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April 2, 2025
Page 1 of 7

VIA ONLINE FILING

Labor and Workforce Development Agency
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Sacramento, CA 95814
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<https://www.dir.ca.gov/Private-Attorneys-General-Act/Private-Attorneys-General-Act.html>

RE: Howard v. Sweetgreen, Inc.

Dear Representative:

This office represents Catherine Howard (“**Ms. Howard**”) with respect to her claims under the California Labor Code against Sweetgreen, Inc. (“**Employer**”). This letter is being sent simultaneously to Employer by certified mail.

Employer employed Ms. Howard from approximately February 6, 2023 to December 22, 2024, as an hourly, non-exempt employee. During her employment with Employer, Ms. Howard was employed as a Shift Leader at Employer’s location at 12853 El Camino Real, Suite 111, San Diego, California 92130. Employer is a fast-casual restaurant chain.

Ms. Howard intends to seek penalties for violations of the California Labor Code which are recoverable under California Labor Code section 2698, *et seq.*, the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 (“**PAGA**”). Ms. Howard is seeking penalties on behalf of herself and in a representative capacity on behalf of the State of California and all current and former non-exempt employees of Employer (“**Aggrieved Employees**”). This letter is being sent in compliance with California Labor Code section 2699.3.

As detailed below, Employer violated several of California’s wage and hour laws during Ms. Howard’s employment, including but not limited to violations of California Labor Code sections 201, 202, 203, 204, 226(a), 226.7, 510, 512(a), 1174(d), 1194, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 2800, and 2802, and the Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders (“**IWC Wage Order**”) including *inter alia*, IWC Wage Order No. 5. The claims made on behalf of Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees are based upon the following facts and theories:

1. FAILURE TO PAY FOR ALL TIME WORKED AT CORRECT RATES OF PAY, INCLUDING MINIMUM WAGES, STRAIGHT TIME WAGES, AND OVERTIME COMPENSATION

Employer has engaged in numerous unlawful practices which resulted in the failure to pay Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees for all time worked at the correct rates of pay, including minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime compensation.



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Page 2 of 7

First, Employer regularly required Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to work more than eight (8) hours in a day or forty (40) hours in a workweek, but failed to pay them overtime compensation for such work. Employer also failed to provide Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees with adequate training as to the payment of overtime compensation, all in an effort to keep its workers uninformed as to their legal right to overtime compensation. In addition, Employer regularly required Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to work off-the-clock in order to complete their duties and responsibilities. This off-the-clock work included, amongst other things, requiring Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to: (1) respond to Employer and work-related requests and perform work while clocked out for purported meal breaks; (2) perform work before clocking in for the start of their shift; and (3) perform work after clocking out for the end of their shift. For example, Ms. Howard would frequently receive work-related calls and/or text messages to her personal cellphone while clocked out for purported meal breaks and would even receive work-related calls and/or text messages before beginning her shift and/or after finishing it for the day. Further, Employer expected Ms. Howard to respond to these communications while off the clock. Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were not compensated for this off-the-clock work, resulting in a failure to pay minimum wages and straight time wages. Moreover, this off-the-clock work typically caused Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to work more than eight (8) hours in a day and forty (40) hours in week, resulting in a failure to pay overtime compensation.

In addition to requiring Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to perform work off-the-clock without compensation, Employer also failed to accurately record the actual time worked by Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees, which resulted in a failure to pay Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees for all hours actually worked, including minimum wages, straight time wages and overtime wages. Even further, Employer would improperly edit or modify Ms. Howard's and Aggrieved Employees' time records sometimes to make them appear compliant, resulting in Employer failing to pay Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees for all wages owed to them. Finally, and as a matter of policy and/or practice, Employer failed to pay overtime to Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees for all overtime hours worked based on regular rates of pay correctly calculated to include all applicable remuneration.

As a result of the foregoing practices, Employer has failed to pay Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees for all wages earned at the correct rates of pay, including minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime compensation. Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 204, 510, 1194, 1197, 1197.1 and 1198.

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek unpaid wages; PAGA default penalties; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 558, 1197.1, and 1199; compensation pursuant to Labor Code Section 1194; and attorneys' fees and costs.

2. FAILURE TO PROVIDE MEAL PERIODS AND PAY MEAL PERIOD PREMIUMS

Employer failed to provide Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees with legally compliant 30-minute meal periods. Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were required by Employer to work more than five (5) hours per



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Page 3 of 7

day, but were not provided with uninterrupted 30-minute meal periods. Further, Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were not provided with a second uninterrupted 30-minute meal period when they worked over ten (10) hours per day. Moreover, Employer regularly required Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to work through their first and second meal periods, to take their first meal period after their fifth (5th) hour of work, and/or to take their second meal periods after their tenth (10th) hour of work. Moreover, due to the high work demands and understaffing, Ms. Howard was sometimes forced to take her meal break after her fifth hour of work, forcing her to suffer a late meal period. On the occasions that Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees did take a meal period, their meal periods were frequently interrupted or cut short. For example, during shifts where Ms. Howard was the only manager on duty, she was frequently forced to step in and assist other employees while she was clocked out for her purported meal breaks, forcing her to suffer cut short meal periods. Further, when Ms. Howard did take her meal breaks, the other manager on duty frequently interrupted her meal periods.

Employer's policies, practices, and procedures were responsible for the violations alleged above and prevented Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, complete and duty-free meal periods because, amongst other reasons: (1) Employer did not have legally compliant policies regarding the provision and timing of meal periods or systematically disregarded its own purported meal period policies; (2) Employer's management at various levels, affecting all hourly-non-exempt employees, failed and refused to implement and enforce legally compliant meal period policies and practices; (3) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees regarding their right to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods; (4) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees about their right to premium wages for non-compliant meal periods; (5) Employer failed to ensure that there was adequate staffing to allow Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods; (6) Employer required Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees to remain on-call and respond to work-related requests at all times, including during meal periods, which included responding to telephone calls and text messages, which she was expected to respond to while clocked out, and in-person verbal interruptions; and (7) Employer's policy and culture prevented Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods because of the priority placed on completing job requirements over employees right to receive timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods.

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees did not receive an extra hour of wages at their regular rate of pay for the meal periods which were not provided to them in compliance with California law.

Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 226.7, 512(a) and 1198.

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 558 and 1199; and attorneys' fees and costs.



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Page 4 of 7

3. FAILURE TO AUTHORIZE AND PERMIT REST PERIODS AND PAY REST PERIOD PREMIUMS

Employer failed to authorize and permit Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees take legally compliant 10-minute rest periods. Employer required Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to work through rest periods. Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were not provided with uninterrupted, duty-free rest periods when they worked more than four (4) hours or a major fraction thereof. Further, Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were not provided with a second uninterrupted, duty-free rest period when they worked more than six (6) hours in a day, or a third uninterrupted, duty-free rest period after working more than ten (10) hours in day. In the rare event that a rest period was taken, it was frequently interrupted or cut short. Moreover, Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were not completely relieved of duty as required by *Augustus v. ABM Security Services, Inc.*, 2 Cal.5th 257 (2016). For example, Ms. Howard was rarely permitted to take her ten-minute (10) rest breaks. However, when she did, due to the high workload and understaffing, she frequently was required to step back in to assist other employees or customers during her ten-minute (10) rest breaks. This forced her to suffer short rest breaks. Further, as a result of Employer's understaffing and high work expectations, Ms. Howard frequently missed her rest breaks altogether.

Employer's policies, practices, and procedures were responsible for the violations alleged above and prevented Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely and complete rest periods because, amongst other reasons: (1) Employer did not have legally compliant policies regarding the provision and timing of rest periods or systematically disregarded its own purported rest period policies; (2) Employer's management at various levels, affecting all hourly-non-exempt employees, failed and refused to implement and enforce legally compliant rest period policies and practices; (3) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees regarding their right to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods; (4) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees about their right to premium wages for non-compliant rest periods; (5) Employer failed to ensure that there was adequate staffing to allow Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods; (6) Employer required Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees to remain on-call and respond to work-related requests at all times, including during rest periods, which included responding to telephone calls and in-person verbal interruptions; and (7) Employer's policy and culture prevented Ms. Howard and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods because of the priority placed on completing job requirements over employees right to receive rest periods.

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees did not receive an extra hour of wages at their regular rate of pay for the rest periods which were not provided to them in compliance with California law.

Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 226.7, and 1198.



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Page 5 of 7

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; California Labor Code sections 558 and 1199 penalties; and attorneys' fees and costs.

4. FAILURE TO TIMELY PAY WAGES DURING EMPLOYMENT

As to each pay period, Employer has failed to timely pay all wages earned because Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were not paid all the wages they were owed including, *inter alia*, overtime compensation, straight time wages, minimum wages, and meal and rest period premiums. Accordingly, Employer violated California Labor Code section 204(a).

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 210 and 1199; and attorneys' fees and costs.

5. FAILURE TO PROVIDE ACCURATE ITEMIZED WAGE STATEMENTS

As a result of the practices described above, the wage statements provided to Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees failed to include the actual hours worked, the actual gross wages earned, and the correct rates of pay. Accordingly, Employer violated California Labor Code section 226(a).

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section 226.3; and attorneys' fees and costs.

6. FAILURE TO MAINTAIN ACCURATE RECORDS

Employer has failed to maintain accurate records relating to Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees' work periods, meal periods, total daily hours worked, and total hours worked per payroll period. Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 1198.5 and 1174(d).

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; California Labor Code section 1174.5 penalties; and attorneys' fees and costs.

7. FAILURE TO REIMBURSE NECESSARY EXPENDITURES

California Labor Code sections 2800 and 2802 require an employer to reimburse its employees for all necessary expenditures incurred by the employee in direct consequence of the discharge of his or her job duties or in direct consequence of his or her obedience to the directions of the employer. IWC Wage Order No. 5 requires employers to provide employees with the tools or equipment necessary for the performance of their job. During the relevant time period, Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees incurred necessary business-



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Page 6 of 7

related expenses and costs that were not fully reimbursed by Employer. These costs include, but are not limited to, mileage for travel between job locations, expenses for the use of a personal cell phone for work-related purposes, and non-slip shoes required for the job.

Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 2800 and 2802.

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; and attorneys' fees

8. FAILURE TO TIMELY PAY ALL WAGES UPON TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT

Upon the termination of employment, Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees were not paid all wages due to them within twenty-four (24) hours or even within seventy-two (72) hours for those who resigned. In fact, Ms. Howard did not receive her final paycheck from Employer until at least one to two weeks after her final day of employment. Further, as a result of Employer's practices of requiring Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees to work off-the-clock without compensation, failing to pay proper overtime compensation, failure to properly calculate regular rates, and failure to accurately record all hours actually worked, Employer failed to pay Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees for all straight time wage, minimum wages and overtime compensation owed to them upon termination of their employment. Employer also failed to pay Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees for meal period premiums, rest period premiums, and accrued vacation time they were owed, amongst other wages. Accordingly, Employer violated California Labor Code sections 201 and 202.

Ms. Howard and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 203, 1199, and 2699(f)(2); and attorneys' fees and costs.

Therefore, on behalf of herself, the State of California and all Aggrieved Employees, Ms. Howard may seek all applicable penalties related to these violations of the California Labor Code pursuant to PAGA. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very Truly Yours,

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Page 7 of 7

Notice provided to Employer via Certified Mail (9414711206208895418552>)

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Notice provided to Employer via Certified Mail (9414711206208895417227>)

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