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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO

KARINA SERRANO, individually, and on behalf of other members of the general public similarly situated, and on behalf of other aggrieved employees pursuant to the California Private Attorneys General Act;

Plaintiff,

vs.

ALASKA USA FEDERAL CREDIT UNION, an unknown business entity; and DOES 1 through 100, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: CIVDS2020498

Honorable Jessica Morgan
Department S26

CLASS ACTION

PLAINTIFF'S NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT; MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

[Declaration of Proposed Class Counsel (Yasmin Hosseini); Declaration of Proposed Class Representative (Karina Serrano); and [Proposed] Order filed concurrently herewith]

Date:	February 27, 2024
Time:	8:30 a.m.
Department:	S26
Complaint Filed:	October 6, 2020
FAC Filed:	August 31, 2023
Trial Date:	None Set

TO THE HONORABLE COURT AND TO ALL PARTIES AND THEIR COUNSEL OF RECORD:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on February 27, 2024 at 8:30 a.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard before the Honorable Jessica Morgan in Department S26 of the Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles, located at 247 West Third Street, San Bernardino, CA 92415, Plaintiff Karina Serrano ("Plaintiff" or "Class Representative") will, and hereby does, move for an order:

- Granting preliminary approval of the proposed class action settlement described herein and as set forth in the Joint Stipulation of Class Action and PAGA Settlement and Release ("Settlement," "Agreement," or "Settlement Agreement") attached as "**EXHIBIT 1**" to the Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini, including, but not limited to, the means of allocation and distribution of funds, including and not limited to, the allocations for penalties under the California Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, Attorneys' Fees and Costs to Class Counsel, Enhancement Award to Plaintiff, and Settlement Administration Costs to the Settlement Administrator;
- Conditionally certifying the Class for settlement purposes;
- Preliminarily appointing Plaintiff Karina Serrano as Class Representative;
- Preliminarily appointing Arby Aiwazian, Joanna Ghosh, and Yasmin Hosseini of Lawyers *for* Justice, PC as Class Counsel;
- Approving the proposed Notice of Class Action Settlement ("Class Notice"), attached as "**EXHIBIT A**" to the [Proposed] Order Granting Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement;
- Directing the mailing of the Class Notice to the Class Members;
- Approving the proposed deadlines for the notice and settlement administration process;
- Approving ILYM Group, Inc. as the Settlement Administrator; and

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- Scheduling a hearing to consider whether to grant final approval of the Settlement, at which time the Court will also consider whether to grant final approval of the requests for the Attorneys' Fees and Costs to Class Counsel, Enhancement Award for Plaintiff, and Settlement Administration Costs to Settlement Administrator.

This Motion is made pursuant to Rule 3.769 and Rule 3.1113(e) of the California Rules of Court, which require approval by the Court of the settlement of a putative class action, allows the Court to preliminarily certify a class for settlement purposes, and permits the Court to extend the page limit for memoranda.

This motion is based upon the following memorandum of points and authorities, the Settlement Agreement, the Declarations of Proposed Class Counsel (Yasmin Hosseini) and Proposed Class Representative (Karina Serrano) in support thereof, the pleadings and other records on file with the Court in this matter, and such evidence and oral argument as may be presented at the hearing on this motion.

Dated: February _1_, 2024

LAWYERS *for* JUSTICE, PC

By: ________________________________
Yasmin Hosseini
Attorneys for Plaintiff

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. SUMMARY OF MOTION

Plaintiff Karina Serrano ("Plaintiff" or "Class Representative") seeks preliminary approval of the Joint Stipulation of Class Action and PAGA Settlement and Release ("Settlement," "Agreement," or "Settlement Agreement") entered into by and between Plaintiff, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated and other aggrieved employees, on the one hand, and Defendant Alaska USA Federal Credit Union (now known as Global Federal Credit Union) ("Defendant"), on the other hand. Subject to approval by the Court, Plaintiff and Defendant (collectively, the "Parties") have agreed to settle this lawsuit for a Maximum Settlement Amount of Six Hundred Ninety-Five Thousand Dollars ($695,000.00).[1] The Maximum Settlement Amount includes the following: (1) Individual Settlement Shares to Settlement Class Members which will be distributed from the Net Settlement Amount[2]; (2) the Enhancement Award of Ten Thousand Dollars ($10,000.00) to Plaintiff[3]; (3) the Attorneys' Fees and Costs to Class Counsel, consisting of attorneys' fees in the amount of thirty-five percent (35%) of the Maximum Settlement Amount, or $243,250.00 if the Maximum Settlement Amount remains $695,000.00, and reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses not to exceed Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars ($25,000.00)[4]; (4) the Settlement Administration Costs to the Settlement Administrator in the amount not to exceed Twenty Thousand Dollars ($20,000.00);[5] and (5) the amount of Forty-Five Thousand Dollars ($45,000.00) allocated to penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA Penalties"), of which 75% (i.e., $33,750.00) will be distributed to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and 25% (i.e., $11,250.00) will be distributed to PAGA Group Members ("PAGA Amount").[6]

Plaintiff also seeks to provisionally certify the following Class for settlement purposes, which Defendant does not oppose:

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[1] Settlement Agreement, attached as "**EXHIBIT 1**" to Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini ("Hosseini Decl."), ¶ 8.u.
[2] *Id.*, ¶ 8.s.
[3] *Id.*, ¶ 13.
[4] *Id.*, ¶ 12.
[5] *Id.*, ¶ 14.
[6] *Id.*, ¶ 15. "PAGA Period," means the period from April 3, 2022 to November 6, 2022. *See id.*, ¶ 8.cc.

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> All current and former hourly-paid or non-exempt employees who worked for Defendant within the State of California at any time during the period form October 6, 2016 through November 6, 2022, except for those individuals who previously settled or released any of the Released Class Claims or any person who was previously paid or received awards through civil or administrative actions for the Released Class Claims ("Class" or "Class Members").[7]

Class Members who do not submit a timely and valid Request for Exclusion from the Class Settlement ("Settlement Class Member") will receive a share of the Net Settlement Amount ("Individual Settlement Share") on a *pro rata* basis based upon the number of weeks each Class Member worked for Defendants as an hourly-paid or non-exempt employee in California during the Class Period ("Workweeks").[8]

PAGA Group Members will receive a share of the 25% portion of the PAGA Penalty Amount ("Individual PAGA Payment") on a *pro rata* basis, based on the number of Workweeks during the PAGA Period.[9]

The Settlement, if granted preliminary and final approval by the Court, will operate to resolve the Released Class Claims of Plaintiff and Settlement Class Members, and the Released PAGA Claims of Plaintiff, PAGA Group Members, and the State of California, against the Released Parties.[10]

II. PROCEDURAL HISTORY AND FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Defendant is a not-for-profit financial services cooperative offering checking and saving accounts, consumer loans, credit cards, business services, personal insurance, real estate loans and mortgage loans. Plaintiff Karina Serrano is a former employee of Defendant.

On October 6, 2020, Plaintiff filed a Class Action Complaint for Damages in the San Bernardino County Superior Court ("Court"), thereby commencing the above-captioned lawsuit ("Action").

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[7] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 8.c. "Class Period" is defined as the period from October 6, 2016 through November 6, 2022. *See id.*, ¶ 8.f.
[8] *Id.*, ¶¶ 8.ll, 8.t & 8.nn.
[9] *Id.*, ¶ 8.r.
[10] See *id.* at ¶ 8.gg, for the full scope of the "Released Class Claims," id at ¶ 8.hh, for the full scope of the "Released PAGA Claims," and *id.* at ¶ 8.ii for the definition of the "Released Parties."

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On April 3, 2023, Plaintiff submitted notice to the California Labor & Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and Defendant of her intent to pursue civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act, Cal. Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq.

On August 31, 2023, Plaintiff the First Amended Class Action Complaint for Damages & Enforcement Under the Private Attorneys General Act, California Labor Code § 2698, Et Seq. ("Operative Complaint"), adding a Private Attorneys General Act (Labor Code § 2698, *et seq*.) ("PAGA") cause of action.

Plaintiff's core allegation is that Defendant has violated the California Labor Code by engaging in a uniform practice and procedure, with respect to Plaintiff, Class Members, and PAGA Group Members, of, *inter alia*, failing to pay all overtime and minimum wages, failing to provide compliant meal and rest periods and associated premium pay, failing to timely pay wages during employment and upon termination of employment, failing to provide compliant wage statements, failing to maintain requisite payroll records, and failing to reimburse necessary business expenses, and thereby engaged in unfair business practices in violation of California Business and Professions Code section 17200, *et seq.* and conduct that gives rise to penalties pursuant to PAGA. Plaintiff contends that she, and the Class Members, are entitled to, *inter alia*, unpaid wages, penalties (including and not limited to, penalties pursuant to PAGA), and attorneys' fees.

Defendant has denied, and continues to deny, any liability and wrongdoing of any kind associated with any of the allegations in the Action, and further denies that the Action is appropriate for class treatment or representative adjudication for any purpose other than for settlement purposes only.

The Parties have actively litigated the Action since it was commenced on October 6, 2020. On October 6, 2022, the Parties participated in a formal, full-day mediation conducted by the Honorable Raul A. Ramirez (Ret.), a well-regarded mediator experienced in mediating complex labor and employment matters. With the aid of the mediator's evaluation, the Parties ultimately reached the Settlement described herein to resolve the Action in its entirety.

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III. SUMMARY OF THE SETTLEMENT TERMS

Under the terms of the Settlement, Defendant will pay a Maximum Settlement Amount to resolve the Released Class Claims of Plaintiff and the Class Members who do not submit a timely and valid Request for Exclusion from the Class Settlement (i.e., Settlement Class Member) and the Released PAGA Claims of Plaintiff, PAGA Group Members, and the State of California, with respect to the Released Parties.[11] Subject to approval by the Court, the Net Settlement Amount will be calculated by deducting the following amounts from the Maximum Settlement Amount: (1) attorneys' fees in an amount not to exceed up to thirty-five percent (35%) of the Maximum Settlement Amount (i.e., $243,250.00 if the Maximum Settlement Amount remains $695,000.00) and reimbursement of costs and expenses in an amount not to exceed Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars ($25,000.00) to Class Counsel (collectively referred to as the "Attorneys' Fees and Costs"); (2) settlement administration costs, which are currently estimated not to exceed Twenty Thousand Dollars ($20,000.00) to the Settlement Administrator ("Settlement Administration Costs"); (3) payment PAGA Penalties Forty-Five Thousand Dollars ($45,000.00) of which 75% will be distributed to the LWDA (i.e., $33,750.00) ("LWDA Payment") and the remaining 25% (i.e., $11,250.00) will be distributed to PAGA Group Members; and (4) payment in the amount of up to Ten Thousand Dollars ($10,000.00) to Plaintiff Karina Serrano ("Enhancement Award").[12] The Parties have agreed to retain ILYM Group, Inc. ("ILYM" or "Settlement Administrator") to handle the notice and settlement administration process.

The Parties have agreed that the Settlement Administrator will determine each Settlement Class Member's share of the available Net Settlement Amount ("Individual Settlement Share"), in accordance with the Settlement Agreement and as follows:

a. The Settlement Administrator will divide the final Net Settlement Amount by the Workweeks of all Settlement Class Members during the Class Period to yield the "Class Workweek Value," and multiply each Settlement Class Member's individual Workweeks during the Class Period by the Class Workweek Value to yield his or her Individual Settlement Share.[13]

[11] Settlement Agreement, ¶¶ 8.gg & 8.hh.
[12] *Id.*, ¶¶ 12, 13, 14 & 15.
[13] *Id.*, ¶ 16.a.

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The Parties have agreed that the Individual PAGA Payments will be calculated as follows: the Settlement Administrator will divide the 25% of the PAGA Penalties allocated to PAGA Group Members, i.e., $11,250.00, by the total number of Workweeks worked by all PAGA Group Members during the PAGA Period ("Total PAGA Workweeks") resulting in the PAGA Workweek Value and then multiply each PAGA Group Member's individual Workweeks during the PAGA Period by the PAGA Workweek Value to yield his or her Individual PAGA Payment.[14]

Each Individual Settlement Share will be allocated as follows: twenty percent (20%) as wages, which will be reported on an IRS Form W-2; and the remaining eighty percent (80%) as penalties, interest and non-wage damages, which will be reported on an IRS Form 1099.[15] Individual PAGA Payments will be allocated as 100% penalties, and will not be subject to deductions of any taxes or withholdings for this payment.[16] The Settlement Administrator will withhold the employee's share of taxes and withholdings with respect to the wages portion of the Individual Settlement Shares, and issue checks to Settlement Class Members for their Individual Settlement Payments (i.e., payment of their Individual Settlement Share net of these taxes and withholdings.[17] The employer's share of taxes and contributions on the wages portion of Individual Settlement Shares will be paid separately and in addition to the Maximum Settlement Amount.[18]

Each settlement check will be valid and negotiable for one hundred and eighty (180) calendar days from the date the checks are issued, and thereafter, shall be cancelled.[19] All leftover funds associated with such canceled checks will be transmitted to the A Greater Hope Foundation for Children, Inc., in accordance with California Code of Civil Procedure Section 384, subd. (b).[20]

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[14] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 17.a.
[15] *Id.*, ¶ 28.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Id.*, ¶ 22.
[20] *Ibid.*

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Any Class Member wishing to excluded from the Class Settlement must submit a timely, written letter to be excluded from the Class Settlement ("Request for Exclusion") to the Settlement Administrator, by mail, postmarked no later than forty-five (45) days after from the initial mailing of the Class Notice ("Response Deadline").[21] The Request for Exclusion must: (a) contain the case name and number of the Action; (b) be signed by the Class Member; (c) contain the full name, address, telephone number, and the last four digits of the Social Security Number of the Class Member requesting exclusion; (d) clearly state that the Class Member does not wish to be included in the Class Settlement; and (e) be returned by mail to the Settlement Administrator at the specified address, postmarked on or before the Response Deadline.[22] Any Class Member who validly requests to be excluded from the Class Settlement will not be a Settlement Class Member and will not have any right to object, appeal, or comment on the Class Settlement; however, if the Class Member worked during the PAGA Period, he or she will be a PAGA Group Member, will still receive an Individual PAGA Payment, and will be bound by the PAGA Settlement regardless of whether he or she has submitted a timely and valid Request for Exclusion.[23]

To object to the Class Settlement, Class Members who have not opted out of the Class Settlement (i.e., Settlement Class Members) may submit a written objection to the Class Settlement ("Notice of Objection") to the Settlement Administrator, by mail, on or before the Response Deadline or directly presenting his or her objection orally to the Court at the Final Approval Hearing with or without submitting a written objection to the Class Settlement.[24] The Notice of Objection must: (a) include the case name and number of the Action; (b) include the objector's full name, signature, address, telephone number, and last four digits of his or her Social Security Number; (c) include a written statement of all grounds for the objection accompanied by any legal support for such objection; (d) attach copies of any papers, briefs, or

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[21] Settlement Agreement., ¶¶ 8.jj & 8.kk.
[22] *Id.*, ¶ 8.jj.
[23] *Id.*, ¶ 23.
[24] *Id.*, ¶¶ 8.w. & 25.

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other documents upon which the objection is based; and (e) be returned by mail to the Settlement Administrator at the specified address, postmarked on or before the Response Deadline.[25]

Class Members and/or PAGA Group Members will have the opportunity to dispute the number of Workweeks to which they have been credited, as reflected in their respective Class Notices on or before the Response Deadline.[26] In order to dispute Workweeks attributable to an individual Class Member and/or PAGA Group Member, that Class Member and/or PAGA Group Member must submit a written letter to the Settlement Administrator that: (a) contains the case name and number of the Action; (b) is signed by the Class Member and/or PAGA Group Member; (c) contains the full name, address, telephone number, and the last four digits of the Social Security Number of the disputing Class Member and/or PAGA Group Member; (d) clearly states that the Class Member and/or PAGA Group Member disputes the number of Workweeks credited to them and what they contend is the correct number to be credited to them; (e) includes information and/or attaches documentation demonstrating that the number of Workweeks that the Class Member and/or PAGA Group Member contends should be credited to the Class Member and/or PAGA Group Member is correct; and (f) is returned by mail to the Settlement Administrator at the specified address, postmarked on or before the Response Deadline.[27]

IV. LEGAL STANDARD FOR PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENTS

The settlement of a class action requires approval by the court. *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.* (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1800; Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 1781(f). California courts look to federal authority for guidance with class action settlements. *Dunk*, *supra*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1801, fn.7 (citing *Vasquez v. Superior Court* (1971) 4 Cal.3d 800, 821). The decision to approve or reject a proposed settlement is within the court's discretion. *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 234-35 ("In general, questions whether a settlement was fair and reasonable, whether certification of the class was proper, and whether the attorney fee award

[25] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 8.w.
[26] *Id.*, ¶ 21.
[27] *Id*.

was proper are matters addressed to the trial court's broad discretion."). Accordingly, a court's decision to approve a class action settlement may be reversed only upon a strong showing of "clear abuse of discretion." *Hanlon v. Chrysler Corp.* (9th Cir. 1998) 150 F.3d 1011, 1026; *Class Plaintiff v. City of Seattle* (9th Cir. 1982) 955 F.2d 1268, 1276.

Courts review class action settlements in a two-step process: (1) an earlier conditional review by the court; and (2) a later detailed review after the period during which notice is distributed to class members for their comments or objections. Conte & Newberg, *Newberg on Class Actions* § 11.24 (4th Ed. 2002). This procedure, which is commonly utilized by both federal and state courts, assures class members of the protection of procedural due process safeguards and enables a court to fulfill its role as the guardian of the interest of the settlement class.

Preliminary approval of a settlement does not require a court to make a final determination that the settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate. Rather, that decision is made only at the final approval stage, after notice of the settlement has been given to the class members and they have had an opportunity to voice their views of the settlement or to exclude themselves from the settlement. Cal. R. Ct. 3.769(g).

In considering a potential class settlement, a court need not reach any ultimate conclusions on the issues of fact and law which underlie the merits of the dispute and need not engage in a trial on the merits. See *City of Detroit v. Grinnell Corporation* (2d Cir. 1974) 495 F.2d 448, 456; *Officers for Justice v. Civil Service Commission of City and County of San Francisco* (9th Cir. 1982) 688 F.2d 615, 625. Neither formal notice nor a hearing is required for the trial court to grant provisional class certification and preliminary approval; the court may grant such relief upon an informal application by the settling parties and may conduct any necessary hearing in court or in chambers, at the court's discretion. *Newberg*, § 11.25.

V. <u>THE COURT SHOULD PRELIMINARILY APPROVE THE SETTLEMENT</u>

The trial court has broad powers to determine whether a proposed settlement is fair under the circumstances of the case. *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.* (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794. To make this fairness determination, courts must consider several relevant factors, including "the strength

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of the plaintiff's case, the risk, expense, complexity and likely duration of further litigation, the risk of maintaining class action status through trial, the amount offered in settlement, the extent of discovery completed and the stage of the proceedings, the experience and view of counsel, the presence of a governmental participant, and the reaction of the class members to the proposed settlement." *Dunk, supra*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1801. "The list of factors is not exclusive and the court is free to engage in a balancing and weighing of the factors depending on the circumstances of each case." *Wershba*, *supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 245. Furthermore, courts give "proper deference to the private consensual decision of the parties." *Hanlon*, *supra*, 150 F.3d at 1027 (citation omitted).

The proponent of the settlement has the burden to show that it is fair and reasonable. *Wershba*, *supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 245. "A presumption of fairness exists where: (1) the settlement is reached through arm's-length bargaining; (2) investigation and discovery are sufficient to allow counsel and the court to act intelligently; (3) counsel is experienced in similar litigation; and (4) the percentage of objectors is small." *Id.*; *Dunk*, *supra*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1802; *7-Eleven Owners for Fair Franchising v. Southland Corp.* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 1135, 1151.

A. **The Settlement Resulted from Arm's-Length Negotiations Based Upon Extensive Investigation and Discovery.**

The Parties actively litigated the Action since it was commenced on October 6, 2020. Both sides used the pre-mediation time period to investigate the veracity, strength, and scope of the claims, and Class Counsel was actively preparing the case for class certification and trial.[28]

Prior to engaging in mediation, Class Counsel conducted significant investigation and formal and informal discovery regarding the facts of the case, including and not limited to, the exchange, review, and analysis of a large volume of documents and data produced by Defendant.[29] The volume of data and documents that Class Counsel reviewed and analyzed included and was not limited to: employment records of Plaintiff, earning statements, new hire

[28] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 10-12.
[29] *Id.*, ¶ 11.

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checklist, job description, Employee Handbook, company policy acknowledgements (Acknowledgment Statement), internal memoranda, among other information and documents.[30] Class Counsel had the opportunity to interview Plaintiff and other Class Members to gather facts and to identify potential witnesses.[31] Counsel for the Parties also met and conferred on numerous occasions, e.g., to discuss issues relating to the pleadings, discovery, and the production of documents and data prior to the mediation.[32] Class Counsel also drafted Plaintiff's mediation brief and prepared for and attended court proceedings, settlement negotiations, and the mediation, among other tasks.[33]

The Parties engaged in extensive settlement negotiations and participated in a formal, full-day mediation conducted by Honorable Raul A. Ramirez (Ret.), a well-respected mediator experienced in mediating complex labor and employment matters.[34] Prior to and during the mediation and settlement discussions, the Parties exchanged class information and engaged in an intensive discussion regarding their evaluations of the case and various aspects of the case, including but not limited to, the risks and delays of further litigation, the risks to the Parties of proceeding with class certification and/or representative adjudication, the law relating to off-the-clock theory, meal and rest periods, wage-and-hour enforcement, and PAGA representative claims, as well as the evidence produced and analyzed, and the possibility of appeals, among other things.[35] During all settlement discussions, the Parties conducted their negotiations at arm's length in an adversarial position.[36] Arriving at a settlement that was acceptable to both Parties was not easy. Defendant and its counsel felt strongly about their ability to prevail on the merits and at certification, and Plaintiff and Class Counsel believed that they would be able to obtain class certification and prevail at trial.[37] After conducting investigations, significant formal and informal discovery, extensive settlement negotiations, and with the aid of the

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[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 11.
[34] *Id.*, ¶ 10.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Id.*, ¶¶ 10, 15-17.

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mediator's evaluation, the Parties have agreed that the matter is well-suited for settlement given the legal issues relating to Plaintiff's principal claims, as well as the costs and risks to both sides that would attend further litigation.[38]

The Settlement takes into account the strengths and weaknesses of each side's position and the uncertainty of how the case might have concluded at certification and trial.[39] The Parties have had the opportunity to interview and obtain information from their respective witnesses.[40] Counsel for the Parties have also reviewed documents and information relating to Plaintiff's, Class Members', and PAGA Group Members' employment with Defendant and performed significant research into the law concerning class certification, PAGA representative actions, off-the-clock theory, meal and rest periods, wage-and-hour enforcement, Plaintiff's claims, and Defendant's defenses thereto, as well as facts discovered.[41] The Parties have reached the Settlement based on this large volume of facts, evidence, and investigation. In addition, Class Counsel has extensive experience in employment class actions, including significant experience in California wage-and-hour litigation.[42]

B. <u>The Settlement Is Fair, Reasonable, and Adequate.</u>

The Settlement, which provides for a Maximum Settlement Amount of Six Hundred Ninety-Five Thousand Dollars ($695,000.00), represents a fair, adequate, and reasonable resolution of the matter.[43] The Settlement was calculated using the information and data uncovered during litigation, case investigation, as well as the formal and informal exchange of information.[44] The Settlement takes into account the potential risks and rewards inherent in any case and, in particular, in the case at issue.[45] Moreover, considering all of the facts and circumstances of the lawsuit, the Settlement represents a fair, reasonable, and adequate recovery for the Class.[46]

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[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 10-12 & 15-17.
[42] *Id.*, ¶¶ 6-7.
[43] *Id.*, ¶¶ 10, 12, 13 & 20.
[44] *Id.*, ¶¶ 10-12.
[45] *Id.*, ¶¶ 15-17.
[46] *Id.*, ¶¶ 10, 12, & 20.

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Assuming that the Attorneys' Fees and Costs, Enhancement Award, PAGA Penalties, and Settlement Administration Costs are approved by the Court and paid in the full amounts provided for by the Settlement, the Settlement provides for a Net Settlement Amount that is currently estimated to be Three Hundred and Fifty-One Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Dollars ($351,750.00).[47] Additionally, the 25% of the PAGA Penalties, which is $11,250.00 out of $45,000.00, will be distributed to PAGA Group Members. As discussed in Part III, *supra*, the entire Net Settlement Amount will be fully paid out to the Settlement Class Members, in accordance with the Settlement Agreement. The amount of each Settlement Class Member's Individual Settlement Share will be calculated based on his or her Workweeks during the Class Period and the amount of each PAGA Group Members' Individual PAGA Payment will be based on his or her Workweeks during the PAGA Period.[48] There is no reason to doubt the fairness of the proposed plan of allocation of the settlement funds for purposes of preliminary approval. Even at the final approval stage, "[a]n allocation formula need only have a reasonable, rational basis [to warrant approval], particularly if recommended by experienced and competent class counsel." *In re American Bank Note Holographics, Inc., Securities Litigation* (S.D.N.Y. 2001) 127 F.Supp.2d 418, 429-30.

In light of the foregoing considerations, Class Counsel believes that the Settlement as a whole is fair, reasonable, and adequate, and is in the best interest of the Class Members, PAGA Group Members, and the State of California.[49] Although the recommendations of Class Counsel are not conclusive, the Court can properly take the recommendations into account, particularly if Class Counsel appears to be competent, and has experience with this type of litigation, and investigation have been completed, as is the case here. *Newberg,* §11.47. Accordingly, the Court should grant preliminary approval of the Settlement.

C. <u>The Settlement Is of Significant Value.</u>

Pursuant to *Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc.* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 116, the Parties conducted significant formal and informal discovery and exchanged a large volume of

[47] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 13.
[48] Settlement Agreement, ¶¶ 16 & 17.
[49] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 10, 11, & 20.

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documents, data, and information in the course of litigation and in connection with mediation and settlement negotiations.[50] The discovery and information that Class Counsel obtained from Defendant, Plaintiff, and other sources allowed Class Counsel to develop valuation models in order to evaluate the potential value and merit of the claims, and perform a complete evaluation of Defendant's defenses thereto.[51] As outlined in the Declaration of Yasmin Hosseini, Class Counsel performed an extensive analysis of each and every claim pursuant to *Kullar* prior to entering into the Settlement.[52]

VI. CERTIFICATION OF THE CLASS IS APPROPRIATE

For settlement purposes, the requisites for establishing class certification are met, and the Parties have stipulated to conditional certification of the Class for settlement purposes only.[53] California Code of Civil Procedure Section 382 "authorizes class actions when the question is one of a common or general interest, of many persons, or when the Parties are numerous, and it is impracticable to bring them all before the court." *Sav-On Drug Stores, Inc. v. Superior Court* (2004) 34 Cal.4th 319, 326. California courts certify class actions where the plaintiff identifies "both [1] an ascertainable class and [2] a well-defined community of interest among class members." *Id.*

The Class is ascertainable and numerous as to make it impracticable to join all Class Members, and there are common questions of law and fact that predominate over any questions affecting any individual Class Member. Further, Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class Members, and Class Counsel will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Class. Finally, prosecution of separate actions by individual Class Members would create the risk of inconsistent or varying adjudications, and a class action is superior to other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of the case. The Class is amenable to class certification for settlement purposes as discussed below.

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[50] Hosseini Decl., ¶¶ 10-12 & 17.
[51] *Id.*, ¶ 17.
[52] *Id.*, ¶¶ 10-12 & 15-17.
[53] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 10.

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A. The Class Is Ascertainable and Sufficiently Numerous.

"Ascertainability is required in order to give notice to putative class members as to whom the judgment in the action will be *res judicata*." *Hicks v. Kaufman & Broad Home Corp.* (2001) 89 Cal.App.4th 908, 914. "A class is ascertainable if it identifies a group of unnamed plaintiffs by describing a set of common characteristics sufficient to allow a member of that group to identify himself or herself as having a right to recover based on the description." *Bartold v. Glendale Federal Bank* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 816, 828. The proposed class must also be sufficiently numerous. *Linder v. Thrifty Oil Co.* (2000) 23 Cal.4th 429, 435.

This class is sufficiently numerous. *See Rose v. City of Hayward* (1981) 126 Cal.App.3d 926, 934-35 (indicating that a class of 30 to 40 individuals satisfies the numerosity requirement as joinder is not practical at that point). Further, all Class Members can and will be identified by Defendants to the Settlement Administrator through a review of Defendant's employment records regarding hourly-paid and non-exempt employees in California during the Class Period. As such, the Class is ascertainable and sufficiently numerous.

B. The Class Members Share a Well-Defined Community of Interest.

The community of interest requirement "embodies three factors: (1) predominant common questions of law or fact; (2) class representative with claims or defenses typical of the class; and (3) class representative who can adequately represent the class." *Sav-On*, *supra*, 34 Cal.4th at 326. "[T]he community of interest requirement for certification *does not mandate that class members have uniform or identical claims*." *Capitol People First v. Dep't of Developmental Services* (2007) 155 Cal.App.4th 676, 692 (emphasis in original). Rather, courts focus on the Defendant's internal policies and "pattern and practice . . . in order to assess whether that common behavior toward similarly situated plaintiff renders class certification appropriate." *Id.* (citing *Sav-On, supra*, 34 Cal.4th at 333).

The "common issues" requirement "involves analysis of whether the proponent's 'theory of recovery' is likely to prove compatible with class treatment." *Capitol People, supra*, 155 Cal.App.4th at 690 (emphasis added) (citing *Sav-On, supra*, 34 Cal.4th at 327). Furthermore,

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the commonality inquiry centers on the "reasonableness" of the defendant's labor policies as applied to the potential class. *Ghazaryan*, *supra*, 169 Cal.App.4th at 1534.

Here, common issues of fact and law predominate as to each of the claims alleged and asserted in the Action. Based on the documents and information obtained through formal and informal discovery and exchange of information in this case, Plaintiff contends that Class Members were subject to the same or similar job duties and uniform operations and employment practices, policies, and procedures during the time period at issue.[54] Plaintiff's claims arise from Defendants' alleged uniform policy and systematic scheme, with respect to Plaintiff and the Class Members, of, *inter alia*, failing to properly pay overtime and minimum wages for all hours worked, failing to provide compliant meal and rest periods and associated premium pay, failing to timely pay wages during employment and upon termination of employment, failing to provide complaint wage statements, failing to keep requisite payroll records, and failing to reimburse necessary business-related expenses.[55]

Plaintiff also contends that Defendant's payroll and recordkeeping practices with respect to Plaintiff and the Class Members were substantially the same during the time period at issue.[56] As a result, Plaintiff claims that all of the Class Members were uniformly not paid all compensation due to them from Defendant during the time period at issue.[57]

Plaintiff maintains that the outcome of this litigation would be determined by Defendant's alleged uniform operations and employment policies and procedures that applied across its hourly-paid and non-exempt employees who worked in California during the Class Period. Accordingly, the Court should certify the Class for settlement purposes only.

VII. APPOINTMENT OF CLASS COUNSEL AND ALLOCATION FOR ATTORNEYS' FEES AND COSTS

Class Counsel has litigated the matter for over three (3) years, and was actively preparing the matter for class certification and trial.[58] The ongoing work has been extensive, demanding,

[54] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 15.
[55] *Id.*, ¶ 15.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Id.*, ¶¶ 10-12.

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and ultimately successful in achieving a substantial settlement resolution. Class Counsel conducted extensive investigations into the facts of the case and formal and informal discovery. Class Counsel reviewed a large volume of documents and data[59] and also interviewed and obtained information from Plaintiff and other sources, researched applicable law, undertook damages/valuation calculations, and met and conferred with Defendant's counsel regarding the pleadings and the production of documents and data prior to mediation.[60] Counsel for the Parties also undertook extensive settlement discussions, which included participating in a formal, full-day mediation.[61]

Class Counsel is well-experienced in wage-and-hour class action litigation and used that experience to obtain a great result for the Class.[62]

The Settlement establishes a Maximum Settlement Amount of Six Hundred Ninety-Five Thousand Dollars ($695,000.00), and provides for Class Counsel to apply to the Court for Attorneys' Fees and Costs, consisting of attorneys' fees in an amount not to exceed thirty-five percent (35%) of the Maximum Settlement Amount (i.e., $243,250.00 if the Maximum Settlement Amount remains $695,000.00) and an amount not to exceed Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars and Zero Cents ($25,000.00) for costs and expenses.[63] The attorneys' fees provided for by the Settlement is commensurate with: (1) the risk that Class Counsel took in bringing and litigating the case, (2) the extensive time, effort and expense that Class Counsel dedicated to the case, (3) the skill and determination that Class Counsel has shown, (4) the results that Class Counsel has achieved throughout the litigation, (5) the value of the Settlement that Class Counsel has achieved for the Class Members, and (6) the other cases that Class Counsel had to turn down in order to devote its time and efforts to this matter. The proposed Class Notice provides Class Members with information about the amount allocated toward the Attorneys'

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[59] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 11.
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Id.*, ¶ 10.
[62] *Id.*, ¶¶ 6-7.
[63] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 12.

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Fees and Costs, and that an award of the Attorneys' Fees and Costs will be sought, as provided for by the Settlement.[64]

Trial courts have "wide latitude" in assessing the value of attorneys' fees and their decisions will "not be disturbed on appeal absent a manifest abuse of discretion." *Lealao v. Beneficial Cal., Inc.* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 19, 41. Indeed, it is long settled that the "experienced trial judge is the best judge of the value of professional services rendered in his court." *Ketchum v. Moses* (2001) 24 Cal.4th 1122, 1132. California law provides that attorney fee awards should be equivalent to fees paid in the legal marketplace to compensate for the result achieved and risk incurred. *Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l, Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 503 (citing *Lealao*, *supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 48-49). In *Lealao,* the court held that when an action leads to a recovery that can be "monetized" with a reasonable degree of certainty, the trial court should "ensure that the fee awarded is within the range of fees freely negotiated in the legal marketplace in comparable litigation." *Id.* at 50. In cases where class members present claims against a settlement fund and the settlement agreement provides that the defendant agrees to paying the attorneys a percentage of the same, use of that percentage method is appropriate. *Id.* at 32.

The propriety of calculating and awarding attorneys' fees as a percentage of a settlement that has, by litigation, been preserved or recovered for the benefit of others, has been confirmed by the California Supreme Court. *Laffitte*, *supra*, 1 Cal.5th 480 at 486 & 506. The California Supreme Court has taken the position that "[t]rial courts have discretion to conduct a lodestar cross-check on a percentage fee," "they also retain the discretion to forgo a lodestar cross-check and use other means to evaluate the reasonableness of a requested percentage fee[,]" and "[t]he percentage of fund method survives in California." *Id*. (internal quotation marks omitted).

Historically, courts have awarded fees as high as fifty percent (50%) of the settlement, depending on the circumstances of the case. *Newberg*, § 14.03; *see also In re Ampicillin Antitrust Litig.* (D.D.C. 1981) 526 F.Supp. 494 (awarding attorneys' fees in the amount of 45% of the $7.3 million settlement); *Beech Cinema, Inc. v. Twentieth-Century Fox Film Corp.* (S.D.N.Y. 1979) 480 F.Supp. 1195 (awarding approximately 53% of the settlement as attorneys' fees).

[64] Settlement Agreement., Exh. A.

California courts routinely approve class action attorneys' fee awards "averag[ing] around one-third of the recovery." *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 66 n.11 (lower court found 20 to 40 percent range of contingency fee in marketplace was appropriate in class actions); see also *Estrada v. Dr. Pepper/Seven-Up*, Los Angeles County Superior Court Case No. BC262247 (May 2005) (wage and hour); *Moore v. IKEA*, Los Angeles County Superior Court Case No. BC263646 (Sept. 2006) (wage and hour).

Class Counsel has borne all of the risks and costs of litigation and will not receive any compensation until recovery is obtained.[65]

Class Counsel will provide extensive evidence as to the time worked, litigation efforts, and further argument at the time of filing Plaintiff's motion for final approval of the Settlement and application for the Attorneys' Fees and Costs and at the Final Approval Hearing. Considering the work performed and the risks incurred, the attorneys' fees provided for by the Settlement and to be requested by Class Counsel are well within the range of reasonableness.

VIII. THE PROPOSED CLASS NOTICE IS ADEQUATE

California statutory and case law vests the Court with broad discretion in fashioning appropriate class notice. See Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 1781; *Cartt v. Superior Court* (1975) 50 Cal.App.3d 960, 973-74. A class notice is adequate if it "present[s] a fair recital of the subject matter and proposed terms" of the Settlement. *Mendoza v. United States* (9th Cir. 1980) 623 F.2d 1338, 1351 (quoting *Marshall v. Holiday Magic* (9th Cir. 1977) 550 F.2d 1173, 1177).

The proposed Class Notice[66] describes the Settlement, the deadlines and procedures to mail an objection to the Class Settlement, request exclusion from the Class Settlement, and/or disputes regarding Workweeks, and the date and time set for the Final Approval Hearing.[67]

The proposed Class Notice fulfills the requirement of neutrality in notice procedure. *Newberg,* at § 8.39. "Sufficient information about the case should be provided to enable class members to make an informed decision about their participation." *Manual for Complex Litigation* § 21.311 at 413 (4th ed. 2004). The proposed Class Notice summarizes the

[65] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 18.
[66] Settlement Agreement, Exh. A.
[67] *Ibid.*

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proceedings to date and the terms and conditions of the Settlement in an informative and coherent manner.[68] The proposed Class Notice recognizes that the Court has not yet granted final approval of the settlement.[69] The proposed Class Notice also apprises the Class Members of, *inter alia*, how their Individual Settlement Share is calculated and the number of Workweeks credited to them.[70]

The proposed Class Notice satisfies all due process requirements and complies with the standards of fairness, completeness, and neutrality. Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(2) and 23(e); *Newberg*, §§ 8.21, 8.39; *Manual*, §§ 21.311, 21.312; see also *Cartt*, *supra*, 50 Cal.App.3d at 960 ("The essentials of due process of law in class suits would appear to be afforded by fair representation in the assertion of claims of class members against the opposing parties in any lawsuit, and notice of the pending suit."). Accordingly, the Court should approve the proposed Class Notice.

IX. APPOINTMENT OF ILYM GROUP, INC. AS THE SETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATOR

The Parties have selected ILYM Group, Inc., to administer the Settlement.

The Settlement Administrator will mail the Class Notice to all identified Class Members by First-Class U.S. mail.[71] With respect to Class Notices that are returned as undeliverable on or before the Response Deadline, the Settlement Administrator will search for an alternate address by way of skip-trace and re-mail the Class Notice within five (5) calendar days to an alternate address if one is located.[72] In the event that a Class Notice is re-mailed to a Class Member, the Response Deadline for that Class Member shall be extended by fifteen (15) calendar days from the original deadline.[73] The Settlement Administrator will receive and process Requests for Exclusion, Notice of Objections, and dispute regarding Workweeks.[74]

The Settlement Administrator's duties will include printing, distributing, and tracking Class Notices and other documents for the Settlement, calculating and distributing payments

[68] *Ibid.*
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 20.a.
[72] *Id.*, ¶ 20.b.
[73] *Id.*, ¶ 8.kk.
[74] *Id.*, ¶¶ 21, 23 & 25.

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due under the Settlement, issuing of 1099 and W-2 IRS Forms and all required tax reporting, filings, withholdings, and remittances, providing necessary reports and declarations, and other duties and responsibilities set forth herein to process the Settlement, and as requested by the Parties.[75] The Settlement Administration Costs are currently estimated to be Twenty Thousand Dollars ($20,000.00) and will be paid out of the Maximum Settlement Amount, subject to approval by the Court.[76]

Accordingly, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court appoint ILYM Group, Inc. as the Settlement Administrator and direct the mailing of the Class Notice to the Class Members in the manner outlined and based on the proposed deadlines as described herein and set forth in the Settlement Agreement.

X. PROPOSED DEADLINES FOR THE NOTICE PROCESS

At this preliminary approval stage, plaintiff seeks approval of the proposed deadlines for the notice and settlement administration process. *Newberg*, at § 11.26. The notice process entails mailing of the Class Notice, in the form approved by the Court, to all known and reasonably ascertainable Class Members based on Defendant's records.[77]

Within fourteen (14) calendar days of Preliminary Approval, Defendant will provide the Settlement Administrator with a complete list which will include each Class Member's full name, last known address, Social Security Number, start and end dates of employment by Defendant during the Class Period and, if applicable, during the PAGA Period, the number of Workweeks worked for Defendant during the period from October 6, 2016 through November 6, 2022, and such other information and data as necessary to determine each Class Member's Workweeks during the Class Period and each PAGA Group Member's Workweeks during the PAGA Period.[78]

Within fourteen (14) calendar days from the receipt of the Class List from Defendant, the Settlement Administrator will perform a search based on the National Change of Address

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[75] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 14.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Id.*, ¶ 20.a.
[78] *Id.*, ¶¶ 8.d & 19.

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Database or any other similar services available, such as provided by Experian, for information to update and correct for any known or identifiable address changes, and will mail a Class Notice in English to all Class Members via First-Class U.S. Mail.[79] With respect to Class Notices that are returned as undeliverable on or before the Response Deadline, the Settlement Administrator will search for an alternate address by way of skip-trace and re-mail the Class Notice within five (5) calendar days to an alternate address is one is located.[80] Class Members will have until the applicable Response Deadline to mail a Request for Exclusion, disputes regarding Workweeks, and/or a Notice of Objection.[81]

Within fifteen (15) calendar days after the Effective Date, the Settlement Administrator will provide the Parties with an accounting of the amounts to be paid by Defendant.[82] Within thirty (30) calendar days of the Effective Date, Defendant will make a one-time deposit of the Maximum Settlement Amount, along with any employer-side tax obligations associated with the Maximum Settlement Amount, into a settlement account to be established by the Settlement Administrator.[83] Within seven (7) calendar days of the funding of the Maximum Settlement Amount, the Settlement Administrator will issue payments due under the Settlement and approved by the Court, as follows: (a) Individual Settlement Shares to Settlement Class Members; (b) Individual PAGA Payments to PAGA Group Members; (c) LWDA Payment to the LWDA; (d) Enhancement Award to Plaintiff; (e) Attorneys' Fees and Costs to Class Counsel; and (f) Settlement Administration Costs to the Settlement Administrator.[84]

Each Individual Settlement Payment and Individual PAGA Payment check will be valid and negotiable for one hundred and eighty (180) calendar days from the date the checks are issued and thereafter, shall be canceled.[85] All leftover funds associated with such canceled checks will be transmitted to the A Greater Hope Foundation for Children, Inc., in accordance

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[79] Settlement Agreement., ¶ 20.a.
[80] *Id.*, ¶ 20.b.
[81] *Id.*, ¶¶ 21, 23 & 25.
[82] *Id.*, ¶ 11.
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] *Id.*, ¶ 22.

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with California Code of Civil Procedure Section 384, subd.(b).[86]

XI. APPOINTMENT OF CLASS REPRESENTATIVE AND ALLOCATION FOR ENHANCEMENT AWARD

Plaintiff Karina Serrano respectfully requests that the Court appoint her as the Class Representative and preliminarily approve the Enhancement Award in an amount up to Ten Thousand Dollars ($10,000.00) to Plaintiff Karina Serrano.[87] It is within the Court's discretion to award payment to a class representative for their efforts and work. *Vranken v. Atlantic Richfield Co.* (N.D. Cal. 1995) 901 F.Supp. 294, 299 (approving $50,000 participation award to a single class representative). The factors that courts may consider in determining whether to make an enhancement payment include: (1) the risk to the class representative in commencing suit, both financial and otherwise; (2) the notoriety and personal difficulties encountered by the class representative; (3) the amount of time and effort spent by the class representative; (4) the duration of the litigation; and (5) the personal benefit (or lack thereof) enjoyed by the class representative as a result of the litigation. *Id*.

The Enhancement Award is fair and appropriate. Plaintiff spent a substantial amount of time and effort in producing relevant documents and past employment records and providing the facts and evidence necessary to attempt to prove the allegations.[88] Plaintiff was available whenever Class Counsel needed her and actively tried to obtain and provide information that would facilitate the pursuit of class and PAGA claims.[89] Accordingly, it is appropriate and just for Plaintiff to receive an Enhancement Award for her services on behalf of the Class, PAGA Group Members, and the State of California, in addition to her individual settlement payments.

XII. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court grant preliminary approval of the Settlement; conditionally certify the Class for settlement purposes; preliminary appoint and designate Lawyers *for* Justice, PC as Class Counsel; preliminary appoint and

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[86] *Ibid.*
[87] Settlement Agreement, ¶ 13.
[88] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 19; Declaration of Karina Serrano in Support of Plaintiff's Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement ("Serrano Decl."), ¶ 4.
[89] Hosseini Decl., ¶ 19; Serrano Decl., ¶¶ 3-6.

designate Plaintiff Karina Serrano as Class Representative; appoint ILYM Group, Inc. as Settlement Administrator; preliminarily approve the allocations for Attorneys' Fees and Costs, Enhancement Award, PAGA Penalties, and Settlement Administration Costs; approve the proposed Class Notice; direct the Settlement Administrator to undertake the notice and settlement administration process in conformity with the deadlines and procedures provided by the Settlement Agreement; schedule a Final Approval Hearing to take place in approximately six (6) months.

Dated: February 1, 2024

LAWYERS *for* JUSTICE, PC

By: ______________________________
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