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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

JORGE CONTRERAS, individually, and on behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

vs.

CHM HOTELS; CHM HOTELS, INC.; and DOES 1 through 10, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: 25CU020737C

REPRESENTATIVE ACTION

PLAINTIFF'S NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF PAGA SETTLEMENT

[Filed with (1) the Declaration of Kane Moon, (2) the Declaration of Plaintiff, (3) the Declaration of Jodey Lawrence, (4) [Proposed] PAGA Approval Order, and (5) [Proposed] Judgment]

PAGA APPROVAL HEARING:
Date: January 22, 2027
Time: 10:30 a.m.
Dept.: C-70
Judge: Hon. Carolyn M. Caietti

Action filed: April 21, 2025
FAC filed: July 27, 2025
Trial date: Not set

TO THIS HONORABLE COURT, TO ALL PARTIES, AND TO COUNSEL OF RECORD:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on January 22, 2027, at 10:30 a.m. in Department C-70 of the San Diego County Superior Court, located at 330 W Broadway, San Diego, California 92101, Plaintiff Jorge Contreras ("Plaintiff") will, and hereby does, move the Court for an Order and Judgment, pursuant to California Labor Code sections 2698, *et seq.*, as follows:

1. Approving the PAGA Settlement Agreement ("Settlement") between Plaintiff and Defendant CHM Hotels, Inc.;
2. Approving the requested Attorneys' Fees of $53,530.00 and Attorneys' Costs of 14,785.74 to PAGA Counsel;
3. Approving a $7,500.00 PAGA Representative Payment to Plaintiff;
4. Appointing Phoenix Class Action Administration Solutions as the Administrator and approving a $3,950.00 as the Administration Costs;
5. Approving the scope of the PAGA Members' Release and Released Parties;
6. Approving a non-reversionary Gross Settlement Amount of $160,590.00;
7. Approving $80,824.26 for the PAGA Amount as settlement of the PAGA Members' Release, to be distributed as 65% ($52,535.77 to the LWDA) and 35% ($28,288.49 to PAGA Members);
8. Directing consummation of the Settlement pursuant to its terms and provisions;
9. Entering Judgment; and
10. Pursuant to California Code of Civil Procedure section 664.6, retaining continuing jurisdiction over the Action for purposes of: (1) enforcing the Settlement; (2) addressing settlement administration matters; and (3) addressing such post-Judgment matters as may be appropriate under Court rules and applicable law.

This Motion is based upon this notice, the attached Memorandum of Points and Authorities, the declarations and exhibits filed concurrently herewith, the records and files in this action, and any other records or argument that the Court may properly receive at or before the hearing.

As this Motion is unopposed, the Parties respectfully request relief from the page limit requirement set by California Rules of Court, Rule 3.1113(d).

Respectfully submitted,

DATED: November 5, 2026

MOON LAW GROUP, PC

By:_____
Kane Moon
Allen Feghali
Chancellor D. Nobles

Attorneys for Plaintiff

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Jorge Contreras ("Plaintiff") seeks approval of a non-reversionary $160,590.00 gross settlement of claims for civil penalties alleged pursuant to the California Private Attorneys General Act, Labor Code sections 2698, *et seq.* ("PAGA"). After a full day of mediation with experienced and neutral mediator Eve Wagner, and extended settlement negotiations, Plaintiff reached a resolution with Defendant CHM Hotels, Inc. ("Defendant") (collectively, Plaintiff and Defendant are the "Parties"). The Parties have executed a PAGA Settlement Agreement (the "Settlement"), a true and correct copy of which is attached as **Exhibit 1** to the Declaration of Kane Moon in Support of Motion for Approval of PAGA Settlement ("Moon Decl.") submitted concurrently herewith. Pursuant to Labor Code section 2699(s)(2), Plaintiff now files this motion seeking an order approving the proposed Settlement.

The Settlement resolves all claims for civil penalties under PAGA that arose during the PAGA Period and that were alleged in the above-captioned matter ("Action"). (Settlement, ¶ I.A.) For purposes of settlement, the "PAGA Period" is April 19, 2024 to May 26, 2026. (*Id.* at ¶ I.U.) This Settlement is on behalf of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (the "LWDA"), Plaintiff, and all persons who worked for Defendant as an hourly, non-exempt employee in California at any time during the PAGA Period ("PAGA Members"). (*Id.* at ¶ I.C.) Plaintiff is unaware of any other pending litigation involving similar claims against Defendant that may be impacted by approval of the Settlement, nor has Defendant pointed to any. (Moon Decl., ¶ 25.) Plaintiff came to this conclusion after a reasonable inquiry and review of the LWDA's PAGA Case Search website, this Court's case search website, and other information reasonably available online. (*Id.*)

Settlement of a PAGA claim requires court approval. Pursuant to the operative PAGA statute, the "court shall review and approve any penalties sought as part of a proposed settlement agreement pursuant to this part." (Lab. Code § 2699(s)(2).) In deciding whether to grant approval of a proposed settlement, the primary issue to be decided is whether the settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable. Specifically, the issue is whether the PAGA penalties to which the parties have agreed provide "genuine and meaningful" relief that is "consistent with the underlying purpose of the statute to

benefit the public," and whether the penalties are reasonable in light of the potential verdict value in this case. (*Villalobos v. Calandri Sonrise Farm LP* (C.D. Cal. July 22, 2015) No. CV 12-2615 PSG (JEMx), 2015 WL 12732709, at *5; *see also O'Connor v. Uber Techn., Inc.* (N.D. Cal. 2016) 201 F.Supp.3d 1110, 1135.)

As set forth herein, the proposed Settlement embodies all the features of a settlement that is fair, adequate, and reasonable, as (1) it is the product of an arm's-length negotiation, (2) negotiated by attorneys experienced in wage and hour litigation, (3) following sufficient investigation necessary to evaluate the relative strength and value of the PAGA claims, and (4) reflects a reasoned compromise based directly on the relative strength and value of the PAGA claims, as well as the risks, expense, complexity, and likely duration of further litigation.

The meaningful value achieved by the Settlement at issue may be gleaned from the fact that the LWDA and the estimated **258** PAGA Members will, cumulatively, receive **$80,824.26** as PAGA penalties. (Moon Decl., ¶ 21.) This is a significant recovery, not only because further litigation may have resulted in a net-zero recovery based on the facts of the case and defenses asserted by Defendant, but also because an investigation by experienced PAGA counsel and analysis of discovery revealed minimal identifiable violations, the discretionary nature of awarding PAGA penalties, and the risk of not being able to proceed on a representative basis at all due to the potential manageability issues and current state of the law. For these reasons, as set forth more fully below, Plaintiff respectfully requests the Court enter the proposed order and proposed judgment submitted concurrently herewith.

II. SUMMARY OF THE LITIGATION AND SETTLEMENT

A. Plaintiff's Claims and Procedural Background

Defendant is a hotel management and operations company, that manages and operates hotel properties throughout Southern California. (Moon Decl., ¶ 4.) Plaintiff worked for Defendant from approximately April 2023 to August 2024 as a maintenance worker. (*Id.*) Throughout his employment, Plaintiff was classified as non-exempt and paid on an hourly basis. (*Id.*) Plaintiff contends that he and his former coworkers were subjected to the same or similar unlawful labor practices during their employment by Defendant, including failure to pay all wages. (*Id.*)

Plaintiff's claims for unpaid wages stem from allegations that Defendant failed to compensate

Plaintiff and PAGA Members for off-the-clock work and that Defendant failed to incorporate all remuneration when calculating the correct overtime rate of pay, sick pay rate of pay, and break premium rate of pay. (*Id.* at ¶ 5.) Plaintiff's meal and rest period claims are based on allegations that Plaintiff and PAGA Members regularly experienced missed, untimely, or interrupted breaks, and that Defendant failed to provide any premiums for non-compliant rest breaks or all premiums for non-compliant meals. (*Id.*) Plaintiff also alleges that Defendant failed to reimburse employees for all reasonable and necessary business expenses incurred, including expenses incurred for the purchase of tools, the maintenance of their uniforms, and the use of their personal cellphone for work purposes. (*Id.*) Plaintiff further alleges he and other employees did not receive all wages owed at the time of termination or accurate itemized wage statements due to Defendant's failure to pay all wages and premiums. (*Id.*) Accordingly, Plaintiff alleges Defendant is liable for civil penalties under PAGA. (*Id.*)

Because of the foregoing alleged violations of the Labor Code, Plaintiff filed a Class Action Complaint on April 21, 2025, alleging Defendant systematically: (1) failed to pay minimum wages, (2) failed to pay overtime compensation, (3) failed to provide meal periods, (4) failed to authorize and permit rest breaks, (5) failure to indemnify necessary business expenses, (6) failed to timely pay final wages at termination, (7) failed to provide accurate itemized wage statements, and (8) engaged in unfair business practices. (*Id.* at ¶ 6.)

Pursuant to PAGA, on April 19, 2025, Plaintiff submitted notice of the alleged Labor Code violations to the LWDA, with certified mail service on Defendant, and paid the required filing fee. (*Id.* at ¶ 7, Ex. 3.) The administrative exhaustion period under PAGA expired without the LWDA indicating any intent to investigate the allegations. (*Id.* at ¶ 7.) On July 27, 2025, Plaintiff filed a First Amended Class and Representative Action Complaint to allege a ninth cause of action for civil penalties under PAGA. (*Id.*) Accordingly, Plaintiff is duly authorized to act as a private attorney general with respect to the PAGA claims involved in this action. (*Id.*) In compliance with Labor Code section 2699(s)(1), Plaintiff subsequently submitted to the LWDA a file-stamped copy of the First Amended Complaint containing the Court-assigned case number. (*Id.* at ¶ 8.) To date, the LWDA has not sought to intervene in this action. (*Id.*)

On August 6, 2025, Plaintiff's class action claims against Defendant were dismissed pursuant to the stipulation of the Parties. (*Id.* at ¶ 9.)

Defendant ardently opposes the merits of this case and denies Plaintiff's factual allegations. (*Id.* at ¶ 10.) Defendant argues all employees were properly paid for all hours worked and that it did not require or permit employees to work off-the-clock. (*Id.*) Defendant also argues that it properly incorporated all remunerations into the regular rate of pay for purposes of paying PAGA Members overtime, sick pay, and break premiums. (*Id.*) Defendant maintains all employees were provided with the opportunity to take all their code-compliant meal and rest breaks and that missed breaks, if any, were solely the result of employees' voluntary choice. (*Id.*) As for the unreimbursed business expenses, Defendant maintains it complied with all its reimbursement obligations. (*Id.*) To the extent employees received wage statements that were allegedly inaccurate, Defendant argues penalties are not warranted because employees suffered no actual damage or harm as a result. (*Id; See, e.g.*, *Angeles v. U.S. Airways, Inc.* (N.D. Cal. Feb. 19, 2013) No. C 12–05860 CRB, 2013 WL 622032, at *10 ["A plaintiff must adequately plead an injury arising from an employer's failure to provide full and accurate wage statements, and the omission of the required information alone is not sufficient."].) Additionally, Defendant alleges its good-faith belief that it paid all wages precludes the imposition of waiting time penalties because Plaintiff would be unable to show Defendant's alleged conduct was done willfully or knowingly. (Moon Decl., ¶ 10; *See, e.g.*, *Pedroza v. PetSmart, Inc.* (C.D. Cal. June 14, 2012) No. ED CV 11–298 GHK (DTBx), 2012 WL 9506073, *5.) For these reasons, Defendant claims it did not engage in any unfair business practices and denies liability under PAGA. (Moon Decl., ¶ 10.) Defendant also maintains the claims are not susceptible to proof on a representative basis because of the individualized and varying nature of each employee's experience, making this matter unmanageable. (*Id.*)

B. Discovery and Investigation

The Parties agreed to mediate the representative PAGA claims. (*Id.* at ¶ 11.) The Parties engaged in informal discovery exchange prior to mediation. Defendant provided information and documents, which enabled Plaintiff's Counsel to meaningfully investigate Plaintiff's allegations and assess the value of the PAGA claims. (*Id.*) Specifically, Defendant produced its policies and

procedures regarding paying non-exempt employees for all hours worked, overtime, meal and rest period policies, payroll and operations policies, and demographic data of the PAGA Members. (*Id.*)

Prior to mediation, Plaintiff's Counsel reviewed and analyzed all the information that Defendant produced, including the time/pay records and Defendant's written policies, in conjunction with information provided by Plaintiff. (*Id.* at ¶ 12.) Further, Plaintiff's Counsel investigated the applicable law regarding the claims and defenses asserted in this action. (*Id.*) Accordingly, Plaintiff's Counsel were able to evaluate the probability of success on the merits and Defendant's monetary exposure. (*Id.*) In sum, Plaintiff and his Counsel's familiarity with the facts of the case and the legal issues involved allowed them to act intelligently in negotiating the Settlement. (*Id.*)

C. Settlement Negotiations

On May 26, 2026, the Parties participated in a full day of private mediation facilitated by Eve Wagner, Esq., an experienced PAGA action mediator. (*Id.* at ¶ 13.) The negotiations were at arm's-length and although conducted in a professional manner, were adversarial. (*Id.*) Both sides went into the mediation willing to explore the potential for a settlement of the dispute, but they were also prepared to litigate their position through trial and appeal if a settlement had not been reached. (*Id.*) Negotiations were protracted, with extended discussions and instances in which it appeared the Parties would not reach a resolution. (*Id.*) Following a full discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the claims and defenses, the Parties ultimately reached a resolution, the material terms of which are encompassed within the Settlement at issue. (*Id.*)

In reaching a resolution, the Parties recognized that the issues presented in this action are likely only to be resolved with extensive and costly pretrial and trial proceedings, and that further litigation will lead to inconvenience, distraction, disruption, delay, and expense disproportionate to the potential benefits of litigation. (*Id.* at ¶ 14.) Plaintiff and his Counsel also considered the risk and uncertainty of the outcome inherent in any litigation when determining whether this Settlement was the correct option. (*Id.*) In sum, Plaintiff and his Counsel believe the proposed Settlement is in the best interests of PAGA Members and the LWDA. (*Id.*)

In compliance with Labor Code section 2699(s)(2), notice of settlement and a copy of the proposed Settlement has been submitted to the LWDA along with a copy of Plaintiff's motion and

the hearing date. (*Id*. at ¶ 15, Ex. 4.) To date, the LWDA has not indicated any objection to the Settlement. (*Id.* at ¶ 15.)

D. Key Terms of the Proposed Settlement

The Settlement's key financial and other terms include:

1. Gross Settlement Amount, Funding, Disbursement, and Uncashed Checks. The Gross Settlement Amount ("GSA") is a non-reversionary $160,590.00, subject to potential increase under an Escalator Clause. (Settlement, ¶¶, I.L, III.A.) Defendant shall deposit the Gross Settlement Amount into the Qualified Settlement Fund Account established by the Settlement Administrator by the Settlement Payment Deadline, i.e. within 30 days of the Effective Date.[1] (*Id.* at ¶ III.E.2.c.) Disbursement will occur within 15 days after the Settlement Payment Deadline. (*Id.* at ¶ III.E.2.e.) Any checks uncashed within the 120-calendar day cashing deadline (the "Void Date") will be cancelled and shall not be reissued. (*Id.* at ¶¶ III.E.6., III.E.6.a.) Thereafter, within 30 days following the Void Date, the Settlement Administrator shall transmit all funds associated with all uncashed checks to the State Controller Unclaimed Property Fund in the name of the PAGA Member who failed to cash their check. (*Id.* at ¶ III.E.6.a.) No portion of the Gross Settlement Amount will revert to Defendant for any reason. (*Id.*)

2. Escalator Provision. Defendant represents that there are no more than 5,353 Pay Periods during the PAGA Period. (*Id.* at ¶ III.A.1.) In the event that the final number of Pay Periods worked during the PAGA Period increases by more than 10%, or more than an additional 535 Pay Periods, then Defendant shall have the option of either: (a) increasing the Gross Settlement Amount pro rata by the percentage that the actual number of Pay Periods exceeds 5,888 multiplied by the Gross Settlement Amount, i.e. if the final number of Pay Periods worked during the PAGA Period increased

[1] "Effective Date" means date upon which all of the following have occurred: (i) the Court has approved the Settlement; (ii) the Court has issued the Final Order and entered Judgment in accordance with the terms described herein; (iii) if there is an appeal of the Court's Judgment, the date the Judgment is affirmed on appeal, the date of dismissal of such appeal, or the expiration of the time to file a petition for writ of certiorari to the California Supreme Court, and (iv) if there is an intervenor and no appeal is filed, the expiration date of the time for filing or noticing any appeal of the Judgment. (Settlement, ¶ I.I.) Defendant will have no obligation to pay the GSA until after the Court grants Approval of the Settlement. (*Id.*)

to 11% above the represented Pay Periods, or to 5,941 Pay Periods, the Gross Settlement Amount would increase by 1% to $162,195.90, or b) ending the PAGA Period on the date that the number of pay periods worked by the PAGA Members equals 5,353, in which case no adjustment to the Gross Settlement Amount shall be made. (*Id.*) Defendant shall inform Plaintiff of its election within 7 days of being provided with the Administrator's final pay periods calculation for the PAGA Members. (*Id.*)

3. PAGA Representative Payment. The Settlement includes a PAGA Representative Payment in an amount not to exceed $7,500, payable from the GSA. (*Id.* at ¶ I.W, III.C.2.) This payment is in consideration for Plaintiff's efforts in litigating the Action, the risks of incurring financial obligations to Defendant in the event Plaintiff was not successful in the Action, and Plaintiff's agreement to provide a general release and waiver of Civil Code section 1542 rights. (*Id.* at ¶ I.W.) If the Court approves less than the amount requested, any amount not approved will become part of the PAGA Amount (*Id.*)

4. Attorneys' Fees and Costs. The Settlement includes attorneys' fees in an amount not to exceed 1/3 of the GSA (currently $53,530), plus reimbursement for out-of-pocket litigation costs not to exceed $18,500.00, payable to PAGA Counsel from the GSA. (*Id.* at ¶¶ I.E, I.F, III.C.1.) If the Court approves less than the amounts requested, any amount not approved will become part of the PAGA Amount. (*Id.* at ¶¶ I.E, I.F.) My firm has incurred $14,785.74 in litigation costs. (*Id.*, Ex. 5.)

5. Administration Costs. The Settlement provides an Administration Costs to the Settlement Administrator, payable from the GSA, in an amount not to exceed $3,950.00, for its fees and expenses in administering this Settlement. (Settlement, ¶¶ I.B, III.C.3.) The Parties jointly selected Phoenix Class Action Administration Solutions ("Phoenix") as the neutral entity to administer this Settlement with a bid for $3,950.00. (*Id.* at ¶ I.BB; Moon Decl., ¶ 20, Ex. 6.)

6. PAGA Amount. The PAGA Amount is the GSA less the Attorneys Fee, Attorneys' Costs, Administration Costs, and PAGA Representative Payment. (Settlement, ¶ 1.R.) Accordingly, the PAGA Amount is estimated to be **$80,824.26**,[2] which will be distributed 65% (i.e., 65% *

[2] The estimated PAGA Amount was calculated by deducting the following amounts from the GSA ($160,590.00): $7,500.00 for the PAGA Representative Payment, $14,785.74 for Attorneys' Costs ,

$80,824.26 = **$52,535.77**) to the LWDA and 35% (i.e., 35% * $80,824.26 = **$28,288.49**) to PAGA Members pursuant to PAGA law governing Plaintiff's claims. (Moon Decl., ¶ 21.)

7. Individual Settlement Shares. Each PAGA Member will receive a proportionate share of the Net Settlement Amount that is equal to: (i) the number of pay periods he or she worked for Defendant in California during the PAGA Period, as calculated by the Settlement Administrator based on the Database provided by Defendant, divided by (ii) the total number of pay periods worked by all PAGA Members during the PAGA Period, as calculated by the Settlement Administrator based on the same Database, which fraction is then (iii) multiplied by the NSA. (Settlement, ¶ III.B.1.) This results in an average Individual Settlement Share of roughly **$109.65** for each of the estimated 258 PAGA Members ($28,288.49 / 258), and a PAGA Pay Period value of **$5.28** for each of the 5,353 estimated PAGA Pay Periods ($28,288.49 / 5,353). (Moon Decl., ¶ 22.)

8. PAGA Members' Release. Upon the Effective Date, the PAGA Members shall release and forever discharge the Released Parties from all claims for civil penalties under PAGA arising from the same facts and/or claims alleged in the Action and/or PAGA Notice and arising during the PAGA Period. (Settlement ¶ III.F.3.) The PAGA Members' Release shall not extend to any claims outside of the PAGA Period and or any claims for failure to pay wages. (*Id.*)

9. Released Parties. Defendant and its former, current, and future parent companies, subsidiaries, affiliates, shareholders, members, agents (including, without limitation, any investment bankers, accountants, insurers, reinsurers, attorneys and any past, present or future officers, directors and employees) predecessors, successors, and assigns. (*Id.* at ¶ I.AA.)

10. No Related Cases To the best of my knowledge, there is no other pending litigation involving similar claims against Defendant that may be impacted by approval of the Settlement at issue, nor has Defendant pointed to any. (Moon Decl., ¶ 25.) I have come to this conclusion after a reasonable inquiry and review of the LWDA's PAGA Case Search website, this Court's case search website, and other information reasonably available online. (*Id.*)

$53,530.00 for Attorneys' Fees, and $3,950.00 for the Administration Costs. (*See* Settlement, ¶ I.R.)

III. DISCUSSION

A. Availability of Civil Penalties

The LWDA and its constituent departments and divisions are authorized to assess and collect civil penalties for specified violations of the Labor Code committed by an employer. With a stated goal of improving enforcement of existing Labor Code obligations, the California Legislature adopted the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, permitting, as an alternative, an aggrieved employee to initiate a private civil action on behalf of him- or herself and other current or former employees." (Lab. Code § 2699(a).) Before an employee may file an action seeking to recover civil penalties for violations of any of the Labor Code provisions enumerated in Labor Code section 2699.5, he or she must comply with the Act's administrative procedures as set forth in Labor Code section 2699.3, subdivision (a), which include providing notice to the LWDA and the employer of the alleged Labor Code violations, and then waiting a prescribed period of time to permit the LWDA to investigate and to decide whether to cite the employer for the alleged violations. (*Id.* at §§ 2699.3, 2699.5; *Caliber Bodyworks, Inc. v. Superior Court* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 365, 370; *see also Dunlap v. Superior Court* (2006) 142 Cal.App.4th 330.)

Here, in compliance with Labor Code section 2699.3, Plaintiff submitted notice of the Labor Code violations at issue to the LWDA, and he exhausted administrative remedies without the LWDA noticing any intent to investigate the claims. (Moon Decl., ¶ 7, Ex. 3.) Accordingly, Plaintiff is duly authorized to act as a private attorney general pursuant to PAGA. (*Id.* at ¶ 7.)

B. The Settlement Merits Approval

Settlement of PAGA claims must be approved by a Court. (Lab. Code § 2699(s)(2).) Here, the circumstances weigh heavily in favor of approval, as explained below.

1. The Relief Is Genuine, Meaningful, and Consistent with the Dual Statutory Purposes of Deterrence and Punishment under PAGA

The $160,590.00 GSA amounts to "genuine and meaningful" relief "consistent with the underlying purpose of the statute to benefit the public." (Moon Decl., ¶ 35; *see O'Connor*, 201 F.Supp.3d at 1133–35 [denying settlement approval where allocation for PAGA claims was 0.1% of the estimated full worth].) This is an excellent result, particularly because, under the Settlement,

PAGA Members and the LWDA will receive timely, guaranteed relief and will avoid the risk of not being able to recover anything at all. (*Moon Decl.,* ¶ 35.)

The Settlement is a fair and reasonable resolution that satisfies PAGA's dual statutory purposes of deterrence and punishment, on the one hand, and providing PAGA Members with genuine and meaningful relief, on the other. (Lab. Code §§ 2698, *et seq.*) As a result of this litigation, Defendant has had to hire legal counsel, engage in employee-wide discovery, and participate in mediation. (Moon Decl., ¶ 35.) Assuming approval is granted, Defendant will also have to pay civil penalties pursuant to PAGA. (*Id.*) Not including its own attorneys' fees and costs, Defendant will pay $160,590.00 to resolve this matter—of which $80,824.26 is allocated toward PAGA penalties and will be distributed as 65% to the LWDA and 35% to PAGA Members, in compliance with PAGA law governing the claims in this Action. (*See* Settlement, ¶¶ I.R, III.B.1.) This amount represents roughly **38%** of the realistic exposure for the claims ($80,824.26 / $214,120.00), as discussed below. (Moon Decl., ¶ 36.)

2. The Settlement Amount Provides a Realistic Value for the Claims that is within the "Ballpark" of Reasonableness

There can be no doubt that this Settlement is the result of vigorous, adversarial, non-collusive, and arm's-length negotiations between the Parties. (Moon Decl., ¶ 13.) Plaintiff's Counsel performed an extensive investigation into the facts, claims, and defenses at issue and Defendant's potential liability, including a review of governing law and analysis of informal discovery, including Defendant's written policies and time/pay data for a majority of PAGA Members. (*Id.* at ¶¶ 11–12.) Plaintiff's Counsel used the foregoing discovery and investigation to prepare for mediation and assessed the probability of success on the merits, discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the claims and defenses in depth at mediation and months of continued negotiations, and ultimately negotiated the resulting Settlement. (*Id.* at ¶¶ 11–14.)

Based on Plaintiff's Counsel's analysis of the time, payroll, and additional records and information provided by Defendant, on Plaintiff's Counsel's analysis of the sample time and payroll records provided by Defendant, and on information from Plaintiff, Plaintiff's Counsel evaluated Defendant's maximum and risk-adjusted potential exposure. (*Id.* at ¶ 26.) Although Plaintiff alleges

that Plaintiff and the PAGA Members were subject to several Labor Code violations, the records themselves did not provide overwhelming evidence to support the case on a representative basis. (*Id.*)

Because Defendant did not require employees to record rest periods, there are no records to establish the rest period claim on the merits. (*Id.* at ¶ 27.) Additionally, there are no records to establish the off-the-clock work claim and reimbursement claim on the merits. (*Id.*) Defendant argued that proof of these claims would need to be supported by declarations from PAGA Members regarding missed rest periods, unreimbursed business expenses, and off-the-clock work as the records themselves cannot demonstrate what breaks were missed, when, and why, what business expenses were incurred without reimbursement, and they cannot demonstrate the time, if any, PAGA Members spent working off the clock. (*Id.*)

The maximum exposure figures that were calculated for mediation were based on assumed high violation rates that would not likely be demonstrated at trial, as they assume either the participation of all PAGA Members (which would be difficult given the size of this group), or alternatively, the use of surveys or statistical data as a surrogate (which would still require the participation of a majority of PAGA Members to establish a sound representation of all non-exempt employees). (*Id.* at ¶ 28.) The reality is that many, if not all, employees would be unwilling to participate due to fear of retaliation. (*Id.*) However, even assuming those employees would be willing to participate, obtaining such declarations would potentially reveal that each PAGA Member had a different experience. (*Id.*) The individualized nature of their employment experience and the numerosity of employees affected present significant risk with manageability and proof on the merits. (*Id.*)

With regard to Plaintiff's meal break claim, Plaintiff alleges that he and other employees missed their meal breaks 2-4 times per week. (*Id.* at ¶ 29.) However, Plaintiff's Counsel reviewed Defendant's meal break policy and determined that the policy was facially valid. (*Id.*) Defendant also argued that to the extent there was any violation, which Defendant disputes, it was a result of the PAGA Member voluntarily choosing to forego a meal period. (*Id.*) With regard to the regular rate claim, Defendant's pay records showed additional remunerations with the following pay codes: "BON – BONUS," "FBN – FIXCOMM," "VBN – VARICOMM," "HWK – HOL WORK," and

"OTH – OTHER EARNING." (*Id.*) However, Defendant argued such additional remunerations were discretionary bonuses and that Defendant properly compensated its employees. (*Id.*)

Further, a claim-by-claim penalty calculation is overly optimistic as it presumes Plaintiff would be able to stack the penalties, although penalty stacking is not expressly permitted by PAGA. (*Id.* at ¶ 30.) Rather, without either (i) a prior finding by the LWDA or a court within the past five years that the employer violated PAGA or (ii) evidence that the employer's conduct was malicious, fraudulent, or oppressive, PAGA only provides for a maximum $100 penalty for each pay period. (*Id.*; Lab. Code § 2699(f)(2)(A)–(B).) Moreover, Plaintiff's Counsel believe it would be unrealistic to expect the Court to award the full (penalty-stacked) exposure given the discretionary nature of awarding penalties and given Defendant's defenses, including that any failure to pay premiums, regular rate wages, or for off-the-clock work was not knowingly or willfully done, and additionally, to the extent employees received wage statements that were allegedly inaccurate, employees suffered no actual resulting damage or harm. (Moon Decl., ¶ 30.) Moreover, awarding the full penalties amount would likely raise Due Process concerns. (*Id.*) For the foregoing reasons, the *realistic* exposure is thus far below the *optimistic* claim by claim estimate. (*Id.* at ¶ 31.)

Based on the foregoing, Plaintiff's Counsel believe it is more reasonable to assess penalties on a $100.00 civil penalty per pay period basis pursuant to Labor Code § 2699(f)(2)(A) for each of the estimated 5,353 pay periods at issue, as opposed to a claim-by-claim approach. (*Id.* at ¶ 32.) Accordingly, Plaintiff's Counsel estimate Defendant's maximum PAGA exposure to be **$535,300.00** ($100.00 x 5,353). (*Id.*) However, based on the discovery, Defendant's arguments at mediations and continued settlement discussions, an understanding that the claims are heavily dependent on the unlikely participation by PAGA Members and their varying employment experience, and other important considerations discussed above, it is reasonable to assume a violation occurred in at most 40% of all pay periods, which results in a realistic (*risk-adjusted*) exposure of **$214,120.00** ($535,300.00 x 40%). (*Id.*) As a result, the GSA of $160,590.00 represents approximately **75%** of the realistic exposure ($160,590.00 / $214,120.00). (*Id.*)

The proposed Settlement therefore represents a substantial recovery when compared to the reasonably forecasted recovery. (*Id.* at ¶ 33.) When considering the risks of litigation, the

uncertainties involved in continued litigation, the burdens of proof necessary to establish liability, and the probability of appeal, it is clear the GSA of $160,590.00 is within the "ballpark" of reasonableness, and that settlement approval is appropriate. (*Id.*; *Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc*. (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 116, 133; *see Munoz v. BCI Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of L.A.* (2010) 186 Cal.App.4th 399, 408–09 [holding that *Kullar* does not require "an explicit statement of the maximum amount the plaintiff class could recover if it prevailed on all its claims," but instead, only an "understanding of the amount that is in controversy and the realistic range of outcomes of the litigation"].)

3. The Settlement Is a Fair and Reasonable Result Following a Thorough Investigation and Accounting of Various Litigation Risks

Plaintiff's Counsel have conducted a thorough investigation into the facts of the allegations. (Moon Decl., ¶ 36.) Based on discovery and on their own independent investigation and evaluation, Plaintiff's Counsel are of the opinion that the proposed Settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate. (*Id.*) Furthermore, considering all known facts and circumstances, the risk of significant delay, trial risk, appellate risk, the defenses that could be asserted by Defendant on the merits, Plaintiff's Counsel respectfully submit that the Settlement is in the best interests of the PAGA Members and the State of California. (*Id.*)

Although Plaintiff's Counsel believe there is merit to Plaintiff's allegations, they also acknowledge a legitimate controversy exists as to each allegation. (*Id.* at ¶ 37.) Plaintiff's Counsel also recognize that proving the amounts of penalties owed to each PAGA Member would be an expensive, time-consuming, and uncertain proposition. (*Id.*) Moreover, Plaintiff's Counsel are also of the opinion that because the issues here are fairly contested, there is a possibility of the Court not awarding PAGA penalties even if Plaintiff prevailed on the merits due to the largely discretionary nature of awarding PAGA penalties. (*Id.* at ¶ 38.) Indeed, a Court may reduce PAGA penalties "if, based on the facts and circumstances of the particular case, to do otherwise would result in an award that is unjust, arbitrary and oppressive, or confiscatory." (Lab. Code § 2699(e)(2).) In other words, were this matter to go to trial, any award granted would be at the discretion of the Court and subject to a substantial reduction. (Moon Decl., ¶ 38.) While Plaintiff's Counsel believe there would be no

persuasive grounds to reduce penalties, they recognize that the Court could determine otherwise and significantly reduce any award of penalties. (*Id.* at ¶ 39.) This wide range of potential recovery and additional delays and risks of trial provide justification to settle for a reasonable amount of recovery at this point in the litigation. (*Id.*) In all, based on the investigation and analysis of the claims in preparation for mediation, proceeding with the rigors of litigation is not commensurate with what Defendant may be adjudged liable to ultimately, as discussed above. (*Id.*)

Plaintiff's Counsel took into account the risk of not being able to proceed on a representative basis at all due to the potential manageability issues, the risk of not prevailing at trial, and the risk that even if Plaintiff prevailed at trial, the penalties would be limited due to the largely discretionary nature of awarding PAGA penalties. (*Id.* at ¶ 40.) The provisions of the Labor Code triggering PAGA penalties in this case include Labor Code sections 210, 226.3, 558, 1174.5, 1197.1, 2802, and 2699(f)(2). (*Id.*) However, PAGA penalties are not mandatory, but rather, permissive. (Lab. Code § 2699(e)(2).) Accordingly, it is entirely possible that even if Plaintiff would be successful at trial, assuming he is first able to win on the merits regarding his individual claims at arbitration and then defeat the manageability issues presented at litigation by the number of PAGA Members in this action, Plaintiff may still be awarded substantially less than what was obtained through the Settlement. (Moon Decl., ¶ 40.)

The Settlement avoids the significant risks, burdens, and the accompanying expense of further litigation. (*Id.* at ¶ 41.) Though the Parties have engaged in a significant amount of investigation through informal discovery, they have not conducted formal discovery procedures. (*Id.*) Moreover, Plaintiff would have to proceed with arbitration of his individual claims and win on the merits before proceeding with litigation of the representative PAGA claims. (*Id.*) Preparation for trial and the prospect of appeals in the wake of any summary judgment ruling would remain for the Parties. (*Id.*) As a result, the Parties would incur considerably more attorneys' fees and costs through trial, a lengthy and uncertain process that could result in recovering less than was settled for. (*Id.*)

C. <u>The Representative Payment to Plaintiff is Reasonable and Should Be Approved</u>

Service awards are particularly important to plaintiffs in wage and hour cases because they promote the important public policies underlying the wage and hour laws. This strong policy is

codified in California Labor Code section 90.5, which provides, "[i]t is the policy of this state to vigorously enforce minimum labor standards in order to ensure employees are not required or permitted to work under substandard unlawful conditions . . ." (Lab. Code § 90.5.) Nonetheless, the California Supreme Court has noted that "retaliation against employees for asserting statutory rights under the Labor Code is widespread," despite anti-retaliation statutes designed to protect employees. (*Gentry v. Super. Ct.* (2007) 42 Cal.4th 443, 460–61.*)* In this context, PAGA representatives should be rewarded for assuming the risk of retaliation for the sake of aggrieved employees.

Here, in line with the Settlement and subject to the Court's approval, Plaintiff requests a Representative Payment of $7,500.00. (Settlement, ¶ III.C.2; Declaration of Plaintiff Jorge Contreras in Support of Motion for Approval of PAGA Settlement ["Plaintiff Decl."], ¶ 14.) Plaintiff and his Counsel respectfully submit that the requested payment is reasonable in recognition of Plaintiff's role as the named Plaintiff and PAGA Representative, for the risks to future employment inherent in undertaking this role and for his service and participation in litigation that resulted in a fair settlement under PAGA. (Moon Decl., ¶¶ 42–45; Plaintiff Decl., ¶¶ 7–18.)

D. <u>The Requested Attorneys' Fees/Costs Are Reasonable and Should Be Approved</u>

In line with the Settlement, Plaintiff's Counsel request an award of attorneys' fees equal to one-third of the GSA (i.e., $53,530.00), plus reimbursement for actual litigation costs in the amount of $14,785.74. (Moon Decl., ¶ 62; *see* Settlement, ¶ III.C.1.)

1. Plaintiff's Counsel Request an Award of Fees Based on the Common Fund Method

California courts have long awarded attorneys' fees as a percentage of the benefit created by counsel in pursuing claims on behalf of a class. (*See, e.g.*, *Serrano v. Priest* (1977) 20 Cal.3d 25.) The California Supreme Court has held, "when a number of persons are entitled in common to a specific fund, and an action brought by a plaintiff or plaintiffs for the benefit of all results in the creation or preservation of that fund, such plaintiff or plaintiffs may be awarded attorney's fees out of the fund." (*Id.* at p. 34.)

Here, Plaintiff's Counsel seek an award of attorneys' fees on the "percentage of recovery/common fund" theory. (Moon Decl., ¶ 63.) The purpose of this approach is to "spread litigation costs proportionately among all the beneficiaries so that the active beneficiary does not bear

the entire burden alone." (*Vincent v. Hughes Air W., Inc.* (9th Cir. 1977) 557 F.2d 759, 769.) In *Quinn v. State of Cal.* (1975) 15 Cal.3d 162, the California Supreme Court stated, "one who expends attorneys' fees in winning a suit which creates a fund from which others derive benefits, may require those passive beneficiaries to bear a fair share of the litigation costs." (*Id.* at p. 167.) Similarly, in *City and County of San Francisco v. Sweet* (1995) 12 Cal.4th 105, the California Supreme Court recognized that the common fund doctrine has been applied "consistently in California when an action brought by one party creates a fund in which other persons[ ] are entitled to share." (*Id.* at pp. 110–11 [pincite omitted].) The reasons for applying this doctrine include:

> fairness to the successful litigant, who might otherwise receive no benefit because his recovery might be consumed by the expenses; correlative prevention of an unfair advantage to the others who are entitled to share in the fund and who should bear their share of the burden of its recovery; encouragement of the attorney for the successful litigant, who will be more willing to undertake and diligently prosecute proper litigation for the protection or recovery of the fund if he is assured that he will be properly and directly compensated should his efforts be successful.

(*Id.* at p. 111.)

Several courts have expressed frustration with the alternative "lodestar" approach for deciding fee awards, which usually involves wading through voluminous and often indecipherable time records. Commenting on the lodestar approach, Chief Judge Marilyn Hall Patel wrote in *In re Activision Securities Litigation* (N.D. Cal. 1989) 723 F.Supp.1373:

> **This court is compelled to ask, "Is this process necessary?" Under a cost-benefit analysis, the answer would be a resounding, "No!"** Not only do the *Lindy* and *Kerr–Johnson* analyses consume an undue amount of court time with little resulting advantage to anyone, but, in fact, it may be to the detriment of the class members.

(*Id.* at p. 1375 [emphasis added].) The percentage approach is preferable to the lodestar because: (1) it aligns the interests of class counsel and absent class members; (2) it encourages efficient resolution of the litigation by providing an incentive for early, yet reasonable, settlement; and (3) it reduces the demands on judicial resources. (*Id*. at pp. 1378–79.) California Courts now routinely use the percentage of the common fund approach to determine the award of attorney's fees. (*See*, *e.g.*, *In re Pac. Enter. Sec. Litig.* (9th Cir. 1995) 47 F.3d 373, 378–79 [approving attorneys' fee award of 33%].)

2. The Matter Involves a Fee and Cost Shifting Provision under PAGA

Labor Code section 2699 provides for the recovery reasonable attorney's fees as well as costs

of suit. (Lab. Code § 2699(k)(1).) Specifically, it states: "Any employee who prevails in any [PAGA] action shall be entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs . . ." (*Id.*) Under this provision, Plaintiff would be permitted to recover his actual attorneys' fees, even if those fees were larger than the total recovery for the PAGA Members at the conclusion of this case. (*Id.*) This fee/cost-shifting provision reflects the understanding that Plaintiff's Counsel must accept significant risk of substantial expenses and consumption of time, energy, and other resources in litigating a PAGA claim, and thus, that Plaintiff's Counsel is not only permitted, but entitled, to recover reasonable attorneys' fees and costs if successful in litigating a PAGA claim.

The Settlement at issue is beneficial in that it limits the risk of continued expenses and consumption of time, energy, and resources facing Defendant while at the same time rewarding Plaintiff's Counsel for their decision to assume risk by taking on this matter. In fact, prosecution of this action involved significant financial risk for Plaintiff's Counsel who undertook this matter on a contingent basis, with no guarantee of recovery. (Moon Decl., ¶¶ 65–70.) Once Plaintiff's Counsel undertook this litigation on behalf of the PAGA Members, they committed to pursue it to its conclusion, and were accordingly precluded from focusing on, or taking on, other cases which could have resulted in a larger, and less risky, monetary gain. (*Id.* at ¶ 69.)

3. Counsel's Experience, Reputation, and Ability Support the Requested Fee Award

As demonstrated by their prior experience in pursuing class and representative actions on behalf of employees, Plaintiff's Counsel possess considerable expertise in litigating class action and representative matters. (*Id*. at ¶¶ 46–59.) Plaintiff's Counsel have been involved as lead counsel or co-counsel in a multitude of class and representative actions resulting in beneficial results to class members and PAGA Members in California. (*Id.*) Because it is reasonable to compensate Plaintiff's Counsel commensurate with their skill, reputation, and experience, the requested fee award is supported here.

Plaintiff's Counsel's experience in wage-and-hour class and representative actions was integral in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the case against Defendant and the reasonableness of this Settlement. (*Id.* at ¶ 60.) Practice in the narrow field of wage-and-hour litigation requires skill and knowledge concerning the rapidly evolving substantive law (state and

federal), as well as the procedural law of representative action litigation. (*Id.* at ¶ 58.) Based on these and other factors, Plaintiff's Counsel have frequently received fee awards of this percentage from the gross recovery for PAGA Members. (*See id.* at ¶¶ 50, 55, 56.) Thus, the requested fee award is reasonable and fair.

4. While the Lodestar Method Is Not Necessary in Common Fund Cases, the Court May Perform a Cross-Check to Award Fees

"Despite its primacy, the lodestar method is not necessarily utilized in common fund cases." (*Lealao v. Beneficial Cal., Inc.* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 19, 27.) Courts have criticized the lodestar method as a drain on the judicial system and a disincentive on attorneys to take on high-risk, challenging cases. (*Id.* at p. 29.) Indeed, the lodestar approach: "(1) 'increases the workload of an already overtaxed judicial system,' (2) is 'insufficiently objective and produce[s] results that are far from homogenous,' (3) 'creates a sense of mathematical precision that is unwarranted in terms of the realities of the practice of law,' (4) 'is subject to manipulation by judges who prefer to calibrate fees in terms of percentages of the settlement fund or the amounts recovered by the plaintiffs or of an overall dollar amount,' (5) 'encourages lawyers to expend excessive hours, and . . . engage in duplicative and unjustified work,' (6) 'creates a disincentive for the early settlement of cases,' (7) deprives trial courts of 'flexibility to reward or deter lawyers so that desirable objectives, such as early settlement, will be fostered,' (8) 'works to the particular disadvantage of the public interest bar,' and (9) results in 'confusion and lack of predictability.'" (*Id.* [quoting Third Circuit Task Force, *Court Awarded Attorney Fees* (1985) 108 F.R.D. 237, 246–49].)

Although California Courts support the common fund doctrine, the lodestar method can be used to cross-check fee awards. "It may be appropriate in some cases, assuming the class benefit can be monetized with a reasonable degree of certainty, to 'cross-check' or adjust the lodestar in comparison to a percentage of the common fund to ensure that the fee awarded is reasonable and within the range of fees freely negotiated in the legal marketplace in comparable litigation." (*In re Consumer Privacy Cases* (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 545, 557 [quoting *Lealao*, *supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at pp. 49–50].) Applying the lodestar method is a two-step process. The first step is to multiply the number of hours reasonably expended by a reasonable hourly rate, and the second step is to apply a

multiplier to the lodestar to account for various factors. (*Id.* at p. 556.) "The purpose of such adjustment is to fix a fee at the fair market value for the particular action. In effect, the court determines, retrospectively, whether the litigation involved a contingent risk or required extraordinary legal skill justifying augmentation of the unadorned lodestar in order to approximate the fair market rate for such services." (*Id*.) "Under certain circumstances, a lodestar calculation may be enhanced on the basis of a percentage-of-the-benefit analysis." (*Id*. at pp. 556–57.)

Further, "California case law permits fee awards in the absence of detailed time sheets." (*Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 255.) The Court "should defer to the winning lawyer's professional judgment as to how much time he was required to spend on the case." (*Moreno v. City of Sacramento* (9th Cir. 2008) 534 F.3d 1106, 1112.) Generally, hours are reasonable if they were "reasonably expended in pursuit of the ultimate result achieved in the same manner that an attorney traditionally is compensated by a fee-paying client." (*Hensley v. Eckerhart* (1983) 461 U.S. 424, 431.)

Here, Plaintiff's Counsel current lodestar is *no less than* **$58,185.00**, which is based on *no less than* **70.1 hours** of attorney time spent to-date at their customary hourly rates. (Moon Decl., ¶ 66.) Thus, in comparison to the fee request of $53,530.00, the lodestar represents a multiplier of **0.92**. (*Id.* at ¶¶ 66, 67(c).) In other words, the lodestar fees are *greater* than the fee request. (*Id.* at ¶ 67(c).) Further, the foregoing lodestar does not reflect additional works that will be devoted to this litigation, including to obtain and monitor approval of the Settlement and requested awards, oversee the settlement administration process and distribution of funds, respond to inquiries, and communicate with Plaintiff regarding the case. (*Id.* at ¶ 65.) The amount of fees requested under the Settlement is warranted based on the contingent risk that Plaintiff's Counsel incurred, the difficulty of the questions involved, the substantial benefit conferred on the PAGA Members and State of California as a result of the Settlement, and the skill displayed by Plaintiff's Counsel. (*Id.* at ¶ 67.) Plaintiff's Counsel also bear the risk of taking whatever actions are necessary if Defendant fails to pay. (*Id.* at ¶ 65.) Thus, the request for attorneys' fees is more than reasonable under a lodestar check.

5. Plaintiff's Counsel's Costs Were Actually and Reasonably Incurred

Winning counsel are entitled to recover the out-of-pocket costs and expenses they reasonably incurred in investigating, prosecuting, and settling a case. (*Staton v. Boeing Co.* (9th Cir. 2003) 327 F.3d 938, 974; Lab. Code § 2699(k)(1).) Here, Plaintiff's Counsel seek reimbursement in the total amount of $14,785.74 for expenses that were actually and reasonably incurred in this litigation. (Moon Decl., ¶ 72, Ex. 5.) Moreover, this amount is below the maximum allocation under the Settlement and thus, the remainder ($3,714.26) will be allocated to the PAGA Amount. (*Id.* at ¶ 73; Settlement, ¶ III.C.1.) Thus, costs should be reimbursed in full.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff respectfully requests the Court grant approval of the Settlement and enter the proposed approval order and proposed judgment submitted herewith.

Respectfully submitted,

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By: _____

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