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**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

**FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO**

JACQUELINE MALDONADO, individually, and on behalf of the State of California and other aggrieved persons,

*Plaintiff*,

v.

RUHNAU CLARKE ARCHITECTS, a California corporation; and DOES 1 through 10, inclusive,

*Defendants*.

Case No.: 37-2023-00037299
[Related Case No. 37-2024-00027674]

*[Assigned for All Purposes to the Hon. Terrie E. Roberts, Dept. C-68]*

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

Preliminary Approval Hearing:
Date: May 15, 2026
Time: 10:30 a.m.
Dept: C-68

Action Filed: August 28, 2023

**TO ALL PARTIES AND THEIR ATTORNEYS OF RECORD:**

**PLEASE TAKE NOTICE** that on May 15, 2026, at 10:30 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard in Department C-68 of the Superior Court of California, County of San Diego, Hall of Justice located at 330 W. Broadway, San Diego, California 92101, Plaintiff Jacqueline Maldonado (hereinafter "Plaintiff") will and hereby does move this Court for an Order:

1. Granting preliminary approval of the proposed Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement ("Settlement");
2. Conditionally certifying the proposed Class for settlement purposes only;
3. Appointing Plaintiff Jacqueline Maldonado as the Class Representative;
4. Appointing John G. Yslas, Jeffrey C. Bils, Mohamed Bholat, Emily K. Borman, and Courtney M. Miller of Wilshire Law Firm, PLC as Class Counsel;
5. Appointing Apex Class Action as the Settlement Administrator;
6. Consolidating the related PAGA Action and this Class Action for settlement purposes; and
7. Setting a final approval hearing date.

Pursuant to California Rules of Court, rule 3.769(d) and (e), this Motion is made on the grounds that the proposed Settlement satisfies all criteria for preliminary approval and falls well within the range of reasonableness. The Settlement was reached through informed, arm's length bargaining between experienced attorneys with the assistance of an experienced neutral, and Plaintiff and Plaintiff's Counsel will fairly and adequately represent the Class.

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This Motion is based on this Notice of Motion, the accompanying Memorandum of Points and Authorities, the Declaration of John G. Yslas, the Declaration of Jacqueline Maldonado, and on all records and documents on file, together with such oral and documentary evidence that may be presented at the hearing on this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: April 3, 2026

**WILSHIRE LAW FIRM, PLC**

By: /s/ Courtney M. Miller
Courtney M. Miller
Attorneys for Plaintiff

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## MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

### I. INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to California Rules of Court, rule 3.769(d) and (e), Plaintiff Jacqueline Maldonado (hereinafter "Plaintiff") seeks preliminary approval of a class action settlement of wage and hour claims, including representative claims brought under the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 ("PAGA"), against Defendant Ruhnau Clarke Architects (hereinafter "Defendant"). The proposed Class is defined as all persons who worked for Defendant in California as an hourly-paid or non-exempt employee ("Class Members") at any time August 28, 2019, through November 19, 2024 ("Class Period").[1] The main terms of the Settlement are as follows:

1. A Gross Settlement Amount of $495,000.00, which will be distributed to approximately 152 Class Members on a pro rata basis according to the total Workweeks worked by each Class Member during the Class Period;
2. Attorneys' fees of up to one third (1/3) of the Gross Settlement Amount (currently estimated to be $165,000.00) and up to $10,000.00 in reimbursement of litigation costs to Plaintiff's Counsel;
3. A Class Representative Service Payment of up to $10,000.00 to Plaintiff;
4. Costs of settlement administration of up to $5,500.00; and
5. Allocation of $22,500.00 to PAGA penalties, seventy-five percent (75%) of which ($16,875.00) will be paid to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA"), and twenty-five percent (25%) of which ($5,625.00) will be paid to all persons who worked for any Defendant in California as an hourly-paid or non-exempt employee ("Aggrieved Employees") at any time from August 28, 2022, through November 19, 2024 ("PAGA Period").

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[1] The escalator clause of the Settlement Agreement provides Defendant an option to shorten the Class Period in the event the escalator was triggered. Settlement Agreement at § 8. Prior to filing this Motion, Defendant informed Plaintiff that it had determined the updated workweek count and confirmed the escalator is not triggered. Yslas Decl. ¶ 38.

The Settlement meets all criteria for preliminary approval and falls within the range of reasonableness given the risks and expenses of further litigation. The Settlement was reached through informed, arm's length bargaining between experienced attorneys with the assistance of an experienced neutral. As such, Plaintiff requests that the Court grant preliminary approval of the Settlement, conditionally certify the Class for settlement purposes only, appoint Plaintiff as the Class Representative, appoint Plaintiff's Counsel as Class Counsel, appoint Apex Class Action as the Administrator, authorize the Administrator to administer notice of the Settlement to the Class, and set a final approval hearing date.

## II. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On August 28, 2023, Plaintiff filed this putative class action against Defendant alleging: (1) failure to pay minimum and straight time wages; (2) failure to pay overtime wages; (3) failure to provide meal periods; (4) failure to authorize and permit rest periods; (5) failure to timely pay final wages at termination; (6) failure to provide accurate itemized wage statements; (7) failure to indemnify employees for expenditures; (8) failure to produce requested employment records; and (9) unfair business practices ("Class Action"). Declaration of John G. Yslas in Support of Plaintiff's Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action and PAGA Settlement ("MPA") ("Yslas Decl.") at ¶ 3.

On October 17, 2023, Plaintiff provided written notice to the LWDA and Defendant of the specific provisions the Labor Code alleged to have been violated, including the facts and theories in support. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 4, Exhibit 1. On October 17, 2023, Plaintiff provided amended written notice to the LWDA and Defendant of the specific provisions the Labor Code alleged to have been violated, including the facts and theories in support. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 4, Exhibit 2. The LWDA did not notify Plaintiff that it intended to investigate within 65 days of these written notices. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 4.

On June 11, 2024, Plaintiff filed a separate representative action against Defendant for civil penalties under PAGA in the Superior Court of California, County of San Diego, Case No. 37-2024-00027674 ("PAGA Action"). Yslas Decl. at ¶ 5. The Court subsequently deemed the Class Action and PAGA Action related. *Id*.

On September 19, 2024, the Parties participated in a private full-day mediation with mediator, Russ J. Wunderli, Esq. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 6. The negotiations were adversarial, conducted at arm's length, and tempered by the efforts of both sides to serve the interests of their clients. *Id*. With the assistance of the mediator, the Parties reached a settlement that day and agreed upon general settlement terms. *Id*. The Parties memorialized their agreement in a Memorandum of Understanding in June 2025. *Id*.

The Parties negotiated the terms of the Settlement over the next several months, and the Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement ("Settlement Agreement") was fully executed in October 2025. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 7, Exhibit 3. On March 24, 2026, Plaintiff submitted a copy of the Settlement Agreement to the LWDA. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 8, Exhibit 4. As part of this motion, Plaintiff seeks consolidation of the PAGA Action and this Class Action for settlement purposes.

## III. SUMMARY OF THE SETTLEMENT TERMS

### A. Terms of the Proposed Settlement

The parties have agreed to settle the claims alleged in this Class Action and PAGA Action for a Gross Settlement Amount of $495,000.00. Settlement Agreement at § 3.1. Subject to Court approval, the following payments will be deducted from the Gross Settlement Amount: (1) a Class Representative Service Payment of up to $10,000.00 to Plaintiff; (2) attorneys' fees of up to one third (1/3) of the Gross Settlement Amount (currently estimated to be $165,000.00) and reimbursement of litigation costs of up to $10,000.00 to Plaintiff's Counsel; (3) costs of settlement administration of up to $5,500.00 to Apex Class Action; (4) individual class payments to Class Members; and (5) PAGA penalties in the amount of $22,500.00, which will be allocated 75% to the LWDA ($16,875.00) and 25% to Aggrieved Employees ($5,625.00). *Id.* at § 3.2. After all requested deductions are made, the remaining Net Settlement Amount is currently estimated to be $282,000.00. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 21.

Individual class payments will be calculated based on the number of workweeks worked by each Class Member during the Class Period. Settlement Agreement at § 3.2.4. For tax purposes, the individual class payments will be allocated 20% to wages and 80% to interest, reimbursement, and penalties. *Id*. at § 3.2.4.1. Defendant will separately pay any and all employer payroll taxes owed on the wage positions of the individual class payments separate from the Gross Settlement Amount. *Id*. at 3.1.

Individual PAGA Payments to Aggrieved Employees will be calculated based on the number of PAGA Pay Periods worked by each Aggrieved Employee during the PAGA Period. *Id*. at § 3.2.5.1. For tax purposes, the Individual PAGA Payments will be allocated 100% to penalties. *Id*. at § 3.2.5.2.

Any deductions not approved by the Court will be retained by the Settlement Administrator in the Net Settlement Amount. *Id.* at §§ 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.5.2. Funds from any uncashed checks will be transmitted by the Settlement Administrator to the California Controller's Unclaimed Property Fund in the name of the Class Member thereby leaving no "unpaid residue." *Id.* at § 4.4.3. None of the Gross Settlement Amount will revert to Defendant. *Id*. at § 3.1.

**B. Proposed Settlement Administration**

The parties' proposed Class Notice complies with the requirements of California Rules of Court, rule 3.766(d). *See* Exhibit A to Settlement Agreement. It provides information regarding the nature of this lawsuit, a summary of the settlement terms, the formula used for calculating individual class and PAGA payments and instructions to dispute the calculations, instructions on how to opt-out of or object to the Settlement, the date, time, and location of the final approval hearing, and the amounts sought for the class representative service payment, attorneys' fees and litigation costs, and settlement administration costs. *See generally, id*. The Class Notice also notifies Class Members that they do not need to submit a claim to participate in the Settlement and receive a payment. *See id*. The Settlement Administrator will mail Class Members the Class Notice by first-class mail.[2] Settlement Agreement at § 7.4.2.

If a Class Notice is returned as undeliverable, the Settlement Administrator will re-mail the Class Notice within five (5) days to the forwarding address provided by the U.S. Postal Service. *Id*. at § 7.4.3. If no forwarding address is provided, the Settlement Administrator will conduct a

[2] Defense Counsel represented to Plaintiff's Counsel that the Class Members read English, and that a translation of the Class Notice to any other language is therefore unnecessary. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 36.

Class Member Address Search and re-mail the Class Notice to the most current address obtained. *Id.* The deadline to opt-out of the Settlement or to submit an objection or dispute will be extended by 14 days for all Class Members whose Class Notice was remailed. *Id*. at § 7.4.4.

**C. Proposed Releases**

Effective on the date when Defendant fully funds the entire Gross Settlement Amount and all employer payroll taxes owed on the Wage Portion of the Individual Class Payments, Plaintiff, Class Members, and Class Counsel will release claims against all Released Parties as follows:

Released Class Claims:

> Plaintiff and all Participating Class Members, other than those who submit requests for exclusion, on behalf of themselves and their respective former and present representatives, agents, attorneys, heirs, administrators, successors, and assigns, shall release all claims, damages, debts, obligations, penalties, actions, rights, demands, liabilities, and causes of action, of any kind, arising under state, federal or local law, whether statutory, common law, or administrative law, at any time during the Class Period, that were alleged or which could have reasonably been alleged based on the facts alleged in the operative Complaints or ascertained in the course of the Actions (the "Released Class Claims"), including but not limited to: (1) failure to pay minimum and straight time wages (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 204, 1194, 1194.2, 1197 and 1197.1); (2) failure to pay overtime wages (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 510, 1194, and 1198); (3) failure to provide meal periods (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 226.7, 512, 1174(d), and 1174.5); (4) failure to authorize and permit rest periods (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 1174.5); (5) failure to timely pay final wages at termination (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 201-203); (6) failure to provide accurate itemized wage statements (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 226); (7) failure to indemnify employees for expenditures (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 2802 and 2699(f)(2)); (8) failure to produce requested employment records (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 226, 432, and 1198.5); and (9) unfair business practices (pursuant to Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 17200, *et seq.*). The enumeration of these specific claims shall neither enlarge nor narrow the scope of *res judicata* based on the claims that were asserted in the Actions or could have been asserted in the Actions based on the facts and circumstances alleged in the Complaints. The Released Class Claims are those that accrued during the Class Period.

Settlement Agreement at § 5.3.

Released PAGA Claims:

> Plaintiff and all Class Members who are Aggrieved Employees, regardless of whether they are Participating Class Members or Non-Participating Class Members, shall release, on behalf of themselves and their respective former and present representatives, agents, attorneys, heirs, administrators, successors, and assigns, the Released Parties from all claims for PAGA civil penalties, interest, fees or costs that are alleged or reasonably could have been alleged based on the facts alleged in the operative PAGA Complaint and/or in Plaintiff's November 1, 2024 and November 18, 2024 PAGA Notices, including but not limited to: (1) failure to pay minimum and straight time wages (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 204, 210, 510, 1194, 1194.2, 2699(f)(2)), 1197,and 1197.1); (2) failure to pay overtime wages (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 510, 1194 and 1198); (3) failure to provide meal periods (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 210, 226.7 and 512); (4) failure to authorize and

permit rest periods (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 210 and 226.7); (5) failure to timely pay final wages at termination (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 201 – 203 and 213(d)); (6) failure to provide accurate itemized wage statements (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 226 and 226.3); (7) failure to indemnify employees for expenditures (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code § 2802); (8) failure to produce requested employment records (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 226, 432, and 1198.5); (9) failure to pay all earned wages twice per month and unlawfully withholding accrued wages (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 204, 210 and 216); (10) failure to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 1174, and 1174.5); (11) recordkeeping requirement violations (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 226.6, 558.1, 1174, 1174.5, 1198 and 1199); (12) failure to provide proper paid sick leave (pursuant to Cal. Labor. Code §§ 233, 234, 245 – 248.5); (13) refusal to pay wages due and/or denial of the validity of any claim to wages due (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code § 216); (14) secretly paying wages lower than required by statute while purporting to pay legal wages (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code § 223); (15) failure to pay vested vacation/ paid time off (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code § 227.3); (14) failure to timely provide temporary workers with owed wages (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code § 201.3); (16) unlawful agreements/ unlawful criminal history inquiries (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 432.5, 1024.5, and CA Civil Code section 1786, et seq. and 15 U.S.C. section 1681, et seq.); (17) preventing employees from using or disclosing the skills, knowledge and experiences they obtained at Employers, and whistleblower violations (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 98.6, 232, 232.5, 1102.5, and 1197.5); (18) unlawful inquiries into criminal histories (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code § 432.7; (19) workplace health and safety violations (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 1527, 3366, 3457, 8397.4, 6401, and 6401; (20) willful misclassification (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 223 and 226.8); (19) retaliation (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code § 1102.5); and (21) civil penalties for wage and hour violations (pursuant to Cal. Labor Code §§ 210, 226.3, 558, 1174.5, 1197.1, and 2699). The Released PAGA Claims are those that accrued during the PAGA Period.

Settlement Agreement at § 5.4.

"Released Parties" means "Defendant and any of its past, present and/or future, directors, officers, partners, principals, trustees, shareholders, owners, members, managers, employees, administrators, agents, attorneys, insurers, predecessors, successors, assigns, DBAs, parents, subsidiaries." Settlement Agreement at § 1.42.

Only Plaintiff will agree to a broader release. *Id*. at §§ 5.1, 5.2.

## IV. THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT MEETS ALL CRITERIA FOR PRELIMINARY APPROVAL

### A. Provisional Certification of the Class is Appropriate

Class certification is appropriate when there is: (1) an ascertainable and sufficiently numerous class; (2) a well-defined community of interest among class members; and (3) substantial benefits from certification that render proceeding as a class superior to the alternatives. *Brinker Restaurant Corp. v. Superior Court*, 53 Cal.4th 1004, 1021 (2012). Although courts still need to review and consider each element for certification, a lesser standard can be used to provisionally certify a settlement class. *Global Minerals & Metals Corp. v. Superior Court*, 113 Cal.App.4th 836, 859 (2003).

### 1. The Proposed Class is Numerous and Ascertainable

"Ascertainability" is determined by examining the class definition and the size of the class, and may also involve examining the means available to identify class members. *Noel v. Thrifty Payless, Inc.*, 7 Cal.5th 955, 980-981, 985-986 (2019). As the settlement eliminates the need for trial, "the case management issues inherent in the ascertainable class determination need not be confronted." *Global Minerals*, 113 Cal.App.4th at 859. Further, under California law, there is no minimum number of class members for maintenance of a class action. *Hendershot v. Ready to Roll Transp., Inc.*, 228 Cal.App.4th 1213, 1222 (2014). Class sizes as small as 10 have been permitted. *Rose v. City of Hayward*, 126 Cal.App.3d 926, 934 (1981), disapproved on other grounds by *Noel*, 7 Cal.5th at 986.

The Class here consists of all persons who worked for any Defendant in California as an hourly-paid or non-exempt employee at any time during the Class Period. *See* Settlement Agreement at § 1.5. The Class is also readily ascertainable from Defendant's business records, because all Class Members are or were employees of Defendant. *Id*. Defendant's records show there are approximately 152 Class Members, making joinder of all Class Members impracticable. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 10.

### 2. A Well-Defined Community of Interest Exists

The community of interest requirement embodies three factors: (1) predominant common questions of law or fact; (2) class representatives with claims or defenses typical of the class; and (3) class representatives who can adequately represent the class. *Brinker*, 53 Cal.4th at 1021.

#### a. Common Questions Predominate

In determining whether common issues "predominate," courts consider both plaintiff's legal theories and defendant's affirmative defenses. *Duran v. U.S. Bank Nat'l Ass'n*, 59 Cal.4th 1, 28-29 (2014). The "predominate common questions" factor does not require that all class members have identical claims. *Ayala v. Antelope Valley Newspapers, Inc.*, 59 Cal.4th 522, 530 (2014). Rather, the focus is on whether issues shared by the class members are sufficiently uniform to permit class-wide assessment, and whether individual variations in proof on those issues are manageable. *Id*.

Plaintiff has alleged that Defendant maintained common employment policies and/or practices that unlawfully deprived Class Members of wages, meal periods, rest periods, reimbursements for business expenses, accurate wage statements, timely payment of wages upon separation of employment, and timely production of employment records. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 11. These allegations present common factual and legal questions of, *inter alia*, whether Defendant applied the same scheduling, timekeeping, pay, meal period, rest period, reimbursement, and employment record production policies to all Class Members, whether these policies and practices resulted in Labor Code violations, whether Defendant's conduct was intentional, and whether Class Members are entitled to damages and/or penalties. *Id*. These common questions could be resolved using Class Members' time records, payroll records, testimony from Defendant's designated representative(s), and Class Members' testimony. *Id*. Therefore, the Court can and should exercise its discretion to grant conditional class certification for settlement purposes.

**b. Plaintiff is Typical of the Class**

Typicality does not require that the representative plaintiff's claims and those of the class members be identical or perfectly aligned. *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.*, 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 228 (2001), disapproved on other grounds by *Hernandez v. Restoration Hardware, Inc.*, 4 Cal.5th 260, 269-280 (2018). Typicality does not require that a plaintiff's claims be identical to those of other class members, only that their claims and the defenses applicable to them are sufficiently similar to those of other class members that a named plaintiff is able to adequately represent the class and focus on common issues. *Medrazo v. Honda of North Hollywood*, 166 Cal.App.4th 89, 99 (2008).

Plaintiff has alleged that she and Class Members were employed by the same Defendant and injured by Defendant's common wage and hour policies and practices, including Defendant's scheduling, timekeeping, pay, meal period, rest period, reimbursement, and employment record production policies. *See* Yslas Decl. at ¶ 11. Through informal discovery, Plaintiff confirmed that these challenged policies and practices applied to Plaintiff and other Class Members alike. *See id.*

at ¶ 9. Therefore, Plaintiff's claims and Class Members' claims arise from the same challenged employment policies and practices and are based on the same legal theories.

**c. Plaintiff and Plaintiff's Counsel Will Adequately Represent the Class**

Certification requires adequacy of both the proposed class representative and of the proposed class counsel. Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 382. "Only a conflict that goes to the very subject matter of the litigation will defeat a party's claim of representative status." *Richmond v. Dart Industries*, 29 Cal.3d 462, 470 (1981). Only conflicts that are "irreconcilable" can defeat adequacy. *Nat'l Solar Equip. Owners' Ass'n v. Grumman Corp.*, 235 Cal.App.3d 1273, 1286 (1991). The proposed representative Plaintiff and proposed Class Counsel present no such conflict.

Plaintiff's interests are coextensive with Class Members' interests. Declaration of Jacqueline Maldonado in Support of Plaintiff's Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action and PAGA Settlement ("Maldonado Decl.") at ¶ 6. Plaintiff has demonstrated an ability to advocate for the interests of Class Members by initiating this lawsuit, providing information to her attorneys, meeting with her attorneys regarding the claims, making herself available the day of mediation to answer questions, and reviewing the proposed Settlement. Maldonado Decl. at ¶ 7.

Likewise, Wilshire Law Firm, PLC has expended considerable time and effort on this case and will continue to do so through final approval. *See generally*, Yslas Decl. Therefore, Plaintiff should be appointed Class Representative, and her counsel should be appointed Class Counsel.

**3. A Class Action is Superior to a Multitude of Individual Lawsuits**

Courts have held that class treatment of wage and hour claims is clearly "superior to the other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy." *Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc. v. Superior Court*, 211 Cal.App.3d 758, 772-773 (1989). This is so because "[p]ublic policy has long favored the 'full and prompt payment of wages due an employee.'" *Sav-On Drug Stores, Inc. v. Superior Court*, 34 Cal.4th 319, 340 (2004). Here, a class action is superior to a multitude of individual lawsuits. Given the size and amount of each Class Members' claim, Class Members have little incentive to litigate their claims on an individual basis because the out-of-pocket expenses and personal commitment necessary to litigate each claim likely outweigh any potential recovery. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 10. Therefore, a class action is the superior method for seeking relief.

### B. The Settlement Meets the Standards for Preliminary Approval

The moving party must demonstrate that "the settlement is fair, adequate and reasonable." *Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc.*, 168 Cal.App.4th 116, 126 (2008). "In determining whether a class settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable, the trial court should consider relevant factors, such as the strength of plaintiffs' 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 views of counsel, the presence of a governmental participant, and the reaction of the class members to the proposed settlement." *Wershba*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 244-245 (internal quotations and citations omitted).

#### 1. The Settlement is Entitled to a Presumption of Fairness

A settlement is entitled to "a presumption of fairness . . . 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." *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.*, 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1801 (1996). The Settlement here satisfies the first three factors. Plaintiff will analyze the fourth factor at final approval after Class Members have been notified of the Settlement and provided with an opportunity to object.

##### a. The Settlement is the Result of Arm's Length Negotiation

Courts have recognized that the involvement of a respected mediator provides a high degree of assurance that the settlement is the result of arm's length bargaining. *See Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.*, 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 52-53 (2008). The Settlement in this matter was the product of a full-day mediation session with a respected mediator. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 6. The negotiations were adversarial, conducted at arm's length, and tempered by the efforts of both sides to serve the interests of their clients. *Id.*

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**b. Sufficient Investigation and Discovery Have Been Conducted**

Prior to attending mediation, Plaintiff's Counsel thoroughly investigated the claims, applicable law, and potential defenses. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 9. Plaintiff's Counsel assessed the value of the class claims using the data and documents Defendant produced in informal discovery. *Id*. The data and documents produced by Defendant included the number of Class Members and Aggrieved Employees, the number of workweeks in the Class Period, and the number of pay periods in the PAGA Period, the average rate of pay, documents concerning Plaintiff, Defendant's written wage-and-hour policies, and a sampling of Class Members' time and payroll records. *Id*. Plaintiff's Counsel engaged an expert to quantify the potential exposure using the time and payroll records, and then assessed the risks associated with each claim meriting reductions in the likely success at class certification and likely recovery at trial. *Id.*

**c. Plaintiff's Counsel is Experienced in Similar Litigation**

Plaintiff is represented by Wilshire Law Firm, PLC. *Id.* at ¶ 1. Plaintiff's Counsel has extensive experience litigating wage-and-hour class actions on behalf of employees. *See id.* at ¶¶ 22-33. Plaintiff's Counsel has been involved as counsel in numerous class actions that have resulted in millions of dollars in recovery. *See id.*

**2. The Settlement is Reasonable Given the Strengths of Plaintiff's Claims and the Risks and Expense of Further Litigation**

A settlement does not have to provide 100% of the damages sought to be considered fair and reasonable. *See Rebney v. Wells Fargo Bank*, 220 Cal.App.3d 1117, 1139 (1991). Although the exposure Plaintiff's Counsel calculated is substantial, the various risks at succeeding at class certification and through trial affected the valuation of the claims for settlement purposes. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 12. Based on an analysis of the facts and legal contentions in this case, documents and information from Defendant, Plaintiff's Counsel evaluated Defendant's maximum exposure. *Id*. Plaintiff's Counsel took into account the risk of not having the claims certified and the risk of not having prevailed at trial, even if the claims are certified. *Id*. After using the data Defendant provided, including class member timekeeping and payroll records, as well as class member demographics, with the assistance of a statistics expert, Plaintiff's Counsel created a damages model to evaluate the realistic range of potential recovery for the class. *Id*.

<u>Minimum and Overtime Wages</u>: Plaintiffs' unpaid minimum and overtime wage claims were based on the allegation that Defendant required Class Members to perform work duties while off the clock, without compensation. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 13. For example, Plaintiff alleged that Defendant regularly required her and other Class Members to work off-the-clock during their scheduled meal periods and to work off-the-clock when they exceeded 40 hours of work in a workweek, all without compensation. *Id*. Based on these allegations, Plaintiffs' Counsel conservatively estimated that Class Members worked one (1) hour off the clock per week in calculating potential exposure for these claims to be approximately $653,399.25 (14,642 workweeks x $29.75 average hourly rate of pay x 1.00 hour/workweek x 1.5 overtime rate of pay). *Id*. Because this claim would have relied heavily on Class Member testimony and would not be evidenced in Defendant's time and payroll records, the risk of succeeding at class certification was substantial. *Id*. Accordingly, Plaintiffs' Counsel applied a risk discount based on a 40% chance of succeeding at class certification and a 40% chance of succeeding at trial on the merits, yielding a realistic damage estimate of approximately $104,543.88 ($653,399.25 x 40% x 40%). *Id.*

<u>Meal Periods</u>: Plaintiff's meal period claim was based on the allegation that Defendant failed to provide Class Members with legally compliant meal periods or pay meal period premiums in lieu thereof. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 14. For example, Plaintiff alleged that Defendant regularly failed to provide her and other Class Members with uninterrupted duty-free meal periods. *Id*. Additionally, the sampling of time records produced by Defendant in advance of mediation showed that Defendant failed to record when Class Members clocked in and clocked out and as such, did not include any recorded meal periods. *Id*. Based on these allegations, Plaintiff's Counsel applied a 100% meal period violation rate to all shifts. Therefore, potential liability for the meal period claims is approximately $1,165,456.25 (39,175 estimated shifts x $29.75 hourly rate x 100% violation rate). *Id*. However, Defendant argued that Class Members were covered by meal period waivers. *Id*. Accordingly, Plaintiff's Counsel applied a risk discount based on a 50% chance of succeeding at class certification and a 40% chance of succeeding at trial on the merits, yielding a realistic damage estimate of approximately $233,091.25 ($1,165,456.25 x 50% x 40%). *Id.*

Rest Periods: Plaintiff's rest period claim was based on the allegation that Defendant failed to provide Class Members with legally compliant rest periods or pay rest period premiums in lieu thereof. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 15. For example, Plaintiff alleged that Defendant failed to provide her and other Class Members with rest periods. *Id*. Based on these allegations, Plaintiff's Counsel applied a 100% violation rate to all shifts. *Id*. Therefore, potential liability for the rest period claims is approximately $1,165,456.25 (39,175 estimated shifts x $29.75 hourly rate x 100% violation rate). *Id*. However, Plaintiff's Counsel discounted this figure to account for the difficulty of certifying and proving rest period claims, particularly because rest periods do not have to be recorded, and to account for the possibility of Class Members voluntarily choosing to forego a rest period. *Id*. Because this claim would have relied exclusively on Class Member testimony, Plaintiff's Counsel discounted this claim based on a 30% chance of succeeding at class certification and a 20% chance of succeeding at trial, yielding a realistic damage estimate of approximately $69,927.38 ($1,165,456.25 x 30% x 20%). *Id.*

Reimbursements: Plaintiff's reimbursement claim was based on the allegation that Defendant failed to indemnify Class Members for expenses incurred as a direct result of performing their job duties for Defendant. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 16. For example, Plaintiff alleged that Defendant failed to reimburse her and other Class Members for mandatory use of their personal cell phones for work-related communications and for mandatory use of their personal vehicle to meet with clients off-site and to visit project sites. *Id*. For purposes of calculating Defendant's liability based on a best-case scenario for Plaintiff and the Class, Plaintiff's Counsel estimated that Defendant were liable to each class member for $10.00 per workweek in unreimbursed expenses, for a total amount of approximately $146,420.00 ($10.00 x 14,642 workweeks). *Id*. Plaintiff's Counsel discounted this figure based on an evaluation of a 30% chance of succeeding at class certification and a 30% chance of succeeding at trial to account for the difficulty of certifying and proving expense reimbursement claims, yielding a realistic damage estimate of approximately $13,177.80 ($146,420.00 x 30% x 30%). *Id.*

In sum, Plaintiff's Counsel estimated that Plaintiff's maximum recovery for the off-the-clock claim, meal period violations, and rest period violations (i.e., the wage claims) is approximately $2.98 million, but after factoring in the risk and uncertainty of certification and prevailing at trial, Plaintiff's Counsel estimates that Plaintiff's realistic estimated recovery for these non-penalty wage claims is approximately $407,562.51. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 17.

Derivative Penalties: Plaintiff alleged that as a result of Defendant's failure to pay all wages owed, Defendant owed waiting time penalties and wage statement penalties. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 18. With respect to Plaintiff's derivative claims for statutory penalties, Plaintiff's Counsel estimated that Defendant's realistic potential liability is approximately $30,256.80. *Id*. Defendant's maximum potential liability for waiting time penalties is approximately $335,580.00 (47 employees x $29.75 hourly rate x 8.00 hours/day x 30 days) based on approximately 47 formerly employed class members during the 3-year statute of limitations period and an average shift length of 8.00 hours. *Id*. Defendant's maximum potential liability for inaccurate wage statements is approximately $168,700.00 ([68 employees x 1 initial violation/employee x $50 for an initial violation] + [(1,721 pay periods - 68 initial violations) x $100 for each subsequent violation]) based on approximately 68 class members who worked during the 1-year statute of limitations period and approximately 1,721 pay periods in that statutory timeframe. *Id*. In light of the foregoing, Plaintiff's Counsel believes that it would be unrealistic to expect the Court to award the full $504,280.00 in statutory penalties given Defendant's defenses, the contested nature of Plaintiff's claims, the challenges of establishing willfulness as applicable, and the discretionary nature of penalties. *Id*. Considering that the underlying wage claims are realistically estimated to be approximately $407,562.51, such a disproportionate award would also raise due process concerns. *Id*. As such, Plaintiff's counsel discounted these figures to account for the risk and uncertainty of obtaining class certification and prevailing at trial, resulting in a realistic evaluation of approximately $20,134.80 for waiting time penalty claims ($335,580.00 x 30% x 20%), and approximately $10,122.00 for wage statement penalty claims ($168,700.00 x 30% x 20%), or approximately $30,256.80 total for statutory penalties. *Id.*

PAGA: For the PAGA claim, Plaintiff's Counsel determined that Defendant's potential exposure could potentially reach $293,400.00, assuming the initial $100 penalty would apply for each of the 2,934 pay periods in the PAGA Period. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 19. However, even assuming success on the merits of each claim, PAGA gives the Court discretion to reduce penalties for a variety of reasons, including where to do otherwise would result in an award that is unjust, arbitrary and oppressive, or confiscatory. *Id*. As such, Plaintiff's counsel discounted this figure to account for the risk and uncertainty of prevailing at trial, resulting in a realistic evaluation of approximately $29,340.00 for PAGA penalties ($293,400.00 x 10%). *Id*. The settlement allocates $22,500.00 of the Gross Settlement Amount to PAGA, therefore the PAGA allocation amounts to 4.5% of the Gross Settlement Amount and approximately 77% of the realistic maximum damages for PAGA penalties ($22,500.00 / $29,340.00). *Id.*

Using these estimated figures, Plaintiff's Counsel predicted that the realistic maximum recovery for all claims, including penalties, would be approximately $480,337.11. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 20. This means that the gross settlement figure represents approximately 103% of the realistic maximum recovery ($495,000.00 / $480,337.11). *Id*. Considering the risk and uncertainty of prevailing at class certification and at trial, this is an excellent result for the Class. *Id*. Indeed, because of the proposed Settlement, Class Members will receive timely, guaranteed relief and will avoid the risk of an unfavorable judgment. *Id*.

Based on the figures in the Settlement Agreement, the Net Settlement Amount available for class settlement payments is currently estimated to be $282,000.00 for approximately 152 Class Members. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 21. As a result, each Settlement Class Member would be eligible to receive an average net benefit of approximately $1,855.26. *Id*. Based on the estimated Net Settlement Amount available for individual class payments and there being approximately 14,642 workweeks in the Class Period, the estimated weekly valuation for individual class payments is $19.26 ($282,000.00 / 14,642 workweeks). *Id*.

**C. The Requested Service Payment is Reasonable**

Plaintiff seeks a class representative service payment of up to $10,000.00 for accepting the responsibilities of representing the interests of the Class and potential costs that were not borne by any other Class Members. Settlement Agreement at § 3.2.1. A named plaintiff is eligible for payment that reasonably compensates him or her for undertaking and fulfilling a fiduciary duty to represent absent class members. *See Cellphone Termination Fee Cases*, 186 Cal.App.4th 1380, 1393 (2010); *Bell v. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 115 Cal.App.4th 715, 726 (2004).

Throughout this case, Plaintiff assisted counsel in providing information necessary to prosecute the claims, meeting with counsel regarding the claims, maintaining regular contact with counsel, making herself available the day of mediation to answer questions, and reviewing the Settlement to ensure it was fair to the Class. Maldonado Decl. at ¶ 7. No action would likely have been taken by Class Members individually and no compensation would have been recovered for them, but for Plaintiff's services on behalf of the Class. By actively pursuing this action, Plaintiff furthered the California public policy goal of enforcing the State's wage and hour laws. *See Sav-On*, 34 Cal.4th at 340. The requested class representative service payments are reasonable and should be preliminarily approved. Plaintiff has provided a declaration regarding her work performed to date and will provide additional information as requested or required by the Court at final approval.

**D. The Requested Attorneys' Fees and Costs Are Reasonable**

The purpose of an attorneys' fee award in class action litigation is to reward counsel who invested in a case despite the risk of non-payment and achieved a substantial positive result for the class. California courts routinely award attorneys' fees equaling one third or more of the potential value of the common fund. *See Chavez*, 162 Cal.App.4th at 66, fn. 11 ("Empirical studies show that, regardless of whether the percentage method or the lodestar method is used, fee awards in class actions average around one-third of the recovery.").

Additionally, courts utilize "multipliers" to account for the risk of taking on cases where there is no guarantee of recovery, uncertainties as the amount that will be recovered, uncertainty as to the cost of litigating the case (both in effort and expenses), and uncertainty about how much time will pass before the recovery is obtained. *Ketchum v. Moses*, 24 Cal.4th 1122, 1132-33 (2001); *see also Serrano v. Priest*, 20 Cal.3d 25, 48-49 (1977) (approving the adjustment of the lodestar figure based on factors specific to the case to ensure fair market value for legal services provided on a contingency basis). Application of that rule is particularly appropriate where the case is brought to redress important rights of vulnerable persons. *Ketchum*, 24 Cal.4th at 1133.

Generally, "[m]ultipliers can range from 2 to 4 or even higher." *Wershba v. Apple*

*Computers, Inc*., 91 Cal.App.4th at p. 255 (2001); *see also Sutter Health Uninsured Pricing Cases*, 171 Cal.App.4th 495, 512 (2009) (applying a 2.52 multiplier on a cross-check in an antitrust class action); *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc*., 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 60 (2008) (applying a 2.5 multiplier on a lodestar cross-check); *Vizcaino v. Microsoft Corp*., 290 F.3d 1043, 1051 n.6 (9th Cir. 2002) ("most" common fund cases apply a multiplier of 1.0-4.0); *Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l*, 231 Cal.App.4th 860, 881-82 (2004) (affirming a 2.13 multiplier after finding that "2 to 4" is a reasonable range for multipliers on a cross-check). *See also Bronshteyn v. State of California – Department of Consumer Affairs*, 114 Cal.App.5th 537 (2025) (court did not abuse its discretion by awarding 1.75 multiplier for fees incurred up to and including the jury verdict and a 1.25 enhancement for hours worked after the verdict where hourly rates for plaintiff's five senior attorneys were $1,100.00 and $1,000.00); *Tran v. Golden State FC LLC, et al*. (LASC Case No. BC699931), Fee Order filed April 8, 2022 (approving hourly rate of $1,300.00 for plaintiff's 32-year attorney).

Plaintiff seeks appointment of Wilshire Law Firm, PLC as Class Counsel. The attorneys performed significant work and expended litigation costs in prosecuting this matter with no guarantee of payment. Yslas Decl. at ¶ 22. Plaintiff's Counsel seeks preliminary approval of up to one third (1/3) of the Gross Settlement Amount, currently estimated to be $165,000.00, and up to $10,000.00 in reimbursement of litigation costs. Given the work performed in this matter, the extensive information exchange, and the substantial recovery obtained on behalf of the Class, Plaintiff's Counsel achieved a settlement through efficient and diligent work. *See generally*, Yslas Decl. At final approval, Plaintiff's Counsel will fully brief the merits of its request for the award of attorneys' fees and litigation costs.

**E. The Administration Costs are Reasonable**

The Parties have agreed upon using Apex Class Action to administer this Settlement. Settlement Agreement at § 1.2. Plaintiff seeks preliminary approval of $5,500.00 for Apex Class Action to administer this Settlement pursuant to Apex Class Action's will-not-exceed bid. *See* Yslas Decl. at ¶ 37, Exhibit 5.

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## V. CONCLUSION

The Parties have negotiated a fair and reasonable settlement of the class claims in light of the risks presented in this case. Plaintiff has presented the materials and information necessary to demonstrate that the requirements for preliminary approval have been met, and therefore respectfully requests that the Court preliminarily approve the Settlement and schedule a date for the final approval hearing.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: April 3, 2026

**WILSHIRE LAW FIRM, PLC**

By: /s/ Courtney M. Miller
Courtney M. Miller
Attorneys for Plaintiff