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VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT

FILED

07/30/2024

Brenda L. McCormick
Executive Officer and Clerk

Elizabeth Muller
Elizabeth Muller

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF VENTURA**

GIANNA GRAZIANO, individually, and on
behalf of other members of the general public
similarly situated;

Plaintiff,

v.

SYNERGY SHIPPING LLC, a California
corporation; and DOES 1 through 100,
inclusive;

Defendants.

Case No.: 56-2022-00568488-CU-OE-VTA

Assigned for All Purposes to:
Honorable Ronda J. McKaig
Department 41

CLASS ACTION

**~~PROPOSED~~ ORDER OF FINAL
APPROVAL AND JUDGMENT**

Hearing Date: July 26, 2024
Hearing Time: 8:20 a.m.
Hearing Place: Department 41

Complaint Filed: July 27, 2022
FAC Filed: June 27, 2023
Trial Date: None Set

1 The Court, having read the papers filed regarding Plaintiffs Gianna Graziano and Ethan
2 Burch's ("Plaintiffs") Motion for Final Approval of Class Action Settlement, and considering the
3 papers submitted in support of the motion, including the Class Action and PAGA Settlement
4 Agreement ("Settlement Agreement," "Settlement," or "Agreement"), hereby **FINDS AND**
5 **ORDERS:**

6 Plaintiffs and Defendant Synergy Shipping LLC ("Defendant") entered the Settlement
7 Agreement on or about November 16, 2023 to settle this lawsuit.

8 The Court entered an order dated April 8, 2024 preliminarily approving the settlement of
9 this lawsuit ("Preliminary Approval Order"), consistent with the Code of Civil Procedure section
10 382 and California Rule of Court 3.769, ordering notice to be sent to the Class Members,
11 providing the Class Members with an opportunity to object to the Settlement or exclude
12 themselves from the Class, and scheduling a Final Approval Hearing.

13 The Court held a Final Approval Hearing on July 26, 2024 to determine whether to give
14 final approval to the Settlement of this lawsuit.

15 1. Incorporation of Other Documents. This Order of Final Approval and Judgment
16 ("Order and Judgment") incorporates the Settlement Agreement. Unless otherwise provided
17 herein, all capitalized terms in this Order and Judgment shall have the same meaning as set forth
18 in the Settlement Agreement.

19 2. Jurisdiction. Because adequate notice has been disseminated and the Class has
20 been given the opportunity to request exclusion, the Court has personal jurisdiction with respect
21 to the claims of all Class Members. The Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this lawsuit,
22 including jurisdiction to approve the Settlement and grants final certification of the Class.

23 3. Final Class Certification. The Court finds the Class satisfies all applicable
24 requirements of Code of Civil Procedure section 382, California Rule of Court 3.769, and due
25 process. The Court certifies the Class consisting of all current and former hourly-paid or non-
26 exempt employees of Defendant within the State of California at any time during the period from
27 July 22, 2019, through August 21, 2023 ("Class," "Class Members," and "Class Period"). There
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are four hundred (400) Class Members who did not submit valid and timely Requests for Exclusion from the Settlement (“Participating Class Members”).¹

4. Adequacy of Representation. Class Counsel fully and adequately represented the Class for the purposes of entering and implementing the Settlement and satisfied the requirements of Code of Civil Procedure section 382.

5. Class Notice. The Court finds the Court Approved Notice of Class Action Settlement and Hearing Date for Final Court Approval (“Class Notice”) and its distribution to the Class Members were implemented pursuant to the Settlement and this Court’s Preliminary Approval Order. The Court also finds the Class Notice:

- a. constitutes notice reasonably calculated to apprise the Class Members of: (i) pendency of this lawsuit; (ii) material terms and provisions of the Settlement Agreement and their rights; (iii) their right to object to any aspect of the Settlement Agreement; (iv) their right to exclude themselves from the Settlement Agreement; (v) their right to receive settlement payments; (vi) their right to appear at the Final Approval Hearing; and (vii) binding effect of the orders and judgment in this lawsuit on all the Participating Class Members;
- b. constitutes notice that fully satisfied the requirements of Code of Civil Procedure section 382, California Rule of Court 3.769, and due process;
- c. constitutes the best practicable notice to the Class Members under the circumstances of this lawsuit; and
- d. constitutes notice reasonable, adequate, and sufficient to the Class Members.

6. Enforcement of Settlement. Nothing in this Order and Judgment shall preclude any action to enforce the terms and provisions of the Settlement Agreement.

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¹ The Administrator mailed Class Notices to four hundred two (402) Class Members and received two (2) requests for exclusion. Thus, there are four hundred (400) Participating Class Members.

1 7. Final Settlement Approval. The terms and provisions of the Settlement
2 Agreement have been entered into in good faith and are the product of arm's-length negotiations
3 by experienced counsel who have carried out a meaningful investigation of the claims. The
4 Settlement Agreement and all its terms and provisions are fully and finally approved as fair,
5 reasonable, adequate, and in the best interests of the Parties. The Parties are hereby directed to
6 implement the Settlement Agreement according to its terms and provisions.

7 8. Binding Effect. The terms and provisions of the Settlement Agreement and this
8 Order and Judgment are binding on Plaintiffs, Participating Class Members, Aggrieved
9 Employees, and their spouses, heirs, registered domestic partners, executors, administrators,
10 successors, and assigns. In addition, those terms shall have res judicata and other preclusive
11 effect in all pending and future claims, lawsuits, or other proceedings maintained by or on behalf
12 of any such persons to the extent those claims, lawsuits, or other proceedings involve matters
13 that were or could have been raised in this lawsuit and are encompassed by the Released Class
14 Claims and Released Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 ("PAGA") Claims. The Settlement
15 Agreement will have no binding effect upon, and provide no res judicata preclusion to, those
16 Class Members who have submitted timely requests for exclusion.

17 9. Release by Participating Class Members Who Are Not Aggrieved Employees.
18 Effective on the date when Defendant fully funds the entire Gross Settlement Amount and funds
19 all employer payroll taxes owed on the Wage Portion of the Individual Class Payments, all
20 Participating Class Members, on behalf of themselves and their former and present
21 representatives, agents, attorneys, heirs, administrators, successors, and assigns, release the
22 Released Parties from the Released Class Claims.

23 a. Release by Participating and Non-Participating Class Members Who Are
24 Aggrieved Employees. Effective on the date when Defendant fully funds the
25 entire Gross Settlement Amount and funds all employer payroll taxes owed on the
26 Wage Portion of the Individual Class Payments, all Participating and Non-
27 Participating Class Members, who are Aggrieved Employees, are deemed to
28 release, on behalf of themselves and their former and present representatives,

agents, attorneys, heirs, administrators, successors, and assigns, the Released Parties from the Released PAGA Claims.

b. Plaintiffs' Release. Effective on the date when Defendant fully funds the entire Gross Settlement Amount and funds all employer payroll taxes owed on the Wage Portion of the Individual Class Payments, in addition to the claims released under Sections E.2 and E.3 of the Agreement, Plaintiffs and their former and present spouses, representatives, agents, attorneys, heirs, administrators, successors, and assigns agree to a general release of any and all claims, transactions, primary rights, or occurrences against Released Parties.

c. Released Parties. The Released Parties include Defendant and its past and present directors, officers, shareholders, owners, members, managing agents, attorneys, insurers, assigns, parents, subsidiaries, affiliates, predecessors, successors, business partners, contracting partners, and clients.

10. Class Representative Service Payments. The Court finds the Class Representative Service Payments of \$3,000, to be paid by Defendant to each Plaintiff out of the Gross Settlement Amount (totaling \$6,000), to be reasonable and appropriate. The Class Representative Service Payments are to be paid pursuant to the terms and provisions set forth in the Agreement.

a. The rationale for making enhancement payments is class representatives should be compensated for the expense and risk they incurred in conferring a benefit on the Class. Criteria courts consider include: (i) risk to the class representatives in commencing suit; (ii) notoriety and personal difficulties; (iii) amount of time and effort spent by the class representatives; (iv) duration of the litigation; and (v) personal benefit (or lack thereof) enjoyed by class representatives.

b. The Court reviewed Plaintiffs' declarations outlining their involvement. Given the risks inherent in the services as the class representative, duration of the case and time involved, and benefits created for the Class, the Court approves the payment of the Class Representative Service Payments of \$3,000 to each Plaintiff.

11. Class Counsel Fees Payment and Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment.

The Court finds the Class Counsel Fees Payment of \$28,333.33, to be paid by Defendant to Class Counsel out of the Gross Settlement Amount, to be reasonable and appropriate. Additionally, the Court finds the Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment as reimbursement for actual litigation costs incurred of \$4,251.48, to be paid by Defendant to Class Counsel out of the Gross Settlement Amount, to be reasonable and appropriate. Such fees and costs are to be paid pursuant to the terms and provisions set forth in the Settlement Agreement. Defendant shall not be required to pay for any other attorneys' fees and expenses, costs, or disbursements incurred by Class Counsel or any other counsel representing Plaintiffs or Class Members. Defendant shall also not be required to pay for any other attorneys' fees and expenses, costs, or disbursements incurred by Plaintiffs or Class Members in connection with or related in any manner to this lawsuit, Settlement Agreement, settlement administration, and/or Released Class Claims and Released PAGA Claims.

- a. The Court has an independent right and responsibility to review the Class Counsel Fees Payment and only award so much as it determines reasonable. (See *Garabedian v. Los Angeles Cellular Telephone Co.* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 123, 127-128.) The Class Counsel Fees Payment of \$28,333.33 is one-third (1/3) of the common fund created for the benefit of the Class and is supported by use of the percentage-fee method. (See *Laffitte v. Robert Half International, Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 504.) Considering the results achieved, financial risk undertaken, difficult nature of this litigation, skills required, percentage fees award in previous and other cases, and contingent fees charged in the marketplace, the Court finds the Class Counsel Fees Payment is consistent with the marketplace, is reasonable, and is approved.
- b. The Court reviewed the declaration of Douglas Han regarding the costs expended in prosecuting this case. Under the terms of the Settlement, Class Counsel may seek reimbursement of up to \$20,000 in litigation costs. The Court finds Class Counsel expended \$4,251.48 in litigation costs, and such costs were reasonable.

1 Thus, the Court approves the payment of the Class Counsel Litigation Expenses
2 Payment of \$4,251.48 from the common fund for the reimbursement of Class
3 Counsel's litigation costs.

4 12. Administration Expenses Payment. The Court finds Administration Expenses
5 Payment of \$8,000, to be paid by Defendant to the Administrator out of the Gross Settlement
6 Amount, to be reasonable and appropriate. The Administration Expenses Payment are to be paid
7 pursuant to terms and provisions set forth in the Settlement Agreement.

8 a. The Court reviewed the declaration of Nicole Bench from ILYM Group, Inc., the
9 Court-approved Administrator. The Court finds notice was provided to the Class
10 pursuant to the Preliminary Approval Order, constitutes the best practicable notice
11 to the Class, and satisfied due process. Thus, the Court approves the payment of
12 the Administration Expenses Payment of \$8,000 for the Administrator's services
13 in administering the Settlement.

14 13. PAGA Penalties. The Court finds the PAGA Penalties of \$7,500, seventy-five
15 percent (75%) of which (\$5,625) will be paid to the LWDA out of the Gross Settlement Amount
16 and twenty-five percent (25%) of which (\$1,875) shall be distributed to the Aggrieved
17 Employees, on a pro rata basis, to be reasonable and appropriate. The PAGA Penalties is to be
18 paid pursuant to the terms and provisions set forth in the Settlement Agreement.

19 14. Funding the Gross Settlement Amount. Defendant shall first fund fifty percent
20 (50%) of the Gross Settlement Amount by transmitting the funds to the Administrator no later
21 than the Effective Date. Defendant shall fund the remaining fifty percent (50%) of the Gross
22 Settlement Amount by transmitting the funds to the Administrator no later than twelve (12)
23 months after the Effective Date. Within fourteen (14) calendar days after Defendant fully funds
24 the Gross Settlement Amount, the Administrator will the settlement mail checks to the
25 appropriate entities and persons.

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1 15. Fairness of the Settlement. As noted in the Preliminary Approval Order, the
2 Settlement is entitled to a presumption of fairness. In the moving papers, Plaintiffs contend the
3 Settlement was the product of arm's-length negotiations following extensive litigation,
4 discovery, and exchange of documentation. The negotiations were facilitated with the aid of Paul
5 Grossman, an experienced and well-respected mediator.

- 6 a. The fairness of the Settlement is demonstrated by there being no objections to and
7 only two (2) requests for exclusion from the Settlement.

8 16. Uncashed Checks. The Class Members must cash or deposit their settlement
9 checks within one hundred eighty (180) calendar days after the checks are mailed to them.
10 Uncashed settlement checks will be canceled and transmitted to the California Controller's
11 Unclaimed Property Fund in the name of the Class Member.

12 17. Modification of Agreement. The Participating Class Members are hereby
13 authorized to agree to and adopt amendments to or modifications of the Agreement by an express
14 written instrument signed by all Parties or their representatives and approved by the Court. Such
15 amendments or modifications shall be consistent with this Order and Judgment and cannot limit
16 the rights of the Participating Class Members under the Agreement.

17 18. Final Accounting and Compliance. The Court sets a compliance hearing on March
18 20, 2026 in Department 41. Within five (5) court days before this hearing, Plaintiffs shall file a
19 compliance status report. Pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 384, the compliance status
20 report shall specify the total amount paid to the Class Members and the residual of the unclaimed
21 settlement funds that will be paid to the entity identified as the recipient of such funds in the
22 Settlement Agreement.

23 19. Retention of Jurisdiction. The Court has jurisdiction to enter this Order and
24 Judgment. This Court expressly retains jurisdiction for the administration, interpretation,
25 effectuation, and/or enforcement of the Settlement Agreement and of this Order and Judgment,
26 and for any other necessary purpose, including, without limitation:

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- 1 a. enforcing the terms and provisions of the Settlement and resolving any disputes,
2 claims, or causes of action in this lawsuit that, in whole or in part, are related to or
3 arise out of the Settlement or this Order and Judgment;
- 4 b. entering such additional orders as may be necessary or appropriate to protect or
5 effectuate this Order and Judgment approving the Settlement, and permanently
6 enjoining Plaintiffs from initiating or pursuing related proceedings, or to ensure
7 the fair and orderly administration of the Settlement; and
- 8 c. entering any other necessary or appropriate orders to protect and effectuate this
9 Court's retention of continuing jurisdiction.

10 The Motion for Final Approval of Class Action Settlement, Class Counsel Fees Payment,
11 Class Counsel Litigation Expenses Payment, and Class Representative Service Payments is
12 GRANTED. The Administrator is directed to carry out the terms of the Settlement forthwith.

13 THE PARTIES ARE HEREBY ORDERED TO COMPLY WITH THE TERMS OF
14 THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT. PURSUANT TO CALIFORNIA RULES OF COURT
15 3.769, THE COURT HEREBY ENTERS FINAL JUDGMENT BASED UPON THE TERMS
16 OF THIS ORDER AND SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT AND, WITHOUT AFFECTING THE
17 FINALITY OF THIS MATTER, RETAINS EXCLUSIVE AND CONTINUING
18 JURISDICTION TO ENFORCE THIS ORDER, THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT, AND
19 THE JUDGMENT THEREON.

20 IT IS SO ORDERED.

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22 DATED: 07/26/2024



23 HONORABLE RONDA J. MCKAIG
24 SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE
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On August 1, 2024, I served the foregoing document described as

PROOF OF SERVICE