotiations.

Class Counsel had to bring together a large volume of information, documents and data that were obtained from Defendant, Plaintiffs, and through other sources. Class Counsel conducted extensive review and analysis of the information, documents and data to strategize the action and engage in settlement discussions.

As discussed above in Part VI.C.1, *infra*, attached to the Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini is a task and time chart that sets forth in detail the numerous tasks that Class Counsel performed on behalf of Plaintiffs and the Class, and the time required for completing those tasks.[93] The chart demonstrates that Class Counsel has spent a total of 841.60 hours litigating the cases and finalizing the Settlement.[94] In light of the facts and circumstances of the cases, as well as the results that Class Counsel has achieved in these cases, Class Counsel has spent a reasonable number of hours on this matter. In addition, Class Counsel will continue to perform work on this matter through the date of final approval and in connection with the implementation of the Settlement.

2. The Fees Requested Represent a Reasonable Hourly Rate of Compensation in Light of Class Counsel's Efforts and Experience.

Both California and federal courts recognize that attorneys should be compensated for providing representation on a contingency basis and for taking on the risks associated with said representation, as well as being provided with financial incentives to enforce important rights and protections like those at issue in this action. See *Ketchum*, *supra*, 24 Cal.4th at 1132-33. In awarding attorneys' fees, the aim is to mirror "the established practice in the private legal market of rewarding attorneys for taking the risk of nonpayment by paying them a premium over their normal hourly rates for winning contingency cases." See *id*.

Class Counsel has been actively involved in this matter, prior to its commencement and all

[93] Hosseini Decl., Exh. A.
[94] *Id*., ¶¶ 11 and 12, Exh. A.

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the way up to the present, and Class Counsel's dedication to providing representation in these cases has precluded other employment. Here, Class Counsel bore the risk that, despite all of its efforts and skills employed, there may be no recovery. Ultimately, Class Counsel was successful in reaching a settlement of $1,700,000.00.

As set forth in the Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini, the professional backgrounds and experience of Lawyers *for* Justice, PC support reasonable rates of compensation at least $850 per hour for services provided by Lawyers *for* Justice, PC.[95] Lawyers *for* Justice, PC has been awarded attorneys' fees, compensating the firm at the blended rate of at least $850 per hour for legal service performed, by courts of this state.[96] While the circumstances of every case are unique, the fact remains that the work performed and efforts undertaken by Class Counsel on behalf of the Class Members justify the requested attorneys' fees.

Applying the rate of $850 per hour to 401.20 hours for services provided by Lawyers *for* Justice, PC would place a reasonable value of $341,020.00 based on lodestar, and Capstone Law APC's base lodestar is $285,530.00, for a combined lodestar of $626,550.00 for the work performed by Class Counsel. However, Class Counsel only seeks attorneys' fees in the amount of $595,000.00, which is thirty-five (35%) of the total recovery, as provided for by the Settlement Agreement.

It also bears noting that a court may apply a multiplier in consideration for risk, efficiency, and/or obtaining a substantial result, to enhance the lodestar for purpose of cross-check. See *Ketchum*, 24 Cal.4th at 1133-34 (holding that a risk multiplier may be applied to compensate contingency fee attorneys at a fair market rate). Such an enhancement "mirrors the established practice in the private legal market of rewarding attorneys for taking the risk of nonpayment by paying them a premium over their normal hourly rates for winning contingency cases." *Vizcaino*, 290 F.3d at 1051; *accord Ketchum*, *supra,* 24 Cal.4th 1122, 1132-34. A risk multiplier also serves to bring the financial incentives for enforcing important rights "into line with incentives [attorneys] have to undertake claims for which they are paid on a fee-for-services basis." *Ketchum,* 24 Cal.4th

[95] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 11 and 12.
[96] Ibid.

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at 1132. Courts have also approved fee awards with multipliers of 2 and even higher. See, e.g., *City of Oakland v. Oakland Raiders* (1988) 203 Cal.App.3d 78 (affirming a 2.34 multiplier without remand); *Wershba*, *supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 255 ("Multipliers can range from 2 to 4 or even higher."); *Sutter Health Uninsured Pricing Cases* (2009) 171 Cal.App.4th 495, 512 (applying a 2.52 multiplier on a lodestar cross-check); *Chavez*, *supra*, 162 Cal.App.4th at 66 (applying a 2.5 multiplier in a consumer class action).

The lodestar method as a cross-check to the percentage figure sought strongly supports the reasonableness of the requested attorneys' fees. Accordingly, Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court grant final approval of, and award, attorneys' fees in the amount of $595,000.00 to Class Counsel.

VII. COSTS TO BE REIMBURSED TO CLASS COUNSEL ARE FAIR AND REASONABLE AND SHOULD BE APPROVED.

The Settlement provides for reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses of up to $22,000.00. As set forth in the Declarations of Yasmin Hosseini and Raul Perez, Class Counsel seeks reimbursement of $18,968.36 in litigation costs and expenses incurred in this case.[97] This amount was reasonable and necessary in the prosecution of the cases and to obtain the Settlement.[98] The cost savings of $3,031.64 will be part of the Net Settlement Amount, which will be distributed to Settlement Class Members in accordance with the Settlement.[99] Accordingly, Plaintiff request that the Court award litigation costs and expenses in the amount of $18,968.36 to Class Counsel.

VIII. THE ADMINISTRATION COSTS ARE FAIR AND REASONABLE AND SHOULD BE APPROVED.

As set forth in the accompanying Phoenix Declaration, the total costs incurred and to be incurred by Phoenix for the notice and settlement administration process are $28,000.00.[100] The costs incurred and to be incurred include, but are not limited to, (a) printing and mailing the Court Approved Notice of Class Action Settlement and Hearing Date for Final Court Approval, in both

[97] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 19.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 17.

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English and Spanish; (b) receiving and processing requests for exclusion; (c) resolving Settlement Class Members' disputes over the number of Workweeks Defendant has record of them working during the Class Period, which was pre-printed on their individualized Class Notice; (d) calculating individual settlement payment amounts; (e) processing and mailing settlement award checks; (f) handling tax withholdings as required by the Settlement and the law; (g) preparing, issuing and filing tax returns and other applicable tax forms; (h) handling the distribution of any unclaimed funds pursuant to the terms of the Settlement; and (i) performing other tasks as the Parties mutually agree to and/or the Court orders Phoenix to perform.[101]

Accordingly, the Court should grant final approval of payment to Phoenix, a necessary third-party administrator, for its handling of the notice and settlement process, in the amount of $28,000.00.

IX. THE REQUESTED CLASS AND PAGA REPRESENTATIVE SERVICE PAYMENTS ARE FAIR AND REASONABLE AND SHOULD BE APPROVED.

The Settlement provides for Class Representative Service Payments in the amount of $10,000.00 each to Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham and Ninette Amaya (for a total of $20,000.00), and a PAGA Representative Service Payment in the amount of $10,000.00 to Plaintiff Bell, to compensate Plaintiffs for the time and effort that they expended on behalf of the Class. The requested Class Representative Service Payments and PAGA Representative Service Payment are both common and reasonable and should be awarded.

In determining whether to make service payments, courts consider the following factors: (1) the risk to the class representative in commencing suit, both financial and otherwise; (2) the notoriety and personal difficulties encountered by the class representatives; (3) the amount of time and efforts spent by the class representatives; (4) the duration of the litigation; and (5) the personal benefit (or lack thereof) enjoyed by the class representatives as a result of the litigation. *Vranken v. Atlantic Richfield Co.* (N.D. Cal. 1995) 901 F.Supp. 294, 299 (approving $50,000 participation award to a single class representative).

[101] Phoenix Decl., ¶ 3.

The requested Class Representative Service Payments and PAGA Representative Service Payment are fair and appropriate because Plaintiffs spent a substantial amount of time and effort producing relevant documents and past employment records, as well as providing the facts and evidence to support the prosecution of the claims.[102] Plaintiffs were available whenever Class Counsel needed them and actively tried to obtain, and gave, information to support the pursuit of the case.[103]

Accordingly, it is appropriate and just for Plaintiffs Cunningham and Amaya to receive $10,000.00 each, as reasonable Class Representative Service Payments, and Plaintiff Bell to receive $10,000.00, as a reasonable PAGA Representative Service Payment, in addition to their individual settlement payment and/or individual PAGA payment.

X. <u>CONCLUSION</u>

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court grant final approval of the Settlement, and award Class Counsel Fees Payment, Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, Class Representative Service Payments, PAGA Representative Service Payment, Administration Costs, and the allocation for PAGA Penalties, in their entirety, as sought herein; and permit the filing of a memorandum that exceeds the page limit.

Dated: October 21, 2024

LAWYERS *for* JUSTICE, PC

By: ______________________________

Yasmin Hosseini
Attorneys for Plaintiffs Imahni Isis Cunningham and Ninette Amaya and the Class

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[102] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 20; Declaration of Imahni Isis Cunningham ("Cunningham Decl."), ¶¶ 3-5.; Declaration of Ninette Amaya ("Amaya Decl."), ¶¶ 3-5.; Declaration of Christopher Bell ("Bell Decl."), ¶¶ 3-5.
[103] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 20; Cunningham Decl., ¶¶ 3-5, Amaya Decl., ¶¶ 3-5, Bell Decl., ¶¶ 3-5.