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County of Stanislaus
Clerk of the Court
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**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF STANISLAUS**

CATALINO MARTINEZ VERA, on behalf of
the State of California and other aggrieved
persons,

Plaintiff,

v.

VALLEY FRESH FOODS, INC., a California
corporation; and DOES 1 through 10, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: CV-22-003924

**PAGA REPRESENTATIVE ACTION
COMPLAINT:**

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

Freeland, John D

This case has been assigned to Judge _____
Dept. 23
Department _____, for all purposes including Trial.

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

4 **INTRODUCTION & PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

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

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

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

28 4. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendants seeking only to recover penalties on

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

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

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

17 7. At all relevant times, Defendants were and are legally responsible for all of the
18 unlawful conduct, policies, practices, acts and omissions as described in each and all of the
19 foregoing paragraphs as the employer of Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees. Further,
20 Defendants are responsible for each of the unlawful acts or omissions complained of herein under
21 the doctrine of "respondeat superior".

22 **THE PARTIES**

23 **A. Plaintiff**

24 8. Plaintiff Catalino Martinez Vera is a California resident who worked for
25 Defendants in Stanislaus County, California as an hourly-paid, non-exempt employee from
26 approximately 2009 to approximately December 2021.

27 **B. Defendants**

28 9. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based upon that information and belief

1 alleges, that VALLEY FRESH FOODS, INC. is, and at all times herein mentioned, was:

- 2 (a) A California corporation conducting business in numerous counties
- 3 throughout the State of California, including in Stanislaus County; and
- 4 (b) The former employer of Plaintiff and the current and/or former employer
- 5 of the Aggrieved Employees because Defendant VALLEY FRESH
- 6 FOODS, INC. suffered and permitted Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
- 7 Employees to work, and/or controlled their wages, hours, or working
- 8 conditions.

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

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

19 12. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that at all relevant times
20 each Defendant, directly or indirectly, or through agents or other persons, employed Plaintiff and
21 the other employees and exercised control over their wages, hours, and working conditions.
22 Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that, at all relevant times, each Defendant
23 was the principal, agent, partner, joint venturer, officer, director, controlling shareholder,
24 subsidiary, affiliate, parent corporation, successor in interest and/or predecessor in interest of
25 some or all of the other Defendants, and was engaged with some or all of the other Defendants in
26 a joint enterprise for profit, and bore such other relationships to some or all of the other
27 Defendants so as to be liable for their conduct with respect to the matters alleged below. Plaintiff
28 is informed and believes and thereon alleges that each Defendant acted pursuant to and within the

1 scope of the relationships alleged above, that each Defendant knew or should have known about,
2 and authorized, ratified, adopted, approved, controlled, aided and abetted the conduct of all other
3 Defendants.

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

5 13. Plaintiff Catalino Martinez Vera worked for Defendants in Stanislaus County,
6 California from approximately 2009 to approximately December 2021. At all times, Defendants
7 paid Plaintiff an hourly wage and classified him as non-exempt from overtime.

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

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

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

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

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

24 18. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants maintained a policy and practice of
25 not paying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all hours worked, including minimum,
26 straight time, and overtime wages. Defendants required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees
27 to work "off-the-clock", uncompensated, by, for example, requiring Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
28 Employees to perform work after clocking out for the workday. Some of this unpaid work

1 should have been paid at the overtime rate. In failing to pay for all hours worked, Defendants
2 also failed to maintain accurate records of the hours Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees
3 worked.

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

5 19. Under California law, employers have an affirmative obligation to relieve
6 employees of all duty in order to take their first 30-minute, duty-free meal periods no later than
7 the start of the sixth hour of work in a workday, and to allow employees to take their second 30-
8 minute, duty-free meal period no later than the start of the eleventh hour of work in a workday.
9 Further, employees are entitled to be paid one hour of additional wages for each workday they
10 were not provided with a required meal period(s).

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

24 21. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are thus entitled to be paid one hour of
25 additional wages for each workday he or she was not provided with all required meal period(s).
26 Defendants, however, regularly failed to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees the
27 additional wages to which they were entitled for meal periods that were not provided.

28 ///

1 **C. Failure to Authorize and Permit Rest Periods**

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

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

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

24 **D. Failure to Pay All Earned Wages Twice Per Month**

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

27 26. Labor Code § 204 requires employers to pay employees all earned wages two
28 times per month. Throughout the statute of limitations period applicable to this cause of action,

employees were entitled to be paid twice a month at their regular rates, including all meal period premium wages owed, rest period premium wages owed, and wages owed for overtime hours worked. However, during all such times, Defendants systematically failed and refused to pay the employees all wages due, and failed to pay those wages twice a month, in that employees were not paid all wages for all meal periods not provided by Defendants, all wages for all rest periods not authorized and permitted by Defendants, and all wages for all hours worked. As a result, Defendants owe employees the legally required wages not paid, and Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees suffered damages in those amounts.

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

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

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

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

1 the Aggrieved Employees have also suffered an injury in that they were prevented from knowing,
2 understanding, and disputing the wage payments paid to them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

27 34. Labor Code § 226(a) provides that every employer shall furnish each of his or her
28 employees an accurate itemized wage statement in writing showing nine pieces of information,

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

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

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

37. Because Defendants violated Labor Code § 226, Plaintiff and similarly Aggrieved Employees suffered injury and damage to their statutorily protected rights. Accordingly, Plaintiff and similarly Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover from Defendants the greater of their actual damages caused by Defendants’ failure to comply with Labor Code § 226(a), or an aggregate penalty not exceeding four thousand dollars (\$4,000) dollars per employee.

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1 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

2 **(Against all Defendants for Civil Penalties Under the Private Attorneys General Act of**
3 **2004, Cal. Lab. Code § 2698 et seq.)**

4 38. Plaintiff incorporates by reference and re-alleges all preceding paragraphs as
5 though fully set forth herein.

6 39. At all times herein mentioned, Defendants were subject to the Labor Code of the
7 State of California and the applicable IWC Orders.

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

15 41. Plaintiff has exhausted his administrative remedies pursuant to California Labor
16 Code § 2699.3. On May 27, 2022, he gave written notice by online filing to the Labor and
17 Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) and by certified mail to Defendants of the specific
18 provisions of the Labor Code that Defendants have violated against Plaintiff and current and
19 former Aggrieved Employees, including the facts and theories to support the violations. Plaintiff
20 also paid the filing fee on May 27, 2022. Plaintiff’s PAGA case number is LWDA-CM-886143-
21 22 (*Catalino Martinez Vera, et al. v. Valley Fresh Foods, Inc.*).

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

25 43. More than sixty-five (65) days has elapsed since Plaintiff provided notice, but the
26 LWDA has not indicated that it intends to investigate Defendants’ Labor Code violations
27 discussed in the notice. Accordingly, Plaintiff may commence a civil action to recover penalties
28 under Labor Code § 2699 pursuant to § 2699.3 for the violations of the Labor Code described in

1 this Complaint. These penalties include, but are not limited to, penalties under California Labor
2 Code §§ 210, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1, and 2699(f)(2).

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

7 45. In addition, Plaintiff seeks an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs
8 pursuant to Labor Code § 2699(g)(1), which states, "Any employee who prevails in any action
9 shall be entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs."

10 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

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

13 1. That the Court declare, adjudge and decree that Defendants violated the California
14 Labor Code by failing to pay for all hours worked (minimum, straight time, and overtime wages),
15 failing to provide meal periods, failing to authorize and permit rest periods, failing to pay all
16 earned wages twice per month, failing to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal
17 periods, failing to timely pay final wages, and failing to furnish accurate wage statements;

18 2. An award of civil penalties on behalf of himself and all similarly aggrieved
19 employees pursuant to PAGA;

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

21 4. Attorneys' fees and costs reasonably incurred;

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: August 30, 2022

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM

By:

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Benjamin H. Haber
Arrash T. Fattahi

Attorneys for Plaintiff