

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM, PLC
3055 Wilshire Blvd, 12th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90010-1137

John G. Yslas (SBN 187324)
jyslas@wilshirelawfirm.com
Jeffrey C. Bills (SBN 301629)
jbills@wilshirelawfirm.com
Aram Boyadjian (SBN 334009)
aboyadjian@wilshirelawfirm.com
Andrew Sandoval (SBN 346996)
andrew.sandoval@wilshirelawfirm.com
WILSHIRE LAW FIRM
3055 Wilshire Blvd., 12th Floor
Los Angeles, California 90010
Telephone: (213) 381-9988
Facsimile: (213) 381-9989

Attorneys for Plaintiff

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF SUTTER

ISMAEL VILLEGAS-SANCHEZ, individually,
and on behalf of the State of California and other
aggrieved persons,

Plaintiff,

v.

COE ORCHARD EQUIPMENT, INC., a
California corporation; and DOES 1 through 10,
inclusive,

Defendant.

Electronically Filed
August 1, 2023
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SUTTER
CLERK OF THE COURT
By: Brenda Johnson, Deputy

Case No.: CVCS23-0001484
**PAGA REPRESENTATIVE ACTION
COMPLAINT:**

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

1 Plaintiff Ismael Villegas-Sanchez (“Plaintiff”), on information and belief, alleges as
2 follows:

3 **INTRODUCTION & PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

4 1. Plaintiff brings this action individually, and on behalf of the State of California and
5 other aggrieved persons, against Defendants COE Orchard Equipment, Inc., and DOES 1 through
6 10 (collectively referred to as “Defendants”) for civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General
7 Act of 2004, California Labor Code §§ 2698 *et seq.* (“PAGA”) stemming from Defendants’ failure
8 to pay for all hours worked (minimum, straight time, and overtime wages), failure to provide meal
9 periods, failure to authorize and permit rest periods, failure to pay all earned wages twice per
10 month, failure to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods, failure to timely
11 pay final wages, failure to furnish accurate wage statements, failure to indemnify employees for
12 expenditures, and failure to produce requested employment records.

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

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

26 4. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendants seeking only to recover penalties on
27 behalf of Plaintiff individually, on behalf of all Aggrieved Employees that worked for Defendants,
28 and on behalf of the State of California. Plaintiff does not seek to recover anything other than

penalties as permitted by California Labor Code Section 2699 at this time. To the extent that statutory violations are mentioned for wage violations, Plaintiff does not seek underlying general and/or special damages for those violations, but simply penalties as permitted by California Labor Code Section 2699, declaratory relief, and injunctive relief for Plaintiff individually, and all Aggrieved Employees as permitted by the PAGA.

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

6. On information and belief, Defendants were on actual and constructive notice of the improprieties alleged herein and intentionally refused to rectify Defendants' unlawful practices. Defendants' violations, as alleged above, during all relevant times herein were willful and deliberate.

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

THE PARTIES

A. Plaintiff

8. Plaintiff Ismael Villegas-Sanchez is a resident of Live Oak, California who worked for Defendants in Sutter County, California as an hourly-paid, non-exempt employee from approximately September 2019 to approximately September 2022.

B. Defendants

9. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based upon that information and belief alleges, that Defendant COE Orchard Equipment, Inc. is, and at all times herein mentioned, was:

(a) A business entity conducting business in numerous counties throughout the

1 State of California, including Sutter County; and,

2 (b) The former employer of Plaintiff, and the current and/or former employer of
3 Aggrieved Employees, because Defendant COE Orchard Equipment, Inc.
4 suffered and permitted Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to work; and/or
5 controlled their wages, hours, or working conditions; and or engaged
6 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees, thereby creating a common law
7 employment relationship.

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

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

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

1 adopted, approved, controlled, aided and abetted the conduct of all other Defendants.

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

3 13. Plaintiff worked for Defendants in Sutter County, California as an hourly-paid, non-
4 exempt employee from approximately September 2019 to approximately September 2022. At all
5 times, Defendants paid Plaintiff an hourly wage and classified Plaintiff as non-exempt from
6 overtime.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Failure to Provide Meal Periods

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

20. Despite these legal requirements, Defendants wrongfully failed to provide Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees with their legally mandated 30-minute, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal period in a manner required by law. Defendants also continued to assert control over Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees by, among other things, requiring, pressuring, or encouraging them to perform work tasks which could not be completed without working in lieu of taking mandatory meal periods, or by denying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees permission to take a meal period under the conditions required by law, and without properly compensating Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for meal periods that were not provided as required by law. Defendants also never informed Plaintiff of Plaintiff's right to, nor permitted Plaintiff to take, a second meal period when Plaintiff worked at least ten hours of work in a workday and otherwise unlawfully pressured Plaintiff to waive such breaks. Accordingly, Defendants' pattern and practice was not to provide meal periods to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees in compliance with California law.

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

C. Failure to Authorize and Permit Rest Breaks

22. Employers are required by California law to authorize and permit breaks of ten

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

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

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

D. Failure to Pay All Earned Wages Twice Per Month

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

26. Labor Code § 204 requires employers to pay employees all earned wages two times per month. Throughout the period applicable to this cause of action, employees were entitled to be paid twice a month at their regular rates, including all meal period premium wages owed, rest

1 period premium wages owed, and wages owed for overtime hours worked. However, during all
2 such times, Defendants systematically failed and refused to pay the employees all wages due, and
3 failed to pay those wages twice a month, in that employees were not paid all wages for all meal
4 periods not provided by Defendants, all wages for all rest periods not authorized and permitted by
5 Defendants, and all wages for all hours worked. As a result, Defendants owe employees the legally
6 required wages not paid, and Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees suffered damages in those
7 amounts.

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

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

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

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

1 and disputing the wage payments paid to them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

26 34. Labor Code § 226(a) provides that every employer shall furnish each of his or her
27 employees an accurate itemized wage statement in writing showing nine pieces of information,
28 including: (1) gross wages earned, (2) total hours worked by the employee, (3) the number of piece-

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

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

16 36. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants failed to furnish Plaintiff and the
17 Aggrieved Employees with accurate, itemized wage statements showing all applicable hourly rates,
18 and all gross and net wages earned (including correct hours worked, correct wages for meal periods
19 that were not provided in accordance with California law, and correct wages for rest periods that
20 were not authorized and permitted to take in accordance with California law). Because Defendants
21 violated Labor Code § 226, Plaintiff and similarly Aggrieved Employees suffered injury and
22 damage to their statutorily protected rights. Accordingly, Plaintiff and similarly Aggrieved
23 Employees are entitled to recover damages from Defendants including the greater of their actual
24 damages caused by Defendants’ failure to comply with Labor Code § 226(a), or an aggregate
25 penalty not exceeding four thousand dollars (\$4,000) dollars per employee, or as otherwise
26 permitted by PAGA based upon all bases of liability.

H. Failure to Indemnify for Necessary Expenditures

37. Labor Code § 2802(a) provides that employers shall indemnify their employees for all necessary business expenditures or losses that have been incurred by the employees in direct discharge of his or her duties. Throughout the period applicable to this cause of action, Defendants wrongfully required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to pay expenses that they incurred in direct discharge of their duties for Defendants. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees regularly paid out-of-pocket for necessary employment-related expenses, including, without limitation, work attire, cell phone expenses and work tools. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees incurred substantial expenses as a direct result of performing their job duties for Defendants, but Defendants failed to indemnify Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for these employment-related expenses.

38. As a result, Defendants are liable to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in Labor Code §§ 2802 and 2699(f)(2) for failing to indemnify Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for necessary business expenditures.

I. Failure to Produce Requested Employment Records

39. Pursuant to California Labor Code § 226, current and former employees have the right to inspect or receive a copy of their records pertaining to their employment, upon reasonable request to their employer. Under this statute, an employer that receives a request to inspect or receive a copy of records pertaining to a current or former employee must comply with the request as soon as practicable, but no later than twenty-one (21) calendar days from the date of the request.

40. Pursuant to California Labor Code § 1198.5(a), every current and former employee, or his or her representative, has the right to inspect and receive a copy of the personnel records that the employer maintains relating to the employee's performance or to any grievance concerning the employee. Under this statute, upon written request from a current or former employee or his or her representative, an employer must make the contents of those personnel records available for inspection or provide a copy of the personnel records to the current or former employee, or his or her representative, not later than thirty (30) calendar days from the date the employer receives the written request, subject to some limited exceptions. Failure to comply with these requests allows

for a civil penalty seven hundred fifty dollars (\$750), pursuant to Labor Code §§ 1198.5(k) and 226(f).

41. As set forth above, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are current and former employees of Defendants.

42. On October 5, 2022, Plaintiff sent written requests through Plaintiff's counsel to Defendants for Plaintiff's personnel file, pay records, wage statements, timekeeping records, and other employment-related documents pursuant to Labor Code section 226 and 1198.5. However, Defendants failed to timely produce the requested employment records, in violation of Labor Code sections 226 and 1198.5.

43. Defendants violated California Labor Code §§ 226 and 1198.5 by failing to timely produce the required records requested by Plaintiff.

44. On information and belief, Defendants' failure to provide Plaintiff with Plaintiff's requested employment records is not an isolated incident, but was instead consistent with Defendants' policy and practice that applied to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees.

45. Pursuant to California Labor Code § 1198.5, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are entitled to a penalty of seven hundred fifty dollars (\$750) from Defendants, injunctive relief in the form of compliance with section 1198.5, and attorneys' fees and costs.

46. Pursuant to California Labor Code § 226, Plaintiff is entitled to a penalty of seven hundred fifty dollars (\$750) from Defendants, injunctive relief in the form of compliance with section 226, and attorneys' fees and cost.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

(By All Plaintiffs Against All Defendants for Civil Penalties Under the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, Cal. Lab. Code § 2698 et seq.)

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

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

50. Plaintiff Ismael Villegas-Sanchez gave written notice by online filing pursuant to California Labor Code § 2699.3 to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency and by certified mail to Defendant of the specific provisions of the Labor Code that Defendants have violated against Plaintiff and current and former aggrieved employees, including the facts and theories to support the violations. Plaintiff also paid the filing fee. Plaintiff's PAGA case number is LWDA-CM-944087-23 (ISMAEL VILLEGAS-SANCHEZ v. COE ORCHARDEQUIPMENT, INC.). The Labor and Workforce Development Agency has not indicated that it intends to investigate Defendants' Labor Code violations discussed in the notice. Plaintiff hereby commences a civil action to recover penalties under Labor Code § 2699 pursuant to § 2699.3 for the violations of the Labor Code described in this Complaint. These penalties include, but are not limited to, penalties under California Labor Code §§ 210, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1, and 2699.

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

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

Plaintiff, individually, and on behalf of the State of California, and on behalf of all similarly

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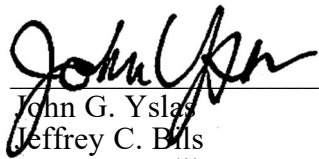
aggrieved employees, prays for relief and judgment against Defendants, jointly and severally, as follows:

1. That the Court declare, adjudge and decree that Defendants violated the California Labor Code by failing to pay for all hours worked (minimum, straight time, and overtime wages), failing to provide meal periods, failing to authorize and permit rest periods, failing to pay all earned wages twice per month, failing to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods, failing to timely pay final wages, failing to furnish accurate wage statements, failing to indemnify for necessary expenditures, and failing to produce requested employment records;
2. An award of civil penalties on behalf of Plaintiff, individually, and on behalf of the State of California, and all similarly aggrieved employees pursuant to PAGA;
3. Pre-judgment and post-judgment interest at the maximum rate allowed;
4. Attorneys' fees and costs reasonably incurred;
5. Injunctive and declaratory relief to the extent allowed by PAGA; and,
6. Such other and further relief that the Court deems proper.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: August 1, 2023

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM

By: 
John G. Yslas
Jeffrey C. Bils
Aram Boyadjian
Andrew Sandoval

Attorneys for Plaintiff