

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 SAN DIEGO**

ALEXANDRA SMITH, on behalf of the State of
California and other aggrieved persons,

Plaintiff,

v.

PUBLIC STORAGE, a Maryland corporation;
and DOES 1 through 10, inclusive,

Defendant.

ELECTRONICALLY FILED
Superior Court of California,
County of San Diego
05/30/2023 at 12:01:00 AM
Clerk of the Superior Court
By Andrea Naranjo, Deputy Clerk

Case No.: 37-2023-00022514-CU-OE-CTL

**PAGA REPRESENTATIVE ACTION
COMPLAINT:**

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

Plaintiff Alexandra Smith (“Plaintiff”), on information and belief, alleges as follows:

INTRODUCTION & PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendant Public Storage, and DOES 1 through 10 (collectively referred to as “Defendants”) for civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code §§ 2698 *et seq.* (“PAGA”) stemming from Defendant’s failure to pay for all hours worked (minimum, straight time, and overtime wages), failure to provide meal periods, failure to authorize and permit rest periods, failure to pay all earned wages twice per month, failure to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods, failure to timely pay final wages, failure to furnish accurate wage statements, and failure to indemnify employees for expenditures.

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

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

4. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendant seeking only to recover penalties on behalf of all Aggrieved Employees that worked for Defendant, 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

1 for those violations, but simply penalties as permitted by California Labor Code Section 2699,
2 declaratory relief, and injunctive relief for herself and all Aggrieved Employees as permitted by
3 the PAGA.

4 5. Defendant owns/owned and operates/operated an industry, business, and
5 establishment within the State of California, including San Diego County. As such and based upon
6 all the facts and circumstances incident to Defendant's business in California, Defendant is subject
7 to the California Labor Code, Wage Orders issued by the Industrial Welfare Commission ("IWC"),
8 and the California Business & Professions Code.

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

12 7. At all relevant times, Defendant was and is legally responsible for all of the unlawful
13 conduct, patterns, practices, acts and omissions as described in each and all of the foregoing
14 paragraphs as the employer of Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees. Further, Defendant is
15 responsible for each of the unlawful acts or omissions complained of herein under the doctrine of
16 "respondeat superior."

17 THE PARTIES

18 **A. Plaintiffs**

19 8. Plaintiff Alexandra Smith is a resident of San Diego, California who worked for
20 Defendants in San Diego County, California as an hourly-paid, non-exempt employee from
21 approximately August 2022 to March 2023.

22 **B. Defendants**

23 9. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based upon that information and belief
24 alleges, that Defendant Public Storage is, and at all times herein mentioned, was:

- 25 (a) A business entity conducting business in numerous counties throughout the
26 State of California, including San Diego County; and,
27 (b) The former employer of Plaintiff, and the current and/or former employer of
28 Aggrieved Employees, because Defendant Public Storage suffered and

permitted Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to work; and/or controlled their wages, hours, or working conditions; and or engaged Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees, thereby creating a common law employment relationship.

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

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

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

///

///

ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL CAUSES OF ACTION

13. Plaintiff Alexandra Smith worked for Defendant Public Storage in San Diego County, California as an hourly-paid, non-exempt employee from approximately August 2022 to March 2023. At all times, Defendant paid Plaintiff an hourly wage and classified him as non-exempt from overtime.

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

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

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

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

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

18. Throughout the statutory period, Defendant maintained a pattern and practice of not paying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all hours worked, including minimum, straight time, and overtime wages. Defendant required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work "off-the-clock," uncompensated, by, for example, requiring Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to perform work after during uncompensated meal periods and/or requiring Plaintiff and the 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, Defendant

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, Defendant 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. Defendant 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. Defendant also never informed Plaintiff of his right to, nor permitted him to take, a second meal period when Plaintiff worked at least ten hours of work in a workday and otherwise unlawfully pressured her to waive such breaks. Accordingly, Defendant 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). Defendant, 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, Defendant has wrongfully failed to authorize and permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to take legally compliant rest periods in a manner required by law. Defendant also regularly required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work in excess of four consecutive hours a day without Defendant 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, Defendant 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, Defendant's 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. Defendant, 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 their failure to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all wages as discussed above, Defendant 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 period premium wages owed, and wages owed for overtime hours worked. However, during all

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

25 34. Labor Code § 226(a) provides that every employer shall furnish each of his or her
26 employees an accurate itemized wage statement in writing showing nine pieces of information,
27 including: (1) gross wages earned, (2) total hours worked by the employee, (3) the number of piece-
28 rate units earned and any applicable piece rate if the employee is paid on a piece-rate basis, (4) all

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

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

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

1 discharge of his or her duties. Throughout the period applicable to this cause of action, Defendant
2 wrongfully required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to pay expenses that they incurred in
3 direct discharge of their duties for Defendant. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees regularly
4 paid out-of-pocket for necessary employment-related expenses, including, without limitation, use
5 of personal cell phone. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees incurred substantial expenses as a
6 direct result of performing their job duties for Defendant, but Defendant failed to indemnify
7 Plaintiffs and the Aggrieved Employees for these employment-related expenses.

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

11 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

12 **(By All Plaintiffs Against All Defendants for Civil Penalties Under the Private Attorneys 13 General Act of 2004, Cal. Lab. Code § 2698 et seq.)**

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

16 40. At all times herein mentioned, Defendant was subject to the Labor Code of the State
17 of California and the applicable IWC Orders.

18 41. California Labor Code § 2699(a) specifically provides for a private right of action
19 to recover penalties for violations of the Labor Code: “Notwithstanding any other provision of law,
20 any provision of this code that provides for a civil penalty to be assessed and collected by the Labor
21 and Workforce Development Agency or any of its departments, divisions, commissions, boards,
22 agencies, or employees, for a violation of this code, may, as an alternative, be recovered through a
23 civil action brought by an aggrieved employee on behalf of herself or himself and other current or
24 former employees pursuant to the procedures specified in Section 2699.3.”

25 42. Plaintiff Alexandra Smith gave written notice by online filing pursuant to California
26 Labor Code § 2699.3 to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency and by certified mail to
27 Defendant of the specific provisions of the Labor Code that Defendant has violated against Plaintiff
28 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-946612-23 (ALEXANDRA SMITH v. PUBLIC STORAGE). The Labor and Workforce Development Agency has not indicated that it intends to investigate Defendant's 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.

43. Based on the conduct described in this Complaint, Plaintiff is entitled to an award of civil penalties on behalf of the State of California and similarly Aggrieved Employees of Defendant. 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.

44. In addition, Plaintiff seeks an award of reasonable attorney's 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."

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Plaintiff, on behalf of all similarly aggrieved employees, prays for relief and judgment against Defendant, jointly and severally, as follows:

1. That the Court declare, adjudge and decree that Defendant 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;

2. An award of civil penalties on behalf of themselves 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,

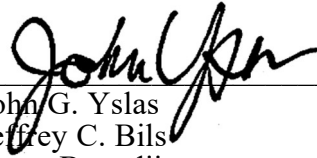
6. Such other and further relief that the Court deems proper.

///

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: May 26, 2023

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM

By: 

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

Attorneys for Plaintiff