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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES – SPRING STREET COURTHOUSE

HAROLD FOX, individually, and on behalf of all others similarly situated, and on behalf of the State of California and other aggrieved persons,

Plaintiff,

vs.

6516 F&B MANAGER LLC, a California Limited Liability Corporation; and DOES 1 through 10, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: 25STCV18764

[Assigned for all purposes to the Hon. William F. Highberger, Dept. 10]

PLAINTIFF'S NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF PAGA SETTLEMENT; MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

Settlement Approval Hearing:
Date: March 29, 2027
Time: 11:00 a.m.
Dept: 10

Action Filed: June 26, 2025
Trial Date: None Set

TO ALL PARTIES AND THEIR ATTORNEYS OF RECORD:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on March 29, 2027, at 11:00 a.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard in Department 10 of the above-entitled Court, located at 312 North Spring Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012, Plaintiff Harold Fox ("Plaintiff") will and hereby does move for an order approving the settlement of the PAGA claim alleged against Defendant 6516 F&B Manager LLC ("Defendant") in accordance with Labor Code §2699(l). The proposed settlement is set forth in the accompanying PAGA Settlement Agreement ("Settlement" or "Settlement Agreement").

This Motion will be based on this notice, the accompanying points and authorities, the Declaration of Thiago M. Coelho, the Declaration of Harold Fox, and the complete files and records in this action. The Labor Workforce Development Agency has been served with this motion and the Settlement Agreement as set forth in the accompanying proof of service.

Dated: November 18, 2026

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM, PLC

By: _____

Thiago M. Coelho
Rachel J. Vinson
Giancarlo A. Recinos
Attorney for Plaintiff

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Harold Fox ("Plaintiff") and Defendant 6516 F&B Manager LLC ("Defendant") (Plaintiff and Defendant collectively, the "Parties") reached a settlement of the California Private Attorneys General Act, Cal. Labor Code § 2699, et seq. ("PAGA") claims asserted in this action. In accordance with Labor Code § 2699(l), Plaintiff now asks this Court to review and approve the settlement of Plaintiff's PAGA claims. This is PAGA Settlement for civil penalties and is not a class settlement and does not release the individual wage claims, if any, of the affected employees other than those of Plaintiff. Cal. Labor Code § 2699(g)(1); *Iskanian v. CLS Transportation*, 59 Cal. 4th 348, 381 (2014); *ZB, N.A. v. Superior Court*, 8 Cal. 5th 175, 182 (2019) (unpaid wages are not recoverable under PAGA).

The PAGA Settlement is set forth in the accompanying PAGA Settlement Agreement ("Settlement" or "Settlement Agreement"). A true and correct copy of the Settlement Agreement which sets forth the terms for the settlement of the PAGA claims is attached as Exhibit 2 to the Declaration of Coelho in Support of Motion for Approval of PAGA Settlement ("Coelho Decl."), filed concurrently herewith. Capitalized terms shall have the same meaning as defined in the Settlement Agreement. The LWDA received notice of this Settlement on November 18, 2026. Coelho Decl. ¶ 32.

II. RELEVANT FACTS AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On June 26, 2025, Plaintiff filed this action as a putative class action against Defendant alleging: (1) failure to pay minimum and straight time wages; (2) failure to pay overtime wages; (3) failure to provide meal periods; (4) failure to authorize and permit rest periods; (5) failure to timely pay final wages at termination; (6) failure to provide accurate itemized wage statements; (7) failure to indemnify employees for expenditures; (8) unfair business practices; (9) PAGA violations; and (10) failure to produce requested employment records. On November 2, 2026, Plaintiff filed a dismissal of class claims. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 3.

Pursuant to Labor Code section 2699.3, subdivision (a), Plaintiff gave timely written notice on April 18, 2025, to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and Defendants

of the specific provisions of the Labor Code alleged to have been violated, including the facts and theories in support (LWDA-CM-1093244-25). Coelho Decl. at ¶ 4.

PAGA Counsel conducted a thorough investigation into the facts of, and applicable law to, the PAGA Action. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 5. Before negotiating the Settlement, PAGA Counsel obtained, through informal discovery, Aggrieved Employee demographic information, including the number of Aggrieved Employee members and pay periods, and Plaintiff's purported arbitration agreement, among other relevant documents *Id*.

The Parties reached an informal settlement after exchanging sufficient data, documents, and information. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 6. The negotiations were adversarial, conducted at arm's length, and tempered by the efforts of both sides to serve the interests of their clients. *Id*. After extensive negotiations and discussions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Plaintiff's claims and Defendant's defenses, the Parties reached a settlement, the material terms of which are encompassed within the Settlement Agreement. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 6, Ex. 2.

III. TERMS OF THE PAGA SETTLEMENT

A. Aggrieved Employees

"Aggrieved Employee" means all persons who performed work for Defendant in California as an hourly-paid or non-exempt employee at any time during the PAGA Period, including current and former employees. Settlement Agreement § 1.4 "PAGA Period" the period from April 18, 2024, through August 25, 2026. Settlement Agreement § 1.22. Defendant estimates that there are approximately 56 Aggrieved Employees who worked a total of 3,934 PAGA Pay Periods. *Id*. at § 4.1.

B. Settlement Terms

The Settlement Agreement negotiated by the Parties provides for a Gross Settlement Amount ("GSA") payment in the amount of $135,000.00 to resolve the PAGA Action. Settlement Agreement § 3.1; Coelho Decl. at ¶ 7. The GSA will be used to pay Individual PAGA Payments, the LWDA PAGA Payment, PAGA Counsel Fees Payment, PAGA Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, PAGA Service Award, and Administration Expenses Payment,

the amount remaining is the Net Settlement Amount ("NSA"). Coelho Decl. at ¶ 7. After deducting the PAGA Service Award ($10,000.00), PAGA Counsel Fees Payment ($45,000.00), PAGA Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment ($3,003.26), and Administration Expenses Payment ($4,200.00) from the GSA, the amount remaining is the Net Settlement Amount ("NSA"). Settlement Agreement § 3.2; Coelho Decl. at ¶ 7. The NSA, which is estimated to be $72,796.74, shall be distributed as PAGA Penalties with 65% of the NSA allocated to the LWDA PAGA Payment ($47,317.88) and 35% of the NSA allocated to Individual PAGA Payments ($25,478.86). Settlement Agreement § 3.2.4; Coelho Decl. at ¶ 7.

PAGA Penalties: The NSA will be distributed as PAGA Penalties with sixty-five percent (65%) allocated to the LWDA PAGA Payment and the remaining thirty-five percent (35%) allocated to the Individual PAGA Payments for Aggrieved Employees. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.4. This 65/35 allocation is required by Labor Code § 2699 as explained by *ZB, N.A. v. Superior Court*, 8 Cal.5th 175 (2019).

Individual PAGA Payments: The Administrator will calculate each Individual PAGA Payment by (a) dividing the amount of the Aggrieved Employees' 35% share of PAGA Penalties ($21,805) by the total number of PAGA Pay Periods worked by all Aggrieved Employees during the PAGA Period and (b) multiplying the result by each Aggrieved Employee's PAGA Pay Periods. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.4.1. The PAGA Period means the period from April 18, 2024, through August 25, 2026. Settlement Agreement § 1.21.

PAGA Service Award: Subject to Court approval, the Plaintiff shall be paid a PAGA Service Award not to exceed $10,000.00 for his time and effort in bringing and presenting the Action. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.1.

PAGA Counsel Fees Payment: Subject to Court approval, PAGA Counsel shall be entitled to receive an award of reasonable attorneys' fees of not more than 33.33% of the GSA which is currently estimated to be $45,000.00. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.2.

PAGA Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment: Per the Settlement Agreement, PAGA Counsel shall be entitled to request reimbursement of costs, not to exceed $13,500.00.

Settlement Agreement § 3.2.2. Counsel has incurred $2,703.26 in expenses on items such as filing fees and service fees. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 30. We anticipate incurring $300.00 in future costs for filing fees and service fees for a total of $3,003.26 in costs. *Id*. The remaining $10,496.74 will therefore revert to the NSA to be distributed as PAGA Penalties to the LWDA and Aggrieved Employees. *Id*.

Administrator Expenses Payment: The Parties agreed to appoint Phoenix Settlement Administrators ("Phoenix") as the Administrator for the Settlement. Settlement Agreement §§ 1.2, 7.1. The Administration Expenses Payment, which are not to exceed $4,200.00, shall be paid from the GSA. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.3.

C. Releases

Plaintiff's Release: "Plaintiff and his respective former and present representatives, agents, attorneys, heirs, administrators, successors, and assigns generally, release and discharge the Released Parties from all claims, transactions, or occurrences including, but not limited to: (a) all claims that were, or reasonably could have been, alleged, based on the facts contained in the Operative Complaint and the PAGA Notice, or (b) any other claims, debts, liabilities, demands, damages, obligations, actions and causes of actions, of any nature whatsoever, whether known or unknown, or suspected or unsuspected, arising out of or in connection with Plaintiff's employment with Defendant, the separation of such employment, or any other act, omission, or event occurring between the Parties arising from the employment relationship at any time prior to the date Plaintiff executed this Agreement. This General Release includes, without limitation: (1) all claims for violation of any federal, state or local statute, ordinance or regulation relating to employment benefits, leaves of absence, or discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or whistleblowing in employment, specifically including, without limitation, the California Fair Employment and Housing Act, the California Family Rights Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Older Workers Benefit Protection Act, the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, the Securities Act,

the Immigration Reform and Control Act the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act of 1988, the California Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, and any regulation of any administrative agency or governmental authority relating to employment benefits or discrimination or harassment or retaliation in employment; the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. § 201, et seq. and the Portal to Portal Act, 29 U.S.C. § 251, et seq.; (2) all claims for retaliation, wrongful termination of employment, failure to provide meal period breaks, failure to provide overtime and minimum wages; failure to provide rest breaks, failure to pay all wages upon termination, failure to provide accurate itemized statements, civil penalties under PAGA, and any claim for violations of the California Labor Code, the UCL; (3) any non-statutory tort or contractual claim, including all claims for breach of oral, implied or written contract, breach of implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing, negligent or intentional infliction of emotional distress, and conversion; (4) all claims for wages, penalties and/or benefits; and (5) all claims for attorneys' fees and costs ("Plaintiff's Release"). Plaintiff's Release does not extend to any claims or actions to enforce this Agreement, or to any claims for vested benefits, unemployment benefits, disability benefits, social security benefits, workers' compensation benefits that arose at any time or based on occurrences outside the PAGA Period. Plaintiff acknowledges that Plaintiff may discover facts or law different from, or in addition to, the facts or law that Plaintiff now knows or believes to be true but agrees, nonetheless, that Plaintiff's Release shall be and remain effective in all respects, notwithstanding such different or additional facts or Plaintiff's discovery of them." Settlement Agreement § 5.1.

Plaintiff's Waiver of Rights Under California Civil Code Section 1542. "For purposes of Plaintiff's Release, Plaintiff expressly waives and relinquishes the provisions, rights, and benefits, if any, of section 1542 of the California Civil Code, which reads: A general release does not extend to claims that the creditor or releasing party does not know or suspect to exist in his or her favor at the time of executing the release, and that if known by him or her would have materially affected his or her settlement with the debtor or released party." Settlement Agreement § 5.1.1.

Released PAGA Claims: "All Aggrieved Employees are deemed to release, on behalf of themselves and their respective former and present representatives, agents, attorneys, administrators, successors, and assigns, the Released Parties from all claims under PAGA arising during the PAGA Period that were alleged, or reasonably could have been alleged, based on the facts and allegations in the Operative Complaint and the PAGA Notice." Settlement Agreement § 5.2.

D. Settlement Administration

Defendant will provide the Aggrieved Employee Data to the Administrator no later than fourteen (14) days after the Court grants PAGA Approval. Settlement Agreement §§ 1.5, 4.2. Defendant has a continuing duty to immediately notify PAGA Counsel if it discovers that the Aggrieved Employee Data omitted employee identifying information and to provide corrected or updated Aggrieved Employee Data as soon as reasonably feasible. *Id*.

The Effective Date is the date on which the Judgment becomes final. the date on which the Judgment becomes final. Settlement Agreement § 1.11. Defendant shall fully fund the Gross Settlement Amount by transmitting the funds to the Administrator in three (3) installments. First, within 7 days of the date the Court enters a Judgment based on the Approval Order, Defendant shall fund 25% ($33,750.00). Second, within three (3) months of the first payment, Defendant shall fund the second payment of 25% ($33,750.00). Third, within three (3) months of the second payment, Defendant shall fund the final payment of 50% ($67,500.00). *Id*. at § 4.3.

Within fourteen (14) days after Defendant funds the GSA, the Settlement Administrator will issue checks for all Individual PAGA Payments, the LWDA PAGA Payment, the Administration Expenses Payment, the PAGA Counsel Fees Payment, the PAGA Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment and the PAGA Service Award. Settlement Agreement § 4.4. Disbursement of the PAGA Counsel Fees Payment, the PAGA Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment and the PAGA Representative Service Payments shall not precede disbursement of the Individual PAGA Payments. *Id*. The Administrator must conduct a PAGA Member Address

Search for all other Aggrieved Employees whose checks are returned undelivered without United States Postal Service ("USPS") forwarding address. *Id*. at § 4.4.2. Within seven (7) days of receiving a returned check the Administrator must re-mail checks to the USPS forwarding address provided or to an address ascertained through the PAGA Member Address Search. *Id*.

The Individual PAGA payments will expire one hundred eighty (180) calendar days from the date they are issued by the Administrator. Settlement Agreement § 4.4.1. For any Aggrieved Employee whose Individual PAGA Payment check is uncashed and cancelled after the void date, the Administrator shall transmit the funds represented by such checks to the California Controller's Unclaimed Property Fund in the name of the Aggrieved Employee. Settlement Agreement § 4.4.3. The Administrator will issue Aggrieved Employees IRS Form 1099s for Individual PAGA Payments. *Id*. at § 3.2.4.2.

Pursuant to California Labor Code Section 2699(s)(2), Plaintiff submitted the proposed Settlement Agreement to the LWDA on November 18, 2026. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 32, Ex. 6. Plaintiff will submit a copy of the Court's judgment and order approving the Settlement Agreement to the LWDA within ten (10) days after entry of judgment or order. *Id*.

IV. THE COURT SHOULD GRANT APPROVAL OF THE PAGA SETTLEMENT

A. Legal Standard

Labor Code § 2699(l) requires that the Court "shall review and approve any settlement of any civil [PAGA] action filed pursuant to this part. The proposed settlement shall be submitted to the agency at the same time that it is submitted to the court." In doing so, the trial court must consider whether the settlement is "fair, reasonable, and adequate in view of PAGA's purposes to remediate present labor law violations, deter future ones, and to maximize enforcement of state labor laws." *Moniz v. Adecco USA, Inc*., 72 Cal. App. 5th 56, 77-78 (Cal. Ct. App. Nov. 30, 2021) (overruled in part on other grounds); *see also O'Connor v. Uber Technologies, Inc*., 201 F. Supp. 3d 1110, 1133 (N.D. Cal. 2016) (adopting guidance from the LWDA providing that "when a PAGA claim is settled, the relief provided for under the PAGA [must] be genuine and meaningful, consistent with the underlying purpose of the statute to

benefit the public").

The court's role in reviewing PAGA settlements differs from its gatekeeping function in the class action context. In class actions, courts have a fiduciary duty to protect the interests of absent class members, whose individual claims will be discharged. *Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc*., 168 Cal.App.4th 116, 129 (2008). In this role, courts conduct an "independent assessment of the adequacy of the settlement terms," which requires them to have sufficient data and information about the amount in controversy and the realistic range of outcomes. *Id*. at 132. Courts consider a variety of factors in conducting this analysis, including whether the settlement is negotiated at an arm's length, whether there is sufficient discovery and information to permit parties and the court to act intelligently, whether the attorneys have experience with the type of issues, and whether the number of objectors is small. *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co*., 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1800-1801 (1996).

However, a PAGA representative action is "not akin to a class action," it "is a species of qui tam action." *Flores v. Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc*., 253 F.Supp.3d 1074, 1076 (C.D. Cal. 2017). When reviewing a PAGA-only settlement, courts do not consider the value of individuals' claims for damages because a PAGA settlement does not release those claims. *See Kim v. Reins Int'l California, Inc*., 9 Cal.5th 73, 87 (2020) (PAGA claims differ from individual claims); *ZB, N.A. v. Superior Court*, 8 Cal.5th 175, 188 (2019) (noting that PAGA penalties do not seek damages that are compensatory in nature). "The state's interest in such an action is to enforce its laws, not to recover damages on behalf of a particular individual." *Huff v. Securitas Sec. Servs., USA, Inc*., 23 Cal.App.5th 745, 760 (2018). Instead of focusing on fair recovery for individual claims, the goal of PAGA enforcement is to achieve "maximum compliance with state labor laws." *Id*. at 756; *see also Iskanian*, 59 Cal.4th at 383 (noting that the goal of PAGA is to impose civil penalties for Labor Code violations "significant enough to deter violations"); *McKenzie v. Federal Exp. Corp*., 765 F.Supp.2d 1222, 1233 (C.D. Cal. 2011) ("Unlike a class action seeking damages… for injured employees, the purpose of PAGA is to incentivize private parties to recover civil penalties for the government that otherwise may not have been assessed and collected by overburdened state enforcement agencies.").

B. The PAGA Penalties Secured by the Settlement Are Genuine and Meaningful and Fulfill PAGA's Underlying Purpose to Benefit the Public

The Settlement of $135,000.00 penalizes Defendant for the alleged violations of California's labor laws in an amount that is significant enough to deter violations and provide genuine and meaningful relief – and approximately $47,317.88 [1] in PAGA Penalties to the State of California and Aggrieved Employees – thus fulfilling the underlying purpose of PAGA to benefit the public. Coelho Decl. at §§ 7-11; *see Jordan v. TCS Grp., Inc*., No. EDCV161701JVSSPX, 2018 WL 1409590, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 5, 2018) ("The proposed settlement imposes a substantial penalty payment of $150,000.00, paid in exchange for a release of only those claims pled in the notice to the LWDA and the Complaint. This penalty has a substantial deterrent effect on Defendant and other California employers. Furthermore, the proposed settlement encourages compliance with the specific requirements of the Labor Code, which has the effect of protecting workers from unlawful employment practices and working conditions."); *Echavez v. Abercrombie & Fitch Co*., No. CV 11-09754-GAF, 2017 WL 3669607, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 23, 2017) (finding that "[t]he primary purpose of PAGA, i.e., the empowerment of Aggrieved Employees to act as private attorneys general to collect civil penalties from their employers for Labor Code violations, [was] served by the proposed PAGA penalty in the parties' settlement agreement," where $340,000 of $700,000 settlement was allocated to PAGA penalties which were divided 75% to the LWDA and 25% to an estimated 10,000 Aggrieved Employees).

This PAGA Settlement amount compares favorably to the estimated amount of PAGA penalties. Plaintiff calculated that the maximum amount of statutory PAGA civil penalties was

[1] The Net Settlement Amount of $72,796.74 was calculated using the following arithmetic: $135,000.00 minus $45,000.00 for PAGA's Counsel's attorneys' fees, minus $3,003.26 for PAGA Counsel's litigation expenses, minus $4,200.00 for administration costs, and minus $10,000.00 for the PAGA Representative Service Payment.

potentially $393.400.00 for an estimated 56 employees based on 3,943 pay periods.[2] Coelho Decl. at ¶ 8. Importantly, however, these calculations were performed at the maximum statutory rate for the penalties, when in fact, it is likely that any penalties awarded would be at a lower rate. California Labor Code Section 2699(e)(1) permits a Court to award a lesser amount than the maximum civil penalty if based on the facts and circumstances to do otherwise would result in an award that is "unjust, arbitrary and oppressive or confiscatory." *See Carrington v. Starbucks Corp*., 30 Cal.App.5th 504 (2018) (affirming a judgment after trial that only provided for a PAGA penalty of $5 per pay period). Therefore, at trial, any PAGA penalties awarded could be significantly less than Plaintiff's calculation even where Plaintiff prevailed on the PAGA claim. *See Fleming v. Covidien*, No. ED CV 10-01487 RGK (OPx), 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 154590 (C.D. Cal. Aug. 12, 2011) (a federal court reduced PAGA penalties from $2,800,000.00 to $500,000.00, a reduction of 82.2%, because the court found maximum penalties "unjust" because the employees had suffered no injuries).

C. The Settlement is Reasonable Given the Risks of Further Litigation

To recover any PAGA penalties, Plaintiff would be required at trial to prove each of the underlying Labor Code violations. *See Cardenas v. McLane Foodservice, Inc*., No. BCV-23-102915, 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 13126, *10 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 31, 2011) ("Given the statutory language [of PAGA], a plaintiff cannot recover on behalf of individuals whom the plaintiff has not proven suffered a violation of the Labor Code by the defendant."). Here, Plaintiff would need to prove, among other things, that each Aggrieved Employees suffered a violation for each period the employee worked in relation to (1) failure to pay for all hours worked, including minimum, straight time, and overtime wages; (2) failure to provide meal periods; (3) failure to authorize and permit rest periods; (4) failure to pay all earned wages twice per month; (5) failure to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods; (6) failure to timely pay all

[2] Stacking is where more than one civil penalty is imposed in a pay period for the same conduct. The valuation of $393,400.00 is the civil penalty amount without stacking. If stacking is permitted, then the valuation increases with each additional penalty added to each pay period. Courts to consider the issue have refused to "stack" penalties. *See Carrington v. Starbucks Corp*., 30 Cal.App.5th 504 (2018).

wages at termination; (7) failure to furnish accurate itemized wage statements; (8) failure to indemnify for necessary expenditures; and (9) and failure to produce requested employment records.

Defendant maintains that Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees were properly compensated, and that Defendant did not commit any violations of the Labor Code as to Plaintiff or the Aggrieved Employees. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 9. Accordingly, Defendant disputes and denies Plaintiff's allegations and claims asserted in the operative complaint which are resolved by the Settlement Agreement. *Id*. Defendant asserted additional defenses to the PAGA claim, not only as to liability but also as to the amount of the penalties. *Id*. Defendant could argue that no penalties prior to the PAGA notification should be awarded because the violations were not intentional, and at least one Court has so ruled. *Id*. These defenses present a risk to the PAGA claim and the potential that some or all the PAGA penalties sought may not be awarded. *Id*.

While Plaintiff is confident in the merits of the case, a legitimate controversy exists as to each cause of action for penalties, the factual allegations, the evidentiary basis, and the underlying claims. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 10. Plaintiff also considered the fact that continued litigation would be expensive, involving a trial and possible appeals, and would substantially delay and potentially reduce any recovery to the State of California and the Aggrieved Employees. *Id*. Assuming Plaintiff could prove at least one violation per pay period and the Court awarded $100.00 in PAGA penalties for each of the 3,934 pay periods during the PAGA Period, the total penalties would be approximately $393,40000. *Id*. As such, the Gross Settlement Amount of $135,000.00 is approximately 34.3% of the maximum potential liability in this case. *Id*.

Thus, when the risks of litigation, the burdens of proof necessary to establish liability, and the probability of appeal of a favorable judgment are considered, it is clear the settlement amount of $135,000.00 is reasonable and in the best interest of the State of California and the public. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 11. Plaintiff objectively and knowledgably balanced the strengths and weaknesses of her claims against the risk of continued litigation and were able to determine a realistic range of settlement recovery for PAGA penalties. *Id*. The Settlement therefore

accomplishes PAGA's objectives by imposing sufficient civil penalties "to punish and deter" Defendant from future alleged Labor Code violations, while also ensuring that the penalties are not "unjust, arbitrary and oppressive, or confiscatory." Lab. Code § 2699(e)(2); *Iskanian*, 59 Cal. 4th at 384.

V. THE ATTORNEYS' FEES AND COSTS ARE FAIR AND REASONABLE

PAGA Counsel seeks approval of attorneys' fees from the PAGA settlement in the amount of $135,000.00 representing 33.33% of the GSA and costs not to exceed $13,500.00. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.2. Plaintiff is entitled to attorneys' fees under Labor Code section 2699(g)(l), which provides that "[a]ny employee who prevails in any action shall be entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs." Lab. Code § 2699(g)(1); *see also Gouskos v. Aptos Village Garage, Inc*., 94 Cal.App.4th 754, 765 (2001) (holding that attorneys' fees to prevailing party are mandatory when the statute uses the word "shall"). It is undisputed that Plaintiff is the prevailing party. *See Graciano v. Robinson Ford Sales, Inc*., 144 Cal. App. 4th 140, 153 (2006) ("[P]laintiffs may be considered 'prevailing parties' for attorney's fee purposes if they succeed on any significant issue in the litigation that achieves some of the benefit the parties sought in bringing suit.") (internal citation omitted). Accordingly, Plaintiff is entitled to recover attorneys' fees and costs.

A. PAGA Counsel's Requested Attorneys' Fees Are Reasonable under the Common Fund Method

The request for attorneys' fees as a percentage of the gross settlement amount is supported by the "common fund theory," where "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." *Serrano v. Priest*, 20 Cal.3d 25, 35 (1977).

The purpose of the common fund approach is to "spread litigation costs proportionally among all the beneficiaries so that the active beneficiary does not bear the entire burden alone." *Vincent v. Hughes Air West, Inc*., 557 F.2d 759, 769 (9th Cir. 1977). Thus, 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." *City and County of San Francisco v. Sweet*, 12 Cal.4th 105, 110 (1995); *see Quinn v. State of California*, 15 Cal.3d 162, 167 (1975) ("[O]ne 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.").

Several other courts have recognized the advantages of awarding fees as a percentage of the common fund over the alternative lodestar approach, which usually involves wading through voluminous and often indecipherable time records. *See*, e.g., *In re Activision Securities Litigation*, 723 F.Supp. 1373, 1375 (N.D. Cal. 1989). The percentage approach is preferable to the lodestar method because: (1) it provides predictability to counsel; (2) encourages efficient resolution of the litigation by providing an incentive for early, yet reasonable, settlement; and (3) reduces the demands on judicial records. *Id*. at 1378-79; *see also Lealao v. Beneficial Cal., Inc*., 82 Cal.App.4th 19, 28 (2000) (discussing findings of task force commissioned by the Third Circuit, which "concluded that the lodestar approach (1) increases the workload of an already overtaxed judicial system, (2) is insufficiently objective and produces 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 Claimants or of an overall dollar amount, (5) encourages lawyers to expend excessive hours, and engage in duplicative and unjustified work, (6) creates a disservice 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.").

The percentage of attorneys' fees set forth in the Settlement Agreement – one third (1/3) of the Gross Settlement Amount – is reasonable. Historically, courts have awarded percentage fees in the range of 20% to 50% in common fund cases. *Newberg on Class Actions*, 4th Ed. 2002, § 14:6. *Newberg* notes that achievement of a substantial recovery with modest hours expended should not be penalized but should be rewarded for consideration of time saved by

superior services performed. *Id*. Furthermore, California and federal courts have long recognized that a percentage of recovery for attorneys' fees is properly awarded based on the total value. *Boeing v. Van Gemert*, 444 U.S. 472, 480-481 (1980); *see also In re Consumer Privacy Cases*, 175 Cal.App.4th 545, 558 n.13 (2009) ("Empirical studies show that, regardless whether the percentage method or the lodestar method is used, fee awards in class actions average around one-third of the recovery.")

The Court should also consider that PAGA Counsel's efforts have resulted in substantial benefits to the State of California and the Aggrieved Employees, in the form of a significant, non-reversionary settlement fund established to compensate the State of California and the Aggrieved Employees and to penalize Defendant for the alleged PAGA violations. Without the efforts of PAGA Counsel's, the claims alleged in the complaint would likely have gone without remedy. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 29.

B. A Lodestar Cross-Check Confirms the Reasonableness of the Requested Fee

Although *Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l, Inc*., 1 Cal.5th 480, 489 (2016) makes clear that a lodestar cross-check is not required, PAGA Counsel's lodestar supports the reasonableness of the requested fee. The lodestar is determined by multiplying the number of hours reasonably expended by the reasonable hourly rate. *PLCM Group, Inc. v. Drexler*, 22 Cal.4th 1084, 1095 (2000). The lodestar figure may then be adjusted, based on consideration of factors specific to the case, in order to fix the fee at the fair market value for the legal services provided." *Id*. The factors that can be considered include "the nature of the litigation, its difficulty, the amount involved, the skill required in its handling, the skill employed, the attention given, the success or failure, and other circumstances in the case." *Melnyk v. Robledo*, 64 Cal.App.3d 618, 623-624 (1976) (citations omitted).

The total hours spent on this action by PAGA Counsel were reasonable and in line with comparable cases. While it is not necessary to substantiate the fee award with a lodestar in this PAGA Action, it should be noted that PAGA Counsel spent approximately 58.02 hours prosecuting this action, which were divided among the attorneys working on this case according to skill level. Coelho Decl. at ¶¶ 27-28. Multiplying the total hours expended by PAGA Counsel

by their reasonable hourly rates yields a lodestar of $51,599.00. *Id*. at ¶ 29. This amount surpasses the requested fee award of $45,000.00, resulting in a negative multiplier. *Id*. at ¶ 30. This amount does not include the time PAGA Counsel will spend at the final approval hearing and assisting the Settlement Administrator following final approval. *Id*. PAGA Counsel dedicated significant resources to this case by dividing the tasks required according to skill level. *Id*. The hours expended by each attorney were not duplicative and reflect the extensive investigation and analysis that was required to achieve this Settlement. This time could have been spent on other potentially lucrative cases. *Id*. PAGA Counsel's lodestar reflects the efficiencies achieved by attorneys experienced in this field. *Id*. Moreover, PAGA Counsel has singularly assumed the risk and costs of litigation purely on a contingency basis. *Id*. And, while Plaintiff is confident in the merits of her claims, a legitimate controversy exists as to each cause of action, posing an actual risk that Plaintiff may not succeed at class certification and/or trial. *Id*. Any of these obstacles could have prevented recovery completely, meaning PAGA Counsel would have been left with no compensation for all the time and money invested in litigating this case. *Id*. Despite these risks, PAGA Counsel took this case on a contingency basis so that Aggrieved Employees (a particularly vulnerable group of hourly paid workers) could be compensated for their unpaid wages. *Id*. Consequently, PAGA Counsel was precluded from focusing on, or taking on, other cases which could have resulted in a larger, and less risky, monetary gain. *Id*.

The Court should also consider that PAGA Counsel's efforts have resulted in substantial benefits to the State of California and the Aggrieved Employees, in the form of a significant, non-reversionary settlement fund established to compensate the State of California and the Aggrieved Employees and to punish Defendant for the alleged PAGA violations. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 29. Without the efforts of PAGA Counsel, the claims alleged in the complaint would likely have gone without remedy. *Id*.

C. PAGA Counsel's Rates Are Similar to Those Approved by California Courts in Comparable Cases.

PAGA Counsel's hourly rates are comparable to those charged by other class action

plaintiffs' counsel and the firms defending class actions. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 23. PAGA Counsel's rates are well within the range of hourly rates that the Los Angeles legal marketplace would compensate counsel for similar services accomplishing similar results. *Id*. For example, in *Bronshteyn v. State of California*, Los Angeles County Superior Ct. No. 19SMCV00057, Order Granting Plaintiff's Motion for Statutory Attorneys' Fees and Costs filed March 30, 2023, an employment action brought by two small law firms (Levy, Vinick, Burrell & Hyams LLP and Law Offices of Wendy Musell), the court found that counsel's 2022 hourly rates of $1,100 and $1,000 per hour were reasonable for the plaintiff's five senior attorneys, including $1,000 per hour for the plaintiff's 23-year lead counsel and $850 per hour for a senior associate. *Id*. These rates were then augmented by a 1.75 lodestar multiplier and affirmed by the California Court of Appeals. *Id*. The rates (and multiplier) requested here are well in line with those found reasonable in *Bronshteyn*. In *Tran v. Golden State FC LLC*, *et al*. (LASC Case No. BC699931), Fee Order filed 4/8/2022, the court found hourly rates of $1,300 per hour reasonable for plaintiff's 32-year attorney and $1,000 per hour reasonable for a 14-year attorney. *Id*.

Likewise, WLF's hourly rates are reasonable when compared to rates charged within the relevant legal marketplace. Coelho Decl. ¶¶ 24-25, Ex. 3, 4. In light of the foregoing, and considered against the risks of continued litigation, and the importance of advocating for employment rights and a speedy recovery, the relief provided under the Settlement represents a very strong result for the Aggrieved Employees. PAGA Counsel's fee request is fair and reasonable and should be approved.

D. PAGA Counsel's Costs Are Reasonable

PAGA Counsel is entitled to reimbursement of its litigation costs under PAGA. *See* Lab. Code § 2699(k)(l) ("Any employee who prevails in any action shall be entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs."). The Settlement provides for reimbursement of costs not to exceed $13,500.00. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.2. To date, PAGA Counsel has incurred costs in the amount of $2,703.26. Coelho Decl. at ¶ 30, Ex. 5. Additionally, we anticipate incurring $300.00 in future costs for filing fees and service fees for a total of $3,003.26 in costs. *Id*. The remaining $10,496.74 will therefore revert to the NSA to be distributed as PAGA Penalties to

the LWDA and Aggrieved Employees. *Id*. These costs were reasonably incurred in prosecuting this Action on behalf of the Aggrieved Employees and should be approved by the Court. Accordingly, PAGA Counsel respectfully requests the Court approve costs in the amount of $3,003.26.

VI. THE REQUESTED PAGA REPRESENTATIVE SERVICE PAYMENT TO PLAINTIFF IS REASONABLE

Both the State of California and the Aggrieved Employees are beneficiaries of a settlement that would not have been made possible but for the effort and commitment of Plaintiff. The Settlement provides the Plaintiff shall be paid a PAGA Representative Service Payment not to exceed $10,000.00, in recognition of his efforts in bringing and presenting the Action. Settlement Agreement § 3.2.1. The requested payment is intended to recognize Plaintiff's effort in bringing the Action, serving as private attorneys general under PAGA, assisting counsel with the investigation, litigation, and settlement, regularly conferring with counsel on the status of the case, and reviewing the proposed settlement to ensure that its terms are fair and achieve PAGA's objectives.

Plaintiff has provided a declaration detailing the risk he faced in bringing the suit, the notoriety and personal difficulties he encountered, the amount of time and effort he spent on this litigation, the duration of this litigation, and the personal benefit he will receive as a result of the litigation. *See generally* Declaration of Plaintiff Harold Fox Support of Plaintiff's Motion for Approval of PAGA Settlement ("Fox Decl."). Plaintiff also faced the real risk that future employers may not hire him because he each lent his name as a PAGA representative in this case, and he could have been liable for Defendant's litigation costs if the case went to trial and he lost. Fox Decl. at ¶¶ 4, 6. Accordingly, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court approve the PAGA Representative Service Payment in the amount of $10,000.00.

VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, Plaintiff respectfully requests this Court approve the PAGA settlement as set forth in the Settlement Agreement and enter the proposed order and judgment submitted herewith.

Dated: November 18, 2026

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM, PLC

By: 

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