

Jonathan M. Genish (State Bar No. 259031)
jgenish@blackstonepc.com
Barbara DuVan-Clarke (State Bar No. 259268)
BDC@blackstonepc.com
Alexander K. Spellman (State Bar No. 250398)
aspellman@blackstonepc.com
P.J. Van Ert (State Bar No. 234858)
pjvanert@blackstonepc.com
Annabel Blanchard (State Bar No. 258135)
ablanchard@blackstonepc.com
BLACKSTONE LAW, APC
8383 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 745
Beverly Hills, California 90211
Telephone: (310) 622-4278/ Fax: (855) 786-6356

*Attorneys for Plaintiff Sergio Montiel,
individually, and on behalf of Aggrieved
Employees pursuant to the California
Private Attorneys General Act*

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES**

SERGIO MONTIEL, individually, and on behalf
of Aggrieved Employees pursuant to the
California Private Attorneys General Act,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

AMERICAN NUTS, LLC, a California Limited
Liability Company; CONNECT STAFFING,
INC., a California Corporation; and DOES 1
through 25, inclusive,

Defendants.

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Superior Court of California,
County of Los Angeles
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Executive Officer/Clerk of Court,
By E. Galicia, Deputy Clerk

Case No. **24STCV02058**

**COMPLAINT FOR ENFORCEMENT
ACTION UNDER THE PRIVATE
ATTORNEYS GENERAL ACT, CAL.
LABOR CODE §§ 2698 ET SEQ.**

1 Plaintiff SERGIO MONTIEL (“Plaintiff”), individually, and on behalf of all similarly
2 aggrieved employees, alleges against defendants) AMERICAN NUTS, LLC, CONNECT
3 STAFFING, INC., and Does 1 through 25 (“Defendants”) as follows:

4 **INTRODUCTION**

5 1. This is an enforcement action under the California Labor Code Private Attorneys
6 General Act of 2004, California Labor Code sections 2698, *et seq.* (“PAGA”) to recover civil penalties
7 on behalf of Plaintiff, the State of California, and all individuals who worked for Defendants in the
8 State of California as hourly-paid and/or non-exempt employees at any time from one year prior to
9 Plaintiff’s submission of written notice of Defendants’ alleged violations of the Labor Code to the
10 Labor & Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) through final judgment (the “PAGA Period”)
11 (“Aggrieved Employees”).

12 2. Plaintiff alleges that Defendants hired Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees but failed to
13 properly pay them all wages owed for all time worked (including minimum wages, straight time
14 wages, and overtime wages), failed to provide them with all meal periods and rest periods and
15 associated premium wages to which they were entitled, failed to timely pay them all wages due during
16 their employment, failed to timely pay them all wages due upon termination of their employment,
17 failed to provide them with accurate itemized wage statements, failed to maintain accurate payroll
18 records, and failed to reimburse them for necessary business expenses.

19 3. As a result, Defendants violated *inter alia* California Labor Code sections 201, 202,
20 203, 204, 226(a), 226.7, 510, 512(a), 1174(d), 1194, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 2800, and 2802, and the
21 applicable Industrial Welfare Commission (“IWC”) Wage Order. Through this action, Plaintiff seeks
22 to recover all available remedies under PAGA including but not limited to civil penalties and
23 attorney’s fees and costs.

24 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

25 4. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to the California Constitution,
26 Article VI, section 10. The statutes under which this action is brought do not specify any other basis
27 for jurisdiction.

28 5. This Court has jurisdiction over all Defendants because, upon information and belief,

1 Defendants are either citizens of California, have sufficient minimum contacts in California, or
2 otherwise intentionally availed themselves of the California market to render the exercise of
3 jurisdiction over them by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and
4 substantial justice. Further, no federal question is at issue because the claims asserted herein are based
5 solely on California law.

6 6. Venue is proper in this Court because, upon information and belief, Defendants
7 maintain offices, have agents, employ individuals, and/or transact business in the State of California,
8 County of Los Angeles. Moreover, many of the acts, events, and violations alleged herein relating to
9 Plaintiff occurred in the State of California, County of Los Angeles.

10 **THE PARTIES**

11 7. At all times mentioned herein, Plaintiff SERGIO MONTIEL was and is a resident of
12 Los Angeles County in the State of California. Plaintiff was also employed by Defendants in Los
13 Angeles County in the State of California.

14 8. At all times herein mentioned, Defendant AMERICAN NUTS, LLC was and is, an
15 employer who does business in California, with locations throughout the state of California, and whose
16 employees are engaged throughout Los Angeles County and the State of California, including at 12950
17 San Fernando Road, Sylmar, CA 91342.

18 9. At all times herein mentioned, Defendant CONNECT STAFFING, INC. was and is, an
19 employer who does business in California, with locations throughout the state of California, and whose
20 employees are engaged throughout Los Angeles County and the State of California, including at 12950
21 San Fernando Road, Sylmar, CA 91342.

22 10. Plaintiff is unaware of the true names or capacities of the Defendants sued herein under
23 the fictitious names DOES 1 through 25 but will seek leave of this Court to amend the complaint and
24 serve such fictitiously named Defendants once their names and capacities become known.

25 11. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that each and all of the acts and
26 omissions alleged herein were performed by, or are attributable to Defendants, each acting as the agent,
27 employee, alter ego, and/or joint venturer of, or working in concert with, each of the other co-
28 Defendants and within the course and scope of such agency, employment, joint venture, or concerted

1 activity with legal authority to act on the others' behalf. The acts of any and all Defendants represent
2 and were in accordance with Defendants' official policy.

3 12. At all relevant times, Defendants were the employers of Plaintiff within the meaning
4 of all applicable state laws and statutes. Defendants directly or indirectly controlled or affected the
5 working conditions, wages, working hours, and conditions of employment of Plaintiff to make each
6 of said Defendants employers and employers liable under the statutory provisions set forth herein.

7 13. Defendants had the authority to hire and terminate Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
8 Employees, to set work rules and conditions governing their employment, and to supervise their
9 daily employment activities.

10 14. Defendants exercised sufficient authority over the terms and conditions of Plaintiff
11 and the Aggrieved Employees' employment for them to be their joint employers.

12 15. Defendants directly hired and paid wages and benefits to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
13 Employees.

14 16. Defendants continue to employ hourly paid and/or non-exempt employees within the
15 State of California.

16 17. At all relevant times, Defendants, and each of them, ratified the acts and omissions
17 complained of herein. At all relevant times, Defendants, and each of them, aided and abetted the acts
18 and omissions of each and all the other Defendants in proximately causing the damages herein alleged.

19 18. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that each of said Defendants is
20 in some manner intentionally, negligently, or otherwise responsible for the acts, omissions,
21 occurrences, and transactions alleged herein.

22 **GENERAL ALLEGATIONS**

23 19. Defendants, jointly and severally, employed Plaintiff from approximately February
24 2022 to October 2022 as a non-exempt, hourly-paid employee. During Plaintiff's employment with
25 Defendants, Plaintiff was employed as a Forklift Operator and Shipping and Receiving Lead based
26 out of Defendants' facility located at 12950 San Fernando Road, Sylmar, CA 91342.

27 20. Defendants hired Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees but failed to properly pay
28 them all overtime wages and minimum wages for all hours worked, failed to provide all meal and rest

breaks to which they were entitled, failed to timely pay all wages upon termination of employment, failed to provide accurate wage statements, failed to keep accurate employment records, failed to reimburse necessary business-related expenses, and failed to adhere to other related protections afforded by the California Labor Code and applicable Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Order.

21. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based thereon alleges, that Defendants knew or should have known that Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees were entitled to the protections afforded by the Labor Code and the applicable Wage Order, yet as set forth in detail below, engaged in a systematic pattern and practice of violating the California Labor Code and the applicable Wage Order.

PAGA ALLEGATIONS

22. PAGA is and was applicable to Defendants' employment of Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees.

23. PAGA provides that any provision of law under the California Labor Code that provides for a civil penalty, including unpaid wages and premium wages, to be assessed and collected by the LWDA for violations of the California Labor Code may, as an alternative, be recovered through a civil action brought by an aggrieved employee on behalf of himself or herself and other current or former employees pursuant to procedures outlined in California Labor Code section 2699.3.

24. Pursuant to PAGA, a civil action may be brought by an "aggrieved employee," who is any person employed by the alleged violator and against whom one or more of the alleged violations was committed.

25. Plaintiff and the other employees are "Aggrieved Employees" as defined by California Labor Code section 2699(c) because they are current or former employees of Defendants against whom one or more of the alleged violations were committed.

26. Pursuant to California Labor Code sections 2699.3 and 2699.5, an aggrieved employee, including Plaintiff, may pursue a civil action arising under PAGA after the following requirements have been met:

- (a) The Aggrieved Employee shall give written notice by certified mail (hereinafter "Employee's Notice") to the LWDA and the employer of the specific provisions of the

1 Labor Code alleged to have been violated, including the facts and theories to support the
2 alleged violations.

3 (b) The LWDA shall provide notice (“LWDA Response”) to the employer and the aggrieved
4 employee by certified mail that it does not intend to investigate the alleged violation within
5 sixty (60) calendar days of the postmark date of the Employee’s Notice. Upon receipt of
6 the LWDA Response, or if the LWDA Response is not provided within sixty-five (65)
7 calendar days of the postmark date of the Employee’s Notice, the aggrieved employee
8 may commence a civil action pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699 to recover
9 civil penalties in addition to any other penalties to which the employee may be entitled.

10 27. On September 14, 2023, Plaintiff provided notice by electronic submission to the
11 LWDA and by certified mail to Defendants regarding the specific provisions of the Labor Code alleged
12 to have been violated, including the facts and theories to support the alleged violations, pursuant to
13 Labor Code section 2699.3. **A true and correct copy of the Employee’s Notice is attached hereto**
14 **as Exhibit A.**

15 28. Plaintiff did not receive a LWDA Response within sixty-five calendar days of
16 providing the Employee’s Notice.

17 29. Therefore, the administrative prerequisites under California Labor Code section
18 2699.3(a) to recover civil penalties against Defendants, in addition to other remedies for violations of
19 *inter alia* California Labor Code sections 201, 202, 203, 204, 226(a), 226.7, 510, 512(a), 1174(d),
20 1194, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 2800 and 2802 have been satisfied.

21 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

22 **VIOLATION OF CALIFORNIA LABOR CODE §§ 2699, *ET SEQ.***

23 **(Against All Defendants)**

24 30. Plaintiff incorporates herein by specific reference, as though fully set forth, the
25 allegations in all preceding paragraphs.

26 31. Plaintiff brings this action on an individual basis and on a representative basis on behalf
27 of other Aggrieved Employees and the State of California, in Plaintiff’s capacity as a private attorney
28 general pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code § 2698, *et seq.*

1 32. PAGA expressly provides for a private right of action to recover civil penalties for
2 violations of the Labor Code as follows: “*Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any provision*
3 *of this code that provides for a civil penalty to be assessed and collected by the Labor and Workforce*
4 *Development Agency or any of its departments, divisions, commissions, boards, agencies, or*
5 *employees, for a violation of this code, may, as an alternative, be recovered through a civil action*
6 *brought by an aggrieved employee on behalf of himself or herself and other current or former*
7 *employees pursuant to the procedures specified in Section 2699.3.*” Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(a).

8 33. Whenever the LWDA, or any of its departments, divisions, commissions, boards,
9 agencies, or employees has discretion to assess a civil penalty, a court in a civil action is authorized to
10 exercise the same discretion, subject to the same limitations and conditions, to assess a civil penalty.

11 34. Plaintiff and the other hourly-paid, non-exempt employees are “Aggrieved Employees”
12 as defined by California Labor Code section 2699(c) in that they are all current or former employees
13 of Defendants, and one or more of the alleged violations were committed against them.

14 35. Defendants’ conduct, as alleged herein, violates numerous sections of the California
15 Labor Code, including, but not limited to, the following:

- 16 (a) Violation of California Labor Code sections 510 and 1198 for failure to pay
17 overtime wages, as set forth more fully below;
- 18 (b) Violation of California Labor Code sections 1194, 1197, and 1197.1 for failure to
19 pay minimum wages, as set forth more fully below;
- 20 (c) Violation of California Labor Code sections 226.7 and 512(a) for failure to provide
21 legally required meal periods, as set forth more fully below;
- 22 (d) Violation of California Labor Code sections 226.7 and 512(a) for failure to pay
23 required meal period premiums, as set forth more fully below;
- 24 (e) Violation of California Labor Code section 226.7 for failure to provide legally
25 required rest periods, as set forth more fully below;
- 26 (f) Violation of California Labor Code section 226.7 for failure to pay required rest
27 period premiums, as set forth more fully below;
- 28 (g) Violation of California Labor Code section 204 for failure to timely pay wages to

1 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees during employment, as set forth more fully
2 before;

3 (h) Violation of California Labor Code sections 201, 202, and 203 for failure to pay all
4 wages at time of discharge from employment, as set forth more fully below;

5 (i) Violation of California Labor Code section 226(a) for failure to provide accurate
6 wage statements to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees, as set forth more fully
7 below;

8 (j) Violation of California Labor Code section 1174(d) for failure to keep complete
9 and accurate payroll records relating to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees, as set
10 forth more fully below; and

11 (k) Violation of California Labor Code sections 2800 and 2802 for failure to reimburse
12 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees for necessary business-related expenses, as set
13 forth more fully below.

14 36. Pursuant to PAGA, and in particular Labor Code sections 2699(a), 2699.3, and 2699.5,
15 Plaintiff, acting in the public interest as a private attorney general, seek assessment and collection of
16 civil penalties for Plaintiff, all Aggrieved Employees, and the State of California against Defendants
17 for violations of Labor Code sections set forth herein, including penalties under California Labor Code
18 sections 2699, 558, 210, 1197.1, 226, 226.3, 1174.5, and 1197.1, penalties under the applicable IWC
19 Wage Order, and any and all additional penalties and remedies as provided by the California Labor
20 Code and/or other statutes.

21 37. Pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699(i), civil penalties recovered by
22 Aggrieved Employees shall be distributed as follows: seventy-five percent (75%) to the LWDA for
23 the enforcement of labor laws and education of employers and employees about their rights and
24 responsibilities and twenty-five (25%) to the Aggrieved Employees.

25 38. Plaintiff retained counsel to file this court action, and to assess and collect the civil
26 penalties owed by Defendants. Plaintiff therefore seeks an award of reasonable attorney's fees and
27 costs pursuant to Labor Code §§ 210, 218.5, 2699(g)(1), and any other applicable statute.

28 ///

1 **Failure to Pay Minimum Wages**

2 39. California Labor Code sections 1194, 1197 and 1197.1 provide that the minimum wage
3 for employees fixed by the IWC is the minimum wage to be paid to employees, and the payment of a
4 wage less than the minimum so fixed is unlawful.

5 40. The IWC set the minimum wage for Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees in the
6 applicable IWC Wage Order.

7 41. Defendants failed to pay minimum wage to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for
8 a wide range of off-the-clock work performed, including, *inter alia*: (1) showing proof of COVID-19
9 test results and vaccination cards, submitting to temperature checks, arriving early to open up the
10 building for other employees, and attending meetings to discuss orders, all prior to clocking-in, (2)
11 performing routine and daily tasks during meal periods, (3) performing additional job duties, waiting
12 for other employees to vacate the premises to lock up the building after clocking out, and (4)
13 responding to calls and texts off-the-clock on their personal cell phone between shifts. Defendants also
14 forced Plaintiff and the class members to work off the clock until the bottom of the hour if they arrived
15 to work late.

16 42. Accordingly, Defendants regularly failed to pay at least minimum wages to Plaintiff
17 and the Aggrieved Employees for all hours they worked in violation of California Labor Code sections
18 1194, 1197, and 1197.1.

19 **Failure to Pay Proper Overtime Wages**

20 43. Labor Code section 510 and the applicable IWC Wage Order require Defendants to pay
21 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees who worked more than eight (8) hours in a day; more than forty
22 (40) hours in a workweek, and/or seven (7) consecutive days, at the rate of one-and-a-half times their
23 regular rate for all such hours worked.

24 44. Labor Code section 510 and the applicable IWC Wage Order further requires
25 Defendants to pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees who worked more than twelve (12) hours in a
26 day or more than eight (8) hours on the seventh consecutive day, overtime compensation at a rate of
27 two (2) times their regular rate of pay for all such hours worked.

28 45. During the relevant time period, Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees regularly worked

1 in excess of eight (8) hours in a day, in excess of twelve (12) hours in a day, in excess of forty (40)
2 hours in a workweek and/or for seven (7) or more consecutive days, but Defendants routinely failed
3 to properly account for all such overtime hours and further failed to compensate Plaintiff and
4 Aggrieved Employees at the correct overtime rates.

5 46. Defendants' failure to pay correct overtime wages included, *inter alia*: (a) when the
6 combined total of the off-the-clock work discussed *supra* and the on-the-clock work exceed the
7 number of hours that trigger the payment of overtime wages under Labor Code sections 510 and/or
8 the applicable Wage Order; (b) when Defendants intentionally, willfully and/or negligently
9 mischaracterized overtime as straight time, or double time as time-and-a-half; (c) when Defendants
10 assigned more work than could reasonably be completed in a workday or workweek to Plaintiff and
11 Aggrieved Employees, but refused to authorize the overtime necessary for them to complete the
12 assigned work; and (d) when Defendants failed to include all required wages and remuneration when
13 calculating the overtime rate.

14 47. Defendants' failure to pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees proper overtime
15 compensation, as required by California law, violates the provisions of California Labor Code section
16 510, and is therefore unlawful.

17 **Failure to Provide Meal Periods**

18 48. California Labor Code section 226.7 provides that no employer shall require an
19 employee to work during any meal period mandated by an applicable IWC Order.

20 49. California Labor Code section 512(a) provides that an employer may not require, cause,
21 or permit an employee to work for a period of more than five (5) hours per day without providing the
22 employee with a meal period of not less than thirty (30) minutes, except that if the total work period
23 per day of the employee is not more than six (6) hours, the meal period may be waived by mutual
24 consent of both the employer and the employee.

25 50. California Labor Code section 512(a) further provides that an employer may not
26 employ an employee for a work period of more than 10 hours per day without providing the employee
27 with a second meal period of not less than 30 minutes, except that if the total hours worked is no more
28 than 12 hours, the second meal period may be waived by mutual consent of the employer and the

1 employee only if the first meal period was not waived.

2 51. The applicable IWC Wage Order sets forth the same requirements for meal breaks.

3 52. Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees who were scheduled to work for no longer than six
4 (6) hours, and who did not waive their legally mandated meal periods by mutual consent, were required
5 to work for periods longer than five (5) hours without a meal period of not less than thirty (30) minutes.

6 53. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees who were scheduled to work for more than six
7 (6) hours were required to work for periods longer than five (5) hours without an uninterrupted meal
8 period of not less than thirty (30) minutes.

9 54. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees, who were scheduled to work for more than ten
10 (10) hours but no longer than twelve (12) hours, and who did not waive their legally mandated meal
11 periods by mutual consent, were required to work in excess of ten (10) hours without receiving a
12 second uninterrupted meal period of not less than thirty (30) minutes.

13 55. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees, who were scheduled to work for more than
14 twelve (12) hours, were required to work for periods longer than ten (10) hours without a second
15 uninterrupted meal period of not less than thirty (30) minutes.

16 56. Moreover, when meal breaks were provided, they were often interrupted, cut short,
17 and/or Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees were not relieved of all duties as required by law.

18 57. Such conduct violates California Labor Code sections 226.7 and 512(a) and the
19 applicable IWC Wage Order.

20 **Failure to Pay Compliant Meal Break Premiums**

21 58. California Labor Code section 226.7 provides: “[i]f an employer fails to provide an
22 employee a [meal] period in accordance with a state law, including, but not limited to, an applicable
23 statute or applicable regulation, standard, or order of the Industrial Welfare Commission... the
24 employer shall pay the employee one additional hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of
25 compensation for each workday that the [meal] period is not provided.

26 59. The applicable IWC Wage Order provides: “[i]f an employer fails to provide an
27 employee a meal period in accordance with the applicable provisions of this Order, the employer shall
28 pay the employee one (1) hour of pay at the employee’s regular rate of compensation for each workday

1 that the meal period is not provided.”

2 60. Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees meal period premiums
3 due in violation of California Labor Code sections 226.7 and 512 on each day when a complete, timely,
4 and uninterrupted meal period of at least thirty (30) minutes was not provided.

5 61. Moreover, if and when meal break premiums were provided, Defendants failed to
6 incorporate all nondiscretionary payments for work performed by Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
7 Employees in the regular rate of compensation for purposes of such premiums.

8 62. Defendants’ conduct violates the applicable IWC Wage Order and California Labor
9 Code section 226.7.

10 **Failure to Provide Rest Periods**

11 63. California Labor Code section 226.7 provides that no employer shall require an
12 employee to work during any rest period mandated by an applicable order of the California IWC.

13 64. The applicable IWC Wage Order provides that “[e]very employer shall authorize and
14 permit all employees to take rest periods, which insofar as practicable shall be in the middle of each
15 work period” and that the “rest period time shall be based on the total hours worked daily at the rate
16 of ten (10) minutes net rest time per four (4) hours or major fraction thereof” unless the total daily
17 work time is less than three and one-half (3½) hours.

18 65. Defendants required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work four (4) or more
19 hours without authorizing or permitting a timely ten (10) minute uninterrupted rest period during
20 which time they were relieved of their duties per each four (4) hour period, or major fraction thereof
21 worked.

22 66. Defendants’ conduct therefore violates the applicable IWC Wage Order and California
23 Labor Code section 226.7.

24 **Failure to Pay Rest Break Premiums**

25 67. California Labor Code section 226.7 provides: “[i]f an employer fails to provide an
26 employee a meal or rest or recovery period in accordance with a state law, including, but not limited
27 to, an applicable statute or applicable regulation, standard, or order of the Industrial Welfare
28 Commission,... the employer shall pay the employee one additional hour of pay at the employee's

1 regular rate of compensation for each workday that the [rest] period is not provided.

2 68. The applicable IWC Wage Order provides: “[i]f an employer fails to provide an
3 employee a rest period in accordance with the applicable provisions of this Order, the employer shall
4 pay the employee one (1) hour of pay at the employee’s regular rate of compensation for each workday
5 that the rest period is not provided.

6 69. Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees required rest break
7 premiums due when compliant rest periods were not provided.

8 70. Such conduct is in direct violation of California Labor Code section 226.7.

9 **Failure to Timely Pay Wages During Employment**

10 71. California Labor Code section 204 provides that all wages earned by any person in any
11 employment between the 1st and 15th days, inclusive, of any calendar month, other than those wages
12 due upon termination of an employee, are due and payable between the 16th and the 26th day of the
13 month during which the labor was performed. It further provides all wages earned by any person in
14 any employment between the 16th and the last day, inclusive, of any calendar month, other than those
15 wages due upon termination of an employee, are due and payable between the 1st and the 10th day of
16 the following month.

17 72. California Labor Code section 204 provides that all wages earned for labor in excess
18 of the normal work period shall be paid no later than the payday for the next regular payroll period.

19 73. During the relevant time period, Defendants intentionally and willfully failed to pay
20 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages due to them, within any time period permissible
21 under California Labor Code section 204, including wages for overtime compensation, minimum wage
22 compensation, meal period premiums, and rest period premiums.

23 74. Such conduct violates Labor Code section 204.

24 **Failure to Timely Pay Wages Upon Termination**

25 75. Pursuant to California Labor Code sections 201, 202, and 203, Defendants are required
26 to timely pay all earned and unpaid wages to an employee who is discharged.

27 76. California Labor Code section 201 mandates that if an employer discharges an
28 employee, the employee’s wages accrued and unpaid at the time of discharge are due and payable

1 immediately.

2 77. California Labor Code section 202 mandates that if an employee quits, his or her wages
3 shall become due and payable not later than seventy-two (72) hours thereafter, unless the employee
4 has given seventy-two (72) hours' notice of his or her intention to quit, in which case the employee
5 is entitled to his or her wages at the time of quitting.

6 78. California Labor Code section 203 provides that if an employer willfully fails to pay,
7 in accordance with California Labor Code sections 201 and 202, any wages of an employee who is
8 discharged or who quits, the wages of the employee shall continue as a penalty from the due date
9 thereof at the same rate until paid or until an action therefore is commenced; but the wages shall not
10 continue for more than thirty (30) days.

11 79. At the time that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees' employment with Defendants
12 ended, Defendants knowingly and willfully failed to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all
13 wages owed to them pursuant to California Labor Code sections 201 and 202, including, without
14 limitation, overtime wages, minimum wages, and meal and rest period premium wages.

15 80. Such conduct violates Labor Code sections 201, 202 and 203.

16 **Failure to Provide Compliant Wage Statements**

17 81. California Labor Code section 226(a) provides that every employer shall furnish each
18 of its employees an accurate itemized statement in writing showing (1) gross wages earned, (2) total
19 hours worked by the employee, (3) the number of piece-rate units earned and any applicable piece rate
20 if the employee is paid on a piece-rate basis, (4) all deductions, provided that all deductions made on
21 written orders of the employee may be aggregated and shown as one item, (5) net wages earned, (6)
22 the inclusive dates of the period for which the employee is paid, (7) the name of the employee and his
23 or her social security number, (8) the name and address of the legal entity that is the employer, and (9)
24 all applicable hourly rates in effect during the pay period and the corresponding number of hours
25 worked at each hourly rate by the employee.

26 82. Defendants intentionally and willfully failed to provide employees with complete and
27 accurate wage statements. The deficiencies include, among other things, the failure to state all correct
28 rates of pay, all hours worked, all meal period premium wages earned, and all rest period premium

1 wages earned.

2 83. Such conduct violates Labor Code section 226.

3 **Failure to Keep Requisite Payroll Records**

4 84. California Labor Code section 1174(d) requires an employer to keep at a central
5 location in the state or at the plants or establishments at which employees are employed, payroll
6 records showing the hours worked daily by and the wages paid to, and the number of piece-rate units
7 earned by and any applicable piece rate paid to, employees employed at the respective plants or
8 establishments. These records shall be kept in accordance with rules established for this purpose by
9 the commission, but in any case, shall be kept on file for not less than three years.

10 85. Defendants intentionally and willfully failed to keep accurate and complete payroll
11 records showing the hours worked daily and the wages paid to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees.

12 86. As a result of Defendants' violation of California Labor Code section 1174(d), Plaintiff
13 and the Aggrieved Employees have suffered injury and damage to their statutorily protected rights.

14 87. More specifically, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees have been injured by
15 Defendants' intentional and willful violation of California Labor Code section 1174(d) because they
16 were denied both their legal right and protected interest, in having available, accurate and complete
17 payroll records pursuant to California Labor Code section 1174(d).

18 **Failure to Reimburse Necessary Business Expenses**

19 88. Pursuant to California Labor Code sections 2800 and 2802, an employer must
20 reimburse its employees for all necessary expenditures incurred by the employee in direct consequence
21 of the discharge of his or her job duties or in direct consequence of his or her job duties or in direct
22 consequence of his or her obedience to the directions of the employer.

23 89. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees incurred necessary business-related expenses
24 and costs that were not fully reimbursed by Defendants, including, but are not limited to, the necessary
25 purchase of pens and personal protective equipment such as "cold suits" and special boots, as well as
26 the use of personal cell phones and internet usage for necessary, work-related purposes.

27 90. Defendants intentionally and willfully failed to reimburse Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
28 Employees for all necessary business-related expenses and costs.

91. Such conduct violates Labor Code sections 2802.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

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

1. For the imposition of civil penalties pursuant to California Labor Code §§ 2699, 210, 558, 226, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1 and all other penalties allowed by the California Labor Code and/or other applicable statutes;

2. For statutory attorneys' fees and costs pursuant to sections 210, 218.5 and 2699(g)(1) of California Labor Code; and

3. For such other and further relief as the Court may deem proper.

January 25, 2024

BLACKSTONE LAW, APC

By:

Jonathan M. Genish, Esq.
Barbara DuVan-Clarke, Esq.
Alexander K. Spellman, Esq.
P.J. Van Ert, Esq.
Annabel F. Blanchard, Esq.

*Attorneys for Plaintiff Sergio Montiel,
individually, and on behalf of Aggrieved
Employees pursuant to the California Private
Attorneys General Act*

Exhibit A

Alexander K. Spellman, Esq.
aspellman@blackstonepc.com

September 14, 2023

PAGA Claim Notice Via Online Electronic Submission

California Labor & Workforce Development Agency

800 Capitol Mall, Suite 5000 (MIC-55)

Sacramento, CA 95814

<https://www.dir.ca.gov/Private-Attorneys-General-Act/Private-Attorneys-General-Act.html>**RE: *Sergio Montiel v. American Nuts, LLC; Connect Staffing, Inc.***

Dear Representative:

This office represents Sergio Montiel (“Claimant”) with respect to Claimant’s claims under the California Labor Code against American Nuts, LLC and Connect Staffing, Inc. (including any and all affiliates, subsidiaries, parents, directors, and officers thereof) (collectively referred to herein as “Employers”). This letter is being sent simultaneously to Employers by certified mail.

Employers employed Claimant from approximately February 2022 through approximately October 2022 as a non-exempt, hourly-paid employee. During Claimant’s employment with Employers, Claimant was employed as a Forklift Operator and Lead in Shipping at Employers’ location at 12950 San Fernando Road, Sylmar, CA 91342.

Claimant intends to bring a representative action seeking penalties for violations of the California Labor Code which are recoverable under the Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code section 2698, *et seq.* (“PAGA”). Claimant is seeking penalties on behalf of Claimant and in a representative capacity on behalf of the State of California and all current and former hourly-paid and/or non-exempt employees who worked for Employers in the State of California during the relevant statutory period (“Aggrieved Employees”). This letter is being sent in compliance with California Labor Code section 2699.3 and shall serve as Claimant’s notice of the provisions of the California Labor Code alleged to have been violated, including the facts and theories in support thereof.

As detailed below, Employers violated several of California’s wage and hour laws during Claimant’s employment, including but not limited to California Labor Code sections 201, 202, 203, 204, 226(a), 226.7, 510, 512(a), 1174(d), 1194, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 2800, 2802, and the Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders (“IWC Wage Orders”). The claims made on behalf of Claimant and Aggrieved Employees are based upon the following facts and theories:

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

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

California Labor Code sections 1194, 1197, and 1197.1 and IWC Wage Orders require employers to pay at least the legal minimum wage to their employees. California Labor Code sections 510 and 1198 and IWC Wage Orders further require employers to pay no less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay of the employee for hours worked in excess of eight (8) hours in one workday, for hours worked in excess of forty (40) hours in one workweek, and for the first eight (8) hours worked on the seventh day of work in any one workweek, and to pay no less than twice the regular rate of pay of the employee for hours worked in excess of twelve (12) hours in one workday and for any work in excess of eight (8) hours on any seventh day of a workweek.

Throughout the relevant time period, Employers regularly required Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to perform work off-the-clock. This off-the-clock work included, amongst other things, off-the-clock prior to clock-in such as: requiring Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to show proof of COVID test results, show vaccine cards, and submit to temperature checks before clocking in. Additionally, Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees would be forced to walk from a further parking structure when their usual one was full, come in early to open up the building for other employees, and attend meetings to discuss orders, all prior to clocking-in. Claimant and Aggrieved Employees were further subject to working off-the-clock during their shifts, because Claimant and Aggrieved Employees were required to work during meal periods while clocked out, performing routine and typical daily tasks. Beyond that, after clock out, Claimant and Aggrieved Employees were required to perform additional job duties, wait for other employees on the same shift to finish their shifts after the day was done so that Employers could lock up the building where Claimant and Aggrieved Employees worked. Last, Claimant and Aggrieved Employees were required to respond to calls and texts off-the-clock on their personal cell phone between shifts.

Employers failed to compensate Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees for any of this off-the-clock work, in violation of California law. In addition, Employers utilized time rounding practices that resulted in the systematic underpayment of wages (including minimum wages, straight time wages and overtime wages) to Claimant and Aggrieved Employees.

Employers also failed to accurately record the actual time worked by Claimant and Aggrieved Employees. Moreover, the uncompensated work described herein was often performed when Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees had already worked eight (8) hours in a day and/or forty (40) hours in week resulting in a failure to pay overtime compensation. Finally, Employers failed to pay overtime to Claimant and Aggrieved Employees for all overtime hours worked based on regular rates of pay correctly calculated to include all applicable remuneration, including non-

discretionary commissions, non-discretionary bonuses, and non-discretionary performance pay.

As a result of the foregoing practices, Employers have failed to pay Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees for all wages earned at the correct rates of pay, including minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime compensation. Accordingly, Employers violated IWC Wage Orders and California Labor Code sections 204, 510, 1194, 1197, 1197.1 and 1198.

Claimant and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph of the applicable IWC Wage Orders; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 558, 1197.1, and 1199; and attorneys' fees and costs.

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

California law requires employers to provide employees with an opportunity to take an uninterrupted meal period of no less than thirty (30) minutes before the end of the fifth hour of work when an employee works more than five (5) hours in a day. Cal. Lab. Code §§ 226.7, 512(a). A second meal period of no less than thirty (30) minutes must be provided before the end of the tenth hour of work when an employee works more than ten (10) hours in a day. Cal. Lab. Code §§ 226.7, 512(a). When an employer fails to provide a meal or rest period, an hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of compensation is owed to the employee. Cal. Lab. Code § 226.7(c).

During the relevant time period, Employers failed to provide Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees with legally compliant 30-minute meal periods. Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees were required by Employers to work more than five (5) hours per day but were not provided with uninterrupted 30-minute meal periods. Further, Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees were not provided with a second uninterrupted 30-minute meal period when they worked over ten (10) hours per day. Employers regularly required Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to work through their first and second meal periods, to take their first meal period after their fifth (5th) hour of work, and/or to take their second meal periods after their tenth (10th) hour of work. Meal periods, when provided, were oftentimes interrupted or cut short.

Employers' policies, practices, and procedures were responsible for the violations alleged above and prevented Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, complete and duty-free meal periods because, amongst other reasons: (1) Employers did not have legally-compliant policies regarding the provision and timing of meal periods or systematically disregarded its own purported meal period policies; (2) Employers' management at various levels failed and refused to implement and enforce legally compliant meal period policies and practices; (3) Employers failed to adequately inform and train Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees regarding their right to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods; (4) Employers failed to adequately inform and train Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees about their right to premium wages for non-compliant meal periods; (5) Employers failed to ensure that there was adequate staffing to allow Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to take timely, uninterrupted,

and duty-free meal periods; (6) Employers required Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to respond to work-related requests at all times, including during meal periods; and (7) Employers' policy and culture prevented Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods because of the priority placed on maximizing profits over employees' right to receive timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods.

Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees did not receive an extra hour of wages at their regular rate of pay for the meal periods which were not provided to them in compliance with California law. Accordingly, Employers violated the applicable IWC Wage Orders and California Labor Code sections 226.7, 512(a) and 1198.

Claimants and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph of the applicable IWC Wage Orders; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 558 and 1199; and attorneys' fees and costs.

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

California law requires employers to authorize and permit employees to take an uninterrupted rest period of no less than ten (10) minutes rest for every four (4) hours, or major fraction thereof, worked. Cal. Lab. Code § 226.7. When an employer fails to authorize and permit a rest period, an hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of compensation is owed to the employee. Cal. Lab. Code § 226.7(c).

Employers failed to authorize and permit Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to take legally compliant 10-minute rest periods. Employers required Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to work through rest periods. Claimant and Aggrieved Employees were not provided with uninterrupted, duty-free rest periods when they worked more than four (4) hours or a major fraction thereof. Further, Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees were not provided with a second uninterrupted, duty-free rest period when they worked more than six (6) hours in a day, or a third uninterrupted, duty-free rest period after working more than ten (10) hours in day. In the rare event that a rest period was taken, it was frequently interrupted or cut short. Moreover, Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees were not completely relieved of duty as required by *Augustus v. ABM Security Services, Inc.*, 2 Cal.5th 257 (2016).

Employers' policies, practices, and procedures were responsible for the violations alleged above and prevented Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely and complete rest periods because, amongst other reasons: (1) Employers did not have legally-compliant policies regarding the provision and timing of rest periods or systematically disregarded its own purported rest period policies; (2) Employers' management at various levels failed and refused to implement and enforce legally compliant rest period policies and practices; (3) Employers failed to adequately

inform and train Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees regarding their right to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods; (4) Employers failed to adequately inform and train Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees about their right to premium wages for non-compliant rest periods; (5) Employers failed to ensure that there was adequate staffing to allow Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods; (6) Employers required Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees to respond to work-related requests at all times, including during rest periods; and (7) Employers' policy and culture prevented Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods because of the priority placed on completing job requirements over employees' right to receive rest periods.

Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees did not receive an extra hour of wages at their regular rate of pay for the rest periods which were not provided to them in compliance with California law. Accordingly, Employers violated the applicable IWC Wage Orders and California Labor Code sections 226.7, and 1198.

Claimant and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph of the applicable IWC Wage Orders; Labor Code sections 558 and 1199 penalties; and attorneys' fees and costs.

4. FAILURE TO TIMELY PAY WAGES DURING EMPLOYMENT

California Labor Code section 204 requires that all wages earned by any person in any employment between the 1st and the 15th days, inclusive, of any calendar month, other than those wages due upon termination of an employee, are due and payable between the 16th and the 26th day of the month during which the labor was performed, and that all wages earned by any person in any employment between the 16th and the last day, inclusive, of any calendar month, other than those wages due upon termination of an employee, are due and payable between the 1st and the 10th day of the following month. California Labor Code section 204 also requires that all wages earned for labor in excess of the normal work period shall be paid no later than the payday for the next regular payroll period. During the relevant time period, Employers have failed to timely pay all wages earned because Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees were not paid all the wages they were owed including, *inter alia*, straight time wages, minimum wages, overtime compensation, and meal and rest period premiums. Accordingly, Employers violated California Labor Code section 204(a).

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

5. FAILURE TO PROVIDE ACCURATE ITEMIZED WAGE STATEMENTS

California Labor Code section 226(a) requires an employer semimonthly or at the time of each payment of wages to furnish wage statements to its employees setting forth, *inter alia*, (1) gross wages earned, (2) total hours worked by the employee, (3) the number of piece-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 only the last four digits of his or her social security number or an employee identification number other than a social security number, and (8) the name and address of the legal entity that is the employer.

As a result of the practices described herein, the wage statements provided to Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees failed to include the actual hours worked (including time spent working off-the-clock), the actual gross wages earned (including wages owed for time spent working off the clock and meal and rest period premiums), and the correct rates of pay. The wage statements provided to Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees also failed to include the name of the legal entity that employed Claimant and the Aggrieved Employees. Accordingly, Employers violated California Labor Code section 226(a).

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

6. FAILURE TO MAINTAIN ACCURATE RECORDS

California Labor Code section 1174(d) requires an employer to keep, at a central location in the state or at the plants or establishments at which employees are employed, payroll records showing the hours worked daily by and the wages paid to, and the number of piece-rate units earned by and any applicable piece rate paid to, employees employed at the respective plants or establishments. These records shall be kept with rules established for this purpose by the commission, but in any case, shall be kept on file for not less than two years. During the relevant time period, Employers have failed to maintain accurate records relating to Claimant and other Aggrieved Employees' work periods, meal periods, total daily hours worked, and total hours worked per payroll period. Accordingly, Employers violated the applicable IWC Wage Orders and California Labor Code sections 1198.5 and 1174(d).

Claimant and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to penalties paragraph of the applicable IWC Wage Orders; California Labor Code section 1174.5 penalties; and attorneys' fees and costs.

7. FAILURE TO REIMBURSE NECESSARY EXPENDITURES

California Labor Code sections 2800 and 2802 require an employer to reimburse its employees for all necessary expenditures incurred by the employee in direct consequence of the discharge of his or her job duties or in direct consequence of his or her obedience to the directions of the employer. The IWC Wage Orders require employers to provide employees with the tools or equipment necessary for the performance of their job. During the relevant time period, Claimant and

Aggrieved Employees incurred necessary business-related expenses and costs that were not fully reimbursed by Employers. These costs include, but are not limited to, purchase of personal protective equipment such as “cold suits” and special boots, as well as use of personal cell phones and internet usage for work-related purposes.

Accordingly, Employers violated the IWC Orders and California Labor Code sections 2800 and 2802. Claimant and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to penalties paragraph of the applicable IWC Wage Orders; and attorneys’ fees and costs.

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

California Labor Code sections 201 and 202 provide that if an employer discharges an employee, the wages earned and unpaid at the time of discharge are due and payable immediately, and if an employee quits his or her employment, his or her wages shall become due and payable not later than seventy-two (72) hours thereafter, unless the employee has given seventy-two (72) hours’ notice of his or her intention to quit, in which case the employee is entitled to his or her wages at the time of quitting.

During the relevant time period, upon the termination of employment (including but not limited to when they were temporarily laid off, laid off, discharged, and/or resigned), Aggrieved Employees were not paid all wages due to them within twenty-four (24) hours or even within seventy-two (72) hours for those who resigned. Specifically, as a result of Employers’ practices of requiring Aggrieved Employees to work off-the-clock without compensation, failing to pay proper overtime compensation, unlawful rounding practices, failure to properly calculate regular rates, and failure to accurately record all hours actually worked, Employers failed to pay Aggrieved Employees for all straight time wage, minimum wages and overtime compensation owed to them upon termination of their employment. Employers also failed to pay Aggrieved Employees for meal period premiums and rest period premiums they were owed, amongst other wages. Accordingly, Employers violated California Labor Code sections 201 and 202.

Claimant and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 203 and 1199; and attorneys’ fees and costs.

9. EMPLOYER’S OTHER VIOLATIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA LABOR CODE

Finally, pursuant to *Huff v. Securitas Security Services USA, Inc.* (2018) 25 Cal.App.5th 745 (“*Huff*”), as an Aggrieved Employee, Claimant has standing, and intends, on behalf of LWDA, to pursue civil penalties against Employer for any and all other Labor Code violations committed by Employer. In *Huff*, the California Court of Appeals held that an employee alleging a single violation of the Labor Code under PAGA may also bring PAGA claims against Employer for all other alleged

Labor Code violations, even those suffered by other employees of the same employer. According to the *Huff* decision, Employee, as an “aggrieved” employee affected by at least one Labor Code violation may, and hereby does, pursue penalties on behalf of LWDA for unrelated Labor Code violations by Employer.

Employers are in direct violation of numerous California wage and hour laws including but not limited to said sections stated above. We hereby provide notice under the California Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code Sections 2698, *et seq.*, and specifically ask for an investigation, or if the agency does not intend to investigate the alleged violations, a letter confirming the same so that we may allege a cause of action under PAGA against Employers for the violations discussed in this letter.

This letter is sent in compliance with the reporting requirements of California Labor Code section 2699.3. By law, an employee alleging a violation of one of the above referenced sections must notify his or her employer and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) before he or she can invoke the provisions of Sections 2699, *et seq.*, by seeking redress in court. Cal. Lab. Code § 2699.3(a)(1). The LWDA must then notify the employer and the employee within 60 calendar days regarding whether it intends to investigate the alleged violation. Cal. Lab. Code § 2699.3(a)(2)(B). If the LWDA advises it will not investigate, or if no notice is provided within 65 calendar days, the employee may file a lawsuit invoking the provisions under Labor Code § 2699. Cal. Lab. Code § 2699.3(a)(2)(A). It is Claimant’s intention to file a civil complaint and to bring the appropriate claims under California Labor Code § 2699 on behalf of themselves, the State of California and all Aggrieved Employees should your office not address Employers’ alleged violations within this time.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact my office. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

BLACKSTONE LAW



Alexander K. Spellman, Esq.

cc: By U.S. Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested

***American Nuts, LLC
12950 San Fernando Road
Sylmar, CA 91342***

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American Nuts, LLC
Attn: Becky De George, Agent for Service of Process
2710 Gateway Oaks Dr., Suite 150N
Sacramento, CA 95833

Connect Staffing, Inc.
Attn: Cima Johnson, Agent for Service of Process
8220 Katella Avenue, Suite A
Stanton, CA 90680