

ELECTRONICALLY FILED
Merced Superior Court
3/27/2025 12:59 PM
Amanda Toste
Clerk of the Superior Court
By: Patricia Palmerin, Deputy

MELMED LAW GROUP P.C.
Jonathan Melmed (SBN 290218)
jm@melmedlaw.com
Kyle D. Smith (SBN 280489)
ks@melmedlaw.com
Jaqueline Antillon (SBN 358092)
ja@melmedlaw.com
1801 Century Park East, Suite 850
Los Angeles, California 90067
Phone: (310) 824-3828
Fax: (310) 862-6851

**ASSIGNED FOR ALL PURPOSES
JUDGE STEPHANIE L JAMIESON**

Attorneys for Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF MERCED**

CARLOS MEJIA, an individual, on behalf of
himself and the State of California, as a private
attorney general,

Plaintiff,

v.

TURLOCK FRUIT CO., a California
Corporation; STEPHEN H. SMITH FARMS,
INC., a California Corporation; and DOES 1 TO
50,

Defendants.

Case Number: 25CV-01869

Representative Action Complaint For:

1. Penalties Pursuant to the Labor Code
Private Attorneys General Act of 2004
("PAGA") for Violations of California
Labor Code Sections 201, 202, 203, 204,
210, 226, 226.3, 226.7, 510, 512, 1174,
1185, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1, 1198,
1198.5, 1199, 2802, 2804, and Other
Provisions of the California Labor Code.

Plaintiff Carlos Mejia (“Plaintiff”), on behalf of himself and the State of California, as a private attorney general, complains and alleges of defendants Turlock Fruit Co., Stephen H. Smith Farms, Inc., and Does 1 to 50 (collectively, “Defendants”), and each of them, as follows:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This action is a representative action brought pursuant to the California Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 (“PAGA”), codified at California Labor Code sections 2698 through 2699.6.

2. The “PAGA Period” as used herein, is defined as the period from January 13, 2024, and continuing into the present and ongoing.

3. This PAGA action is brought on behalf of Plaintiff, the State of California as private attorney general, and on behalf of the following aggrieved employees: *All individuals who are or were employed by Defendants as non-exempt employees in California during the PAGA Period* (the “Aggrieved Employees”).

4. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that the California Industrial Welfare Commission (“IWC”) Wage Order applicable to the facts of this case is IWC Wage Order 14-2001 (the “Applicable Wage Order”) and possibly others that may be applicable. (Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 8, § 11140.) Plaintiff reserves the right to amend or modify the definition of “Applicable Wage Order” with greater specificity or add additional IWC Wage Orders if additional applicable wage orders are discovered in litigation.

II. JURISDICTION & VENUE

5. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over all causes of action asserted herein pursuant to Article VI, section 10, of the California Constitution and Code of Civil Procedure section 410.10 because this is a civil action in which the matter in controversy, exclusive of interest, exceeds \$25,000, and because each cause of action asserted arises under the laws of the State of California or is subject to adjudication in the courts of the State of California.

6. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendants because Defendants have caused injuries in the County of Merced and the State of California through their acts, and by their violation of the California Labor Code and California state common law. Defendants transact millions of dollars

1 of business within the State of California. Defendants own, maintain offices, transact business, have an
2 agent or agents within the County of Merced, and/or otherwise are found within the County of Merced,
3 and Defendants are within the jurisdiction of this Court for purposes of service of process.

4 7. Venue as to Defendants is proper in this judicial district, pursuant to section 395 of the
5 Code of Civil Procedure. Defendants operate within California and do business within Merced County,
6 California. The unlawful acts alleged herein have a direct effect on Plaintiff and all of Defendants'
7 employees identified above within Merced County and surrounding counties where Defendants may
8 remotely operate. (See *Crestwood Behavioral Health, Inc. v. Superior Court of Alameda County* (2021)
9 60 Cal.App.5th 1069, 1075 ["We hold that venue is proper in any county in which an aggrieved
10 employee worked and Labor Code violations allegedly occurred."].)

11 **III. THE PARTIES**

12 **A. PLAINTIFF**

13 8. At all relevant times, Plaintiff, who is over the age of 18, was and currently is a citizen
14 of California residing in the State of California. Defendants employed Plaintiff as a non-exempt hourly
15 employee in the County of Merced.

16 9. Plaintiff brings this action on behalf of himself and the State of California, as a private
17 attorney general, and on behalf of the following group of aggrieved employees: *All individuals who*
18 *are or were employed by Defendants as non-exempt employees in California during the PAGA Period*
19 *(the "Aggrieved Employees")*.

20 10. The Aggrieved Employees, at all times pertinent hereto, are or were employees of
21 Defendants during the relevant statutory period.

22 **B. DEFENDANTS**

23 11. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants were authorized
24 to and doing business in Merced County and is and/or was the legal employer of Plaintiff and the other
25 Aggrieved Employees during the applicable statutory periods. Plaintiff and the other Aggrieved
26 Employees were, and are, subject to Defendants' policies and/or practices complained of herein and
27 have been deprived of the rights guaranteed to them by: California Labor Code sections 201, 202, 203,
28 204, 210, 226, 226.3, 226.7, 510, 512, 1174, 1185, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 1198.5, 1199,

1 2802, 2804, and others that may be applicable; and the Applicable Wage Order (Cal. Code of Regs.,
2 tit. 8, § 11140).

3 12. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that during the PAGA
4 Period, Defendants did (and continue to do) business in the State of California, County of Merced.
5 Defendants' operations are headquartered in Merced County.

6 13. Plaintiff does not know the true names or capacities, whether individual, partner, or
7 corporate, of the defendants sued herein as Does 1 to 50, inclusive, and for that reason, said defendants
8 are sued under such fictitious names, and Plaintiff will seek leave from this Court to amend this
9 complaint when such true names and capacities are discovered. Plaintiff is informed, and believes, and
10 thereon alleges, that each of said fictitious defendants, whether individual, partners, or corporate, were
11 responsible in some manner for the acts and omissions alleged herein, and proximately caused Plaintiff
12 and the other Aggrieved Employees to be subject to the unlawful employment practices, wrongs,
13 injuries, and damages complained of herein.

14 14. Plaintiff is informed, and believes, and thereon alleges, that at all times mentioned
15 herein, Defendants were and/or are the employers of Plaintiff and the other Aggrieved Employees. At
16 all times herein mentioned, each of said Defendants participated in the doing of the acts hereinafter
17 alleged to have been done by the named Defendants. Furthermore, the Defendants, and each of them,
18 were the agents, representatives, and employees of each and every one of the other Defendants, and at
19 all times herein mentioned were acting within the course and scope of said agency, representation, and
20 employment. Defendants, and each of them, approved of, condoned, or otherwise ratified every one of
21 the acts or omissions complained of herein.

22 15. Plaintiff is further informed, and believes, and thereon alleges, that at all times
23 mentioned herein, that Defendants, and each of them, are the alter egos of one another and that there
24 existed and now exists a unity of interest and ownership between them such that the individuality and
25 separateness of each of them has ceased. Plaintiff is further informed, and believes, and thereon alleges,
26 that at all times mentioned herein, that Defendants, and each of them, have been and now are mere
27 shells and naked frameworks that their principal uses for the conduct of that Defendant's own business,
28

1 property, and affairs, for which Defendants, and each of them, have concealed and misrepresented their
2 identities as the entities responsible for their ownership, management, and financial interests.

3 16. Plaintiff is further informed, and believes, and thereon alleges, that at all times
4 mentioned herein, Defendants, and each of them, were members of and engaged in a joint venture,
5 partnership, and common enterprise, and acting within the course and scope of and in pursuance of said
6 joint venture, partnership, and common enterprise. Further, Plaintiff is informed, and believes, and
7 thereon alleges, that all Defendants were joint employers for all purposes of Plaintiff and the other
8 Aggrieved Employees.

9 **IV. COMMON FACTS & ALLEGATIONS**

10 17. Plaintiff and the other Aggrieved Employees (collectively, the “Aggrieved Employees”)
11 are, and were at all relevant times, employed by the Defendants within the State of California.

12 18. The Aggrieved Employees are, and were, at all relevant times, non-exempt employees
13 for the purposes of minimum wages, overtime, rest breaks, meal periods, and the other claims alleged
14 in this complaint.

15 19. Specifically, Plaintiff was employed by Defendants within the statutory PAGA Period,
16 working as an hourly, non-exempt melon picker for Defendants.

17 **A. MINIMUM WAGE VIOLATIONS**

18 20. Labor Code section 1197 requires employees to be paid at least the minimum wage fixed
19 by the IWC, and any payment of less than the minimum wage is unlawful. Likewise, the Applicable
20 Wage Order also obligates employers to pay each employee minimum wages for all hours worked.
21 (Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 8, § 11140.) Labor Code section 1198 makes unlawful the employment of an
22 employee under conditions that the IWC Wage Orders prohibit.

23 21. These minimum wage standards apply to each hour that employees work. Therefore, an
24 employer’s failure to pay for any particular time worked by an employee is unlawful, even if averaging
25 an employee’s total pay over all hours worked, paid or not, results in an average hourly wage above
26 minimum wage. (*Armenta v. Osmose, Inc.* (2005) 135 Cal.App.4th 314, 324.)

27 22. Here, Defendants failed to fully conform their pay practices to the requirements of the
28 law during the relevant statutory periods. The Aggrieved Employees were not compensated for all

1 hours worked including, but not limited to, all hours they were subject to the control of Defendants
2 and/or suffered or permitted to work under the California Labor Code and the Applicable Wage Order.
3 Among other violations, the Aggrieved Employees were subject to the control of Defendants while off-
4 the-clock and did not receive minimum wage for each hour worked.

5 23. Additionally, the Aggrieved Employees were not paid all wages for all hours worked
6 due to Defendants' uniform payroll policies and practices that unfairly rounded employees' wages to
7 the detriment of the Aggrieved Employees. This rounding policy routinely failed to capture the entirety
8 of the hours the Aggrieved Employees worked and was structured in a way that in favored
9 underpayment. (See *See's Candy Shops, Inc. v. Superior Court* (2012) 210 Cal.App.4th 889, 907.) As
10 a result, the Aggrieved Employees suffered periodic shortages in the hours for which they were
11 compensated. This uncompensated time violated California's requirement that employees be
12 compensated for all hours worked. As a result of this practice, the Aggrieved Employees were not
13 compensated their minimum wages for all hours worked.

14 24. Labor Code section 1197.1 authorizes employees who are paid less than the minimum
15 wage fixed by an applicable state or local law, or by an order of the IWC, a civil penalty, among other
16 damages, as follows:

17 (1) "For any initial violation that is intentionally committed, one hundred
18 dollars (\$100) for each underpaid employee for each pay period for
19 which the employee is underpaid."

20 (2) "For each subsequent violation for the same specific offense, two
21 hundred fifty dollars (\$250) for each underpaid employee for each pay
22 period for which the employee is underpaid regardless of whether the
23 initial violation is intentionally committed." (Lab. Code, § 1197.1, subd.

24 (a).)

25 25. As set forth above, Defendants failed to fully compensate the Aggrieved Employees for
26 all minimum wages. Accordingly, through PAGA and to the extent permitted by law, Plaintiff and the
27 Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section
28 1197.1 in addition to any other applicable penalties.

1 **B. OVERTIME VIOLATIONS**

2 26. Labor Code section 510 requires employers to compensate employees who work more
3 than eight hours in one workday, forty hours in a workweek, and for the first eight hours worked on
4 the seventh consecutive day no less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for an employee.
5 (Lab. Code, § 510, subd. (a).) Further, Labor Code section 510 obligates employers to compensate
6 employees at no less than twice the regular rate of pay when an employee works more than twelve
7 hours in a day or more than eight hours on the seventh consecutive day of work. (Lab. Code, § 510,
8 subd. (a).)

9 27. IWC Wage Order 14-2001, section 3(A), is similar, but provides in pertinent part:

10 “(1) Such employees shall not be employed more than ten (10) hours in any
11 one workday or more than six (6) days in any workweek unless the
12 employee receives one and one-half (1½) times such employee’s regular
13 rate of pay for all hours worked over ten (10) hours in any workday and
14 for the first eight (8) hours on the seventh (7th) day of work and double
15 the employee’s regular rate of pay for all hours worked over eight (8) on
16 the seventh (7th) day of work in the workweek.

17 “(2) For employers of more than 25 employees:

18 “(a) Starting January 1, 2019, an employee shall not be employed more than
19 nine and one-half (9½) hours per workday or fifty-five (55) hours per
20 workweek unless the employee receives one and one-half (1½) times
21 such employee’s regular rate of pay for all hours worked over nine and
22 one-half (9½) hours in any one workday or more than fifty-five (55)
23 hours in any one workweek.

24 “(b) Starting January 1, 2020, an employee shall not be employed more than
25 nine (9) hours per workday or fifty (50) hours per workweek unless the
26 employee receives one and one-half (1½) times such employee’s regular
27 rate of pay for all hours worked over nine (9) hours in any one workday
28

1 or more than fifty (50) hours in any one workweek.” (Cal. Code of Regs.,
 2 tit. 8, § 11140, subd. 3.)

3 28. In accordance with Labor Code section 1194 and the Applicable Wage Order, the
 4 Aggrieved Employees could not then agree and cannot now agree to work for a lesser wage than the
 5 amount provided by Labor Code sections 510 or the Applicable Wage Order.

6 29. Here, Defendants violated their duty to accurately and completely compensate the
 7 Aggrieved Employees for all overtime worked. The Aggrieved Employees periodically worked hours
 8 that entitled them to overtime compensation under the law but were not fully compensated for those
 9 hours.

10 30. These actions were and are in clear violation of California’s overtime laws as set forth
 11 in Labor Code sections 510, 1194, 1199, and the Applicable Wage Order. (Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 8, §
 12 11140.) As a result of Defendants’ faulty policies and practices, the Aggrieved Employees were not
 13 compensated for all hours worked or paid accurate overtime compensation.

14 **C. DONNING AND DOFFING VIOLATIONS**

15 31. As explained above, employers are required to pay employees at least the applicable
 16 minimum wage for all hours worked. (Lab. Code, §§ 1194, 1197.) “Hours worked,” for these purposes,
 17 includes “activities, such as the donning and doffing of specialized protective gear, that are performed
 18 either before or after the regular work shift” (*IBP, Inc. v. Alvarez* (2005) 546 U.S. 21, 30 [126
 19 S.Ct. 514, 521], internal quotation marks omitted.) As one court noted:

20 “All activities which are an integral and indispensable part of the principal
 21 activities for which covered workmen are employed, including the donning and
 22 doffing of specialized protective gear either before or after the regular work
 23 shift, are compensable under the FLSA.” (*Pehle v. Dufour* (E.D. Cal., Sept. 28,
 24 2012, No. 2:06-CV-1889-EFB) 2012 WL 4490955, at p. 8, internal quotation
 25 marks omitted; see also *Aguilar v. Ass’n for Retarded Citizens* (1991) 234
 26
 27
 28

1 Cal.App.3d 21, 34 [“[F]ederal law does not control unless it is more beneficial
2 to employees than the state law.”].)

3 32. Thus, a failure to pay employees for their time donning and doffing clothing and
4 equipment is a violation of law. (See *Steiner v. Mitchell* (1956) 350 U.S. 247, 256 [76 S.Ct. 330, 335]
5 [time spent by private employees at a battery plant changing clothes and showering before and after
6 shifts was compensable because the activities were necessary to protect the workers from toxins in the
7 workplace]; *IBP, Inc. v. Alvarez, supra*, 546 U.S. 21, 37–42 [time spent by meat processing plant
8 employees walking between locker rooms and production areas after donning special safety gear in the
9 locker rooms is compensable, as it is time employees spent waiting to doff protective clothes because
10 that time was not a “preliminary or postliminary activity” excluded from coverage].)

11 33. Here, the Aggrieved Employees were and are periodically required to don specialized
12 accoutrements necessary for their work. At such times, Defendants had a policy and practice of
13 requiring the Aggrieved Employees to arrive at work early to engage in preparation and
14 donning/doffing activities before clocking in for their shift.

15 34. Likewise, the Aggrieved Employees were and are periodically required to remove those
16 accoutrements after the conclusion of their work. At such times, Defendants had a policy and practice
17 of requiring the Aggrieved Employees to stay beyond the conclusion of their shift to engage in these
18 removal activities after clocking out.

19 35. None of the time spent engaging in these donning or doffing activities is or was
20 compensated by Defendants. As a result, the Aggrieved Employees were not compensated for all hours
21 worked. These donning and doffing violations resulted in additional overtime violations, as well as
22 non-compliant meal and rest periods.

23 **D. REST BREAK VIOLATIONS**

24 36. Pursuant to Labor Code section 226.7 and the Applicable Wage Order, Defendants were
25 and are required to provide the Aggrieved Employees with compensated, duty-free rest periods of not
26 less than ten minutes for every major fraction of four hours worked. Under the Applicable Wage Order,
27 an employer must authorize and permit all employees to take ten minute duty free rest periods for every
28 major fraction of four hours worked. (Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 8, § 11140.)

1 37. Likewise, Labor Code section 226.7 provides that “[a]n employer shall not require an
2 employee to work during a meal or rest or recovery period mandated pursuant to an applicable statute,
3 or applicable regulation, standard, or order of the Industrial Welfare Commission” (Lab. Code, §
4 226.7, subd. (b).) Labor Code section 226.7 also provides that employers must pay their employees one
5 additional hour of pay at the employee’s regular rate for each workday that a “meal or rest or recovery
6 period is not provided.” (Lab. Code, § 226.7, subd. (c).) The “regular rate” for these purposes must
7 factor in all nondiscretionary payments for work performed by the employee, including non-
8 discretionary bonuses, commissions, and other forms of wage payments exceeding the employees’ base
9 hourly rate. (*Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 858, 878.) Thus, the Wage
10 Orders set when and for how long the rest period must take place and the Labor Code establishes that
11 violations of the IWC Wage Orders are unlawful and sets forth the premium pay employer must pay
12 their employees when employers fail to provide rest periods.

13 38. The California Supreme Court has held that, during required rest periods, “employers
14 must relieve their employees of all duties and relinquish any control over how employees spend their
15 break time.” (*Augustus v. ABM Security Services, Inc.* (2016) 2 Cal.5th 257, 260.) Relinquishing
16 control over employees during rest periods requires that employees be “free to leave the employer’s
17 premises” and be “permitted to attend to personal business.” (*Id.* at p. 275.) The *Brinker* Court
18 explained in the context of rest breaks that employer liability attaches from adopting an unlawful
19 policy:

20 “An employer is required to authorize and permit the amount of rest break time
21 called for under the wage order for its industry. If it does not—if, for example,
22 it adopts a uniform policy authorizing and permitting only one rest break for
23 employees working a seven-hour shift when two are required—it has violated
24 the wage order and is liable.” (*Brinker Rest. Corp. v. Superior Court* (2012) 53
25 Cal.4th 1004, 1033.)

26 39. Here, Defendants periodically did not permit the Aggrieved Employees to take
27 compliant duty-free rest breaks, free from Defendants’ control as required by Labor Code section
28 226.7, the Applicable Wage Order, and applicable precedent. (See *Augustus v. ABM Security Services*,

1 *Inc.* (2016) 2 Cal.5th 257, 269 [concluding that “during rest periods employers must relieve employees
2 of all duties and relinquish control over how employees spend their time.”].) At all relevant times, the
3 Aggrieved Employees were periodically not provided with legally-compliant and timely rest periods
4 of at least ten minutes for each four hour work period, or major fraction thereof due to Defendants’
5 unlawful rest period policies/practices. The Aggrieved Employees were often expected and required to
6 continue working through rest periods to meet the expectations Defendants and finish the workday. In
7 some cases when the Aggrieved Employees worked more than ten hours in a shift, Defendants failed
8 to authorize and/or permit a third mandated rest period. As a result, the Aggrieved Employees were
9 periodically unable to take compliant rest periods.

10 40. In such cases where Defendants did not offer the Aggrieved Employees the opportunity
11 to receive a compliant off-duty rest period, “the court may not conclude employees voluntarily chose
12 to skip those breaks.” (*Alberts v. Aurora Behavioral Health Care* (2015) 241 Cal.App.4th 388, 410
13 (2015) [“If an employer fails to provide legally compliant meal or rest breaks, the court may not
14 conclude employees voluntarily chose to skip those breaks.”]; *Brinker Rest. Corp. v. Superior Court*,
15 *supra*, 53 Cal.4th at p. 1033 [“No issue of waiver ever arises for a rest break that was required by law
16 but never authorized; if a break is not authorized, an employee has no opportunity to decline to take
17 it.”].)

18 41. In addition to failing to authorize and permit compliant rest periods, the Aggrieved
19 Employees were not compensated with one hour’s worth of pay at their regular rate of compensation
20 when they were not provided with a compliant rest period in accordance with Labor Code section
21 226.7, subdivision (c). Thus, Defendants have violated Labor Code section 226.7 and the Applicable
22 Wage Order.

23 **E. MEAL BREAK VIOLATIONS**

24 42. Labor Code section 512 and the Applicable Wage Order require employers to provide
25 employees with a thirty-minute uninterrupted and duty-free meal period within the first five hours of
26 work. (Lab. Code, § 512, subd. (a) [“An employer shall not employ an employee for a work period of
27 more than five hours per day without providing the employee with a meal period of not less than 30
28 minutes”]; Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 8, § 11140 [“No employer shall employ any person for a work

period of more than five (5) hours without a meal period of not less than 30 minutes”].) Additionally, an employee who works more than ten hours per day is entitled to receive a second thirty-minute uninterrupted and duty-free meal period. (Lab. Code, § 512, subd. (a) [“An employer shall not employ an employee for a work period of more than 10 hours per day without providing the employee with a second meal period of not less than 30 minutes”].)

43. “An on-duty meal period is permitted only when the nature of the work prevents an employee from being relieved of all duty and the parties agree in writing to an on-duty paid meal break.” (*Lubin v. The Wackenhut Corp.* (2016) 5 Cal.App.5th 926, 932.) The written agreement must include a provision allowing the employee to revoke it at any time. (*Ibid.*) Generally, the California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Labor Standards Enforcement (“DLSE”) and courts have “found that the nature of the work exception applies: (1) where the work has some particular external force that requires the employee to be on duty at all times, and (2) where the employee is the sole employee of a particular employer.” (*Id.* at p. 945, internal quotation marks omitted; *Abdullah v. U.S. Security Associates, Inc.* (9th Cir. 2013) 731 F.3d 952, 958–959.) “[I]t is the employer’s obligation to determine whether the nature of the work prevents an employee from being relieved before requiring an employee to take an on-duty meal period.” (*Lubin v. The Wackenhut Corp.*, *supra*, 5 Cal.App.5th at p. 946.)

44. Here, the Aggrieved Employees were never asked to sign any enforceable document agreeing to an on-duty meal period. Moreover, nothing in the nature of their work involved the kind of “external force” that might justify on-duty meal breaks. (*Lubin v. The Wackenhut Corp.*, *supra*, 5 Cal.App.5th at p. 945.) Nevertheless, Defendants periodically did not provide compliant off-duty meal periods within the first five hours of work for the Aggrieved Employees.

45. As with rest breaks, meal breaks must be duty-free. (*Brinker Restaurant Corp. v. Superior Court* (2012) 53 Cal.4th 1004, 1035 [“The IWC’s wage orders have long made a meal period’s duty-free nature its defining characteristic.”].) Relinquishing control over employees during meal periods requires that employees be “free to leave the employer’s premises” and be “permitted to attend to personal business.” (*Augustus v. ABM Security Services, Inc.*, *supra*, 2 Cal.5th at p. 275.) Under Labor Code section 512, if an employer maintains a uniform policy that does not authorize and permit

1 the amount of meal time called for under the law (as specified in the Labor Code and/or applicable
2 IWC Wage Order), “it has violated the wage order and is liable.” (*Brinker Restaurant Corp. v. Superior*
3 *Court, supra*, 53 Cal.4th at p. 1033.)

4 46. During the applicable statutory periods here, the Aggrieved Employees were
5 periodically denied legally-compliant and timely off-duty meal periods of at least thirty minutes due to
6 Defendants’ unlawful meal period policy and practices. As a result of Defendants’ uniform meal period
7 policies and practices, the Aggrieved Employees were often not permitted to take compliant first meal
8 periods before the end of the fifth hour of work. The Aggrieved Employees were also periodically not
9 permitted to take second meal periods for shifts in excess of ten hours. Defendants thus violated Labor
10 Code section 512 and the Applicable Wage Order by failing to advise, authorize, or permit the
11 Aggrieved Employees to receive thirty-minute, off-duty meal periods within the first five hours of their
12 shifts.

13 47. Labor Code section 226.7 provides that “[a]n employer shall not require an employee
14 to work during a meal or rest or recovery period mandated pursuant to an applicable statute, or
15 applicable regulation, standard, or order of the Industrial Welfare Commission.” (Lab. Code, § 226.7,
16 subd. (b).) Labor Code section 226.7, subdivision (c), and the Applicable Wage Order further obligate
17 employers to pay employees one additional hour of pay at the employee’s regular rate of compensation
18 for each workday that the meal period is not provided. (Lab. Code, § 226.7, subd. (c); Cal. Code of
19 Regs., tit. 8, § 11140 [“If an employer fails to provide an employee a meal period in accordance with
20 the applicable provisions of this order, the employer shall pay the employee one (1) hour of pay at the
21 employee’s regular rate of compensation for each workday that the meal period is not provided.”].)
22 The “regular rate” for these purposes must factor in all nondiscretionary payments for work performed
23 by the employee, including non-discretionary bonuses, commissions, and other forms of wage
24 payments exceeding the employees’ base hourly rate. (*Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021)
25 11 Cal.5th 858, 878.)

26 48. Accordingly, for each day that the Aggrieved Employees did not receive compliant meal
27 periods, they were and are entitled to receive meal period premiums pursuant to Labor Code section
28 226.7 and the Applicable Wage Order. Defendants, however, failed to pay the Aggrieved Employees

1 applicable meal period premiums for many workdays that the employees did not receive a compliant
2 meal period. Thus, Defendants have violated Labor Code section 226.7 and the Applicable Wage
3 Order.

4 **F. UNTIMELY WAGES DURING EMPLOYMENT**

5 49. Labor Code section 204 expressly requires employers who pay employees on a weekly,
6 biweekly, or semimonthly basis to pay all wages “not more than seven calendar days following the
7 close of the payroll period.” Labor Code section 210, subdivision (a), makes employers who violate
8 Labor Code section 204 subject to a penalty of:

9 “(1) For any initial violation, one hundred dollars (\$100) for each failure to
10 pay each employee.

11 “(2) For each subsequent violation, or any willful or intentional violation, two
12 hundred dollars (\$200) for each failure to pay each employee, plus 25
13 percent of the amount unlawfully withheld.” (Lab. Code, § 210, subd.
14 (a).)

15 50. Notably, the penalty provided by Labor Code section 210 is “[i]n addition to, and
16 entirely independent and apart from, any other penalty provided in this article . . .” (Lab. Code, § 210,
17 subd. (a).)

18 51. Due to Defendants’ failure to pay the Aggrieved Employees the wages described above,
19 along with rest and meal break premiums, Defendants failed to timely pay the Aggrieved Employees
20 within seven calendar days following the close of payroll in accordance with Labor Code section 204
21 on a regular and consistent basis. (See *Parson v. Golden State FC, LLC* (N.D. Cal., May 2, 2016, No.
22 16-CV-00405-JST) 2016 WL 1734010, at p. *3–5, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 58299 [finding that a failure
23 to pay rest period premiums can support claims under Labor Code sections 203 and 204].)

24 **G. UNTIMELY WAGES AT SEPARATION**

25 52. Labor Code section 203 provides “if an employer willfully fails to pay . . . any wages
26 of an employee who is discharged or who quits, the wages of the employee shall continue as a penalty”
27 for up to thirty days. (Lab. Code § 203; *Mamika v. Barca* (1998) 68 Cal.App.4th 487, 492.) As a result
28

1 of Defendants' failure to pay the Aggrieved Employees for the wages described above, along with rest
2 and meal break premiums, Defendants violated and continue to violate Labor Code section 203.

3 53. Due to Defendants' faulty pay policies, those Aggrieved Employees whose employment
4 with Defendants concluded were not compensated for each and every hour worked at the appropriate
5 rate. Defendants have failed to pay formerly-employed Aggrieved Employees whose sums were certain
6 at the time of termination within at least seventy-two hours of their resignation and have failed to pay
7 those sums for thirty days thereafter.

8 **H. FAILURE TO REIMBURSE BUSINESS EXPENSES**

9 54. At all relevant times herein, Defendants were subject to Labor Code section 2802, which
10 states that "an employer shall indemnify his or her employees for all necessary expenditures or losses
11 incurred by the employee in direct consequence of the discharge of his or her duties, or of his or her
12 obedience to the directions of the employer." The purpose of this section is to "prevent employers from
13 passing along their operating expenses onto their employees." (*Gattuso v. Harte-Hanks Shoppers, Inc.*
14 (2007) 42 Cal.4th 554, 562.)

15 55. At all relevant times herein, Defendants were subject to Labor Code section 2804, which
16 states that "any contract or agreement, express or implied, made by any employee to waive the benefits
17 of this article or any part thereof, is null and void, and this article shall not deprive any employee or his
18 personal representative of any right or remedy to which he is entitled under the laws of this State."

19 56. Thus, the Aggrieved Employees were and are entitled to reimbursement for the expenses
20 they incurred during the course of their duties. The duty to reimburse even extends to the use of
21 equipment the employee may already own and would be required to pay for anyway. (*Cochran v.*
22 *Schwan's Home Serv., Inc.* (2014) 228 Cal.App.4th 1137, 1144 ["The threshold question in this case
23 is this: Does an employer always have to reimburse an employee for the reasonable expense of the
24 mandatory use of a personal cell phone, or is the reimbursement obligation limited to the situation in
25 which the employee incurred an extra expense that he or she would not have otherwise incurred absent
26 the job? The answer is that reimbursement is always required. Otherwise, the employer would receive
27 a windfall because it would be passing its operating expenses on to the employee."].)
28

1 57. Here, Defendants failed to fully reimburse the Aggrieved Employees for necessary
2 expenditures incurred as a direct consequence and requirement of performing their job duties, including
3 the costs associated with their personal cell phone and protective gear they required to perform their
4 work. Consequently, Defendants failed to comply with Labor Code section 2802.

5 **I. WAGE STATEMENT VIOLATIONS**

6 58. Defendants also failed to provide accurate itemized wage statements in accordance with
7 Labor Code sections 226, subdivisions (a)(1), (2), (5), and (9). Labor Code section 226, subdivision
8 (a), obligates employers, semi-monthly or at the time of each payment to furnish an itemized wage
9 statement in writing showing:

- 10 (1) The gross wages earned;
- 11 (2) The total hours worked by the employee;
- 12 (3) The number of piece-rate units earned and any applicable piece rate if
13 the employee is paid on a piece rate basis;
- 14 (4) All deductions, provided that all deductions made on written orders of
15 the employee may be aggregated and shown as one item;
- 16 (5) The net wages earned;
- 17 (6) The inclusive dates of the period for which the employee is paid;
- 18 (7) The name of the employee and only the last four digits of his or her social
19 security number or an employee identification number other than a social
20 security number;
- 21 (8) The name and address of the legal entity that is the employer; and
- 22 (9) All applicable hourly rates in effect during the pay period and the
23 corresponding number of hours worked at each hourly rate by the
24 employee.

25 59. Due to Defendants' failure to pay the Aggrieved Employees properly as described
26 above, the wage statements issued do not indicate the correct amount of gross wages earned, total hours
27 worked, or the net wages earned, or the applicable hourly rates in effect during the pay period and the
28

1 corresponding number of hours worked at each hourly rate. Thus, Defendants have violated Labor
2 Code section 226, subdivisions (a)(1), (2), (5), and (9).

3 60. In addition to Labor Code section 226, subdivision (a), Defendants also knowingly and
4 intentionally failed to provide the Aggrieved Employees with accurate itemized wage statements in
5 violation of Labor Code section 226, subdivision (e). Defendants knew that they were not providing
6 the Aggrieved Employees with wage statements required by California law but nevertheless failed to
7 correct their unlawful practices and policies. (See *Garnett v. ADT LLC* (E.D. Cal. 2015) 139 F.Supp.3d
8 1121, 1134 [finding the defendant knowingly and intentionally violated Labor Code section 226
9 because the “[d]efendant knew that it was not providing total hours worked to plaintiff or other
10 employees paid on commission” even though it believed that employees paid solely on commission or
11 commission and salary “are exempt and therefore we do not record hours on a wage statement.”].)

12 **J. RECORDKEEPING VIOLATIONS**

13 61. Labor Code section 226, subdivision (a), requires employers to keep an accurate record
14 of, among other things, all hours worked by employees. Labor Code section 226.3 provides, in pertinent
15 part, as follows:

16 “Any employer who violates subdivision (a) of Section 226 shall be subject to a
17 civil penalty in the amount of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250) per employee per
18 violation in an initial citation and one thousand dollars (\$1,000) per employee
19 for each violation in a subsequent citation, for which the employer fails to
20 provide the employee a wage deduction statement or fails to keep the records
21 required in subdivision (a) of Section 226. The civil penalties provided for in
22 this section are in addition to any other penalty provided by law.” (Lab. Code, §
23 226.3, emphasis added.)

24 62. Likewise, Labor Code section 1174, subdivision (d), requires every employer, including
25 Defendants, to:

26 “Keep, at a central location in the state or at the plants or establishments at which
27 employees are employed, payroll records showing the hours worked daily by
28 and the wages paid to, and the number of piece-rate units earned by and any

1 applicable piece rate paid to, employees employed at the respective plants or
2 establishments. These records shall be kept in accordance with rules established
3 for this purpose by the commission, but in any case shall be kept on file for not
4 less than three years. An employer shall not prohibit an employee from
5 maintaining a personal record of hours worked, or, if paid on a piece-rate basis,
6 piece-rate units earned.” (Lab. Code, § 1174, subd. (d), emphasis added.)

7 63. As explained in detail above, Defendants failed to provide the Aggrieved Employees
8 with accurate itemized wage statements. Defendants did so, in part, because they failed to accurately
9 track hours worked by the Aggrieved Employees. Defendants have thus failed to keep accurate records
10 of the “total hours worked by the employee[s]” in violation of Labor Code section 226, subdivision (a),
11 and are therefore subject to the penalties provided by Labor Code section 226.3. These penalties are
12 “in addition to any other penalty provided by law.” (Lab. Code, § 226.3.)

13 64. The failure to accurately track hours worked also resulted in a failure of Defendants to
14 keep a record of all “payroll records showing the hours worked daily by” Defendants’ employees,
15 including Plaintiff, in violation of Labor Code section 1174, subdivision (d).

16 **V. EXHAUSTION OF REMEDIES**

17 65. Plaintiff has fully and completely exhausted administrative remedies under PAGA prior
18 to proceeding with the PAGA claims stated in this complaint. Plaintiff filed a PAGA notice online with
19 the Labor Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) and sent a letter by certified mail to Defendants
20 setting forth the facts and theories of the violations alleged against Defendants, as prescribed by PAGA.
21 (Lab. Code, §§ 2698–2699.8.)

22 66. As required by PAGA, Plaintiff submitted the \$75.00 filing fee with the LWDA by
23 regular mail. Pursuant to Labor Code section 2699.3, subdivision (a)(2)(A), no notice was received by
24 Plaintiff from the LWDA evidencing its intention to investigate within sixty-five calendar days of the
25 postmark date of the PAGA notice. Plaintiff is therefore entitled to commence and proceed with a civil
26 action pursuant to Labor Code section 2699.

1 **VI. CAUSES OF ACTION**

2 **First Cause of Action**

3 *Penalties Pursuant to PAGA for Violations of Labor Code Sections 201, 202, 203,*
4 *204, 210, 226, 226.3, 226.7, 510, 512, 1174, 1185, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1, 1198,*
5 *1198.5, 1199, 2802, 2804, and Other Provisions of the California Labor Code*
6 *(Against All Defendants)*

7 67. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference all previous paragraphs.

8 68. Based on the above allegations incorporated by reference, Defendants violated Labor
9 Code sections 201, 202, 203, 204, 210, 226, 226.3, 226.7, 510, 512, 1174, 1185, 1194, 1194.2, 1197,
10 1197.1, 1198, 1198.5, 1199, 2802, 2804, and others that may be applicable; and the Applicable Wage
11 Order (Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 8, § 11140), and others that may be applicable.

12 69. As a result of the acts alleged above, Plaintiff seeks penalties under Labor Code sections
13 2698 through 2699.6 because of Defendants' violation of Labor Code sections 201, 202, 203, 204, 210,
14 226, 226.3, 226.7, 510, 512, 1174, 1185, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 1198.5, 1199, 2802, 2804,
15 and others that may be applicable; and the Applicable Wage Order (Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 8, § 11140),
16 and others that may be applicable.

17 70. Under Labor Code section 2699, subdivision (f)(2), and 2699.5, for each such violation,
18 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are entitled to penalties in an amount to be shown at the time
19 of trial with a default penalty of at least \$100.00 per aggrieved employee per pay period. These penalties
20 must be allocated sixty-five percent to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and
21 thirty-five percent to the affected employees. (Lab. Code, § 2699, subd. (m).)

22 71. For violations of Labor Code section 226, subdivision (a), Plaintiff seeks the default
23 penalty provided by Labor Code section 226.3. Labor Code section 226.3 provides that "[a]ny
24 employer who violates subdivision (a) of Section 226 shall be subject to a civil penalty in the amount
25 of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250) per employee per violation in an initial citation and one thousand
26 dollars (\$1,000) per employee for each violation in a subsequent citation, for which the employer fails
27 to provide the employee a wage deduction statement or fails to keep the records required in subdivision
28 (a) of Section 226." Accordingly, through PAGA and to the extent permitted by law Plaintiff and the

1 Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover penalties for violations of Labor Code section 226.3 and
2 seeks default PAGA penalties for each of Defendants' numerous violations of Labor Code section 226,
3 subdivision (e).

4 72. Labor Code section 210 provides that "in addition to, an entirely independent and apart
5 from, any other penalty provided in this article, every person who fails to pay the wages of each
6 employee as provided in Sections . . . 204 . . . shall be subject to a civil penalty as follows: (1) For any
7 initial violation, one hundred dollars (\$100) for each failure to pay each employee; (2) For each
8 subsequent violation, or any willful or intentional violation, two hundred dollars (\$200) for each failure
9 to pay each employee, plus 25% of the amount unlawfully withheld." As a result of the faulty
10 compensation policies and practices, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are also entitled to recover
11 penalties under Labor Code section 210 through PAGA.

12 73. Labor Code section 1197.1 authorizes a civil penalty, restitution of wages, and
13 liquidated damages, in the amount of: (1) one hundred dollars (\$100) for any initial violation that is
14 intentionally committed for each underpaid employee for each pay period for which the employee is
15 underpaid, and (2) two hundred fifty dollars (\$250) for each subsequent violation for the same specific
16 offense for each underpaid employee for each pay period for which the employee is underpaid
17 regardless of whether the initial violation is intentionally committed. Accordingly, through PAGA and
18 to the extent permitted by law, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover pursuant
19 to Labor Code section 1197.1.

20 74. Plaintiff was compelled to retain the services of counsel to file this action to protect his
21 interests and those of the Aggrieved Employees, and to assess and collect the wages and penalties owed
22 by Defendants. Plaintiff has thereby incurred attorneys' fees and costs, which Plaintiff is also entitled
23 to recover under Labor Code section 2699, subdivision (k)(1).

24 **VII. PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

25 Plaintiff prays for judgment for himself and for all others on whose behalf this suit is brought
26 against Defendants, as follows:

- 27 1. For the failure to maintain accurate employment records, penalties pursuant to Labor
28 Code sections 226.3, 1174.5, and others that may be applicable;

2. For the claim of penalties pursuant to PAGA and other provisions of the California Labor Code, a civil penalty in the amount of \$100 for each violation as specified in Labor Code section 2699, subdivision (f)(2)(A), in the representative action brought on behalf of Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees pursuant the Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, and for civil penalties available under Labor Code section 210;
3. Prejudgment interest on all due and unpaid wages pursuant to Labor Code section 218.6 and Civil Code sections 3287 and 3289;
4. On all causes of action for which attorneys' fees may be available, for attorneys' fees and costs as provided by Labor Code sections 218.5, 226, 2699, Code of Civil Procedure section 1021.5, and others as may be applicable;
5. For an order enjoining Defendants, and each of them, and their agents, servants, and employees, and all persons acting under, in concert with, or for them, from acting in derogation of any rights or duties adumbrated in this complaint; and
6. For such other and further relief, this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: March 27, 2025

MELMED LAW GROUP P.C.



KYLE D. SMITH

Attorneys for Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
Employees