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VIA ONLINE FILING

Labor and Workforce Development Agency

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<https://www.dir.ca.gov/Private-Attorneys-General-Act/Private-Attorneys-General-Act.html>

RE: *Duanna Challenger-Kueth v. John Muir Health*

Dear Representative:

This office represents Duanna Challenger-Kueth (**"Ms. Challenger-Kueth"**) with respect to her claims under the California Labor Code against John Muir Health at Walnut Creek Medical Center (**"Employer"**). This letter is being sent simultaneously to Employer by certified mail.

Employer employed Ms. Challenger-Kueth since approximately March 2022, as an hourly, non-exempt employee. During her employment with Employer, Ms. Challenger-Kueth was employed as a Respiratory Therapist at Employer's location at Walnut Creek Medical Center, 1601 Ygnacio Valley Rd., Walnut Creek, California 94598. Employer is a hospital specializing in obstetrics, gynecology, emergency, trauma, cancer care, orthopedics, neurosciences, cardiac, and rehabilitation.

Ms. Challenger-Kueth intends to seek penalties for violations of the California Labor Code which are recoverable under California Labor Code section 2698, *et seq.*, the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 (**"PAGA"**). Ms. Challenger-Kueth is seeking penalties solely in a representative capacity on behalf of the State of California and all current and former non-exempt employees of Employer (**"Aggrieved Employees"**). This letter is being sent in compliance with California Labor Code section 2699.3.

As detailed below, Employer violated several of California's wage and hour laws during Ms. Challenger-Kueth's employment, including but not limited to violations of California Labor Code sections 201, 202, 203, 204, 226(a), 226.7, 510, 512(a), 1174(d), 1194, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 2800, and 2802, and the Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders (**"IWC Wage Order"**) including *inter alia*, IWC Wage Order No. 5. These claims 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

Employer has engaged in numerous unlawful practices which resulted in the failure to pay Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees for all time worked at the correct rates of pay, including minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime compensation.

First, Employer regularly required Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees to work more than eight (8) hours in a day or forty (40) hours in a workweek, but failed to pay them overtime compensation



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for such work. Employer also failed to provide Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees with adequate training as to the payment of overtime compensation, all in an effort to keep its workers uninformed as to their legal right to overtime compensation. In addition, Employer regularly required Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees to work off-the-clock in order to complete their duties and responsibilities. This off-the-clock work included, amongst other things, requiring Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees to: (1) respond to Employer and work-related requests and perform work while clocked out for purported meal breaks; (2) perform work after clocking out for the end of their shift. Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees regularly experience late, missed, and interrupted meal periods. In addition, they are not compensated for all overtime hours worked and are not trained on their rights regarding overtime compensation. Moreover, during off-duty hours, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees are required to respond to work-related text messages. Further, after clocking out, they are required to perform uncompensated work, including setting up and cleaning stations, completing patient charts, opening assignments for the day, and answering work-related phone calls. Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees were not compensated for this off-the-clock work, resulting in a failure to pay minimum wages and straight time wages. Moreover, this off-the-clock work typically caused Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees to work more than eight (8) hours in a day and forty (40) hours in week, resulting in a failure to pay overtime compensation.

In addition to requiring Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees to perform work off-the-clock without compensation, Employer also failed to accurately record the actual time worked by Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees, which resulted in a failure to pay Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees for all hours actually worked, including minimum wages, straight time wages and overtime wages. Finally, and as a matter of policy and/or practice, Employer failed to pay overtime to Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees for all overtime hours worked based on regular rates of pay correctly calculated to include all applicable remuneration.

As a result of the foregoing practices, Employer has failed to pay Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees for all wages earned at the correct rates of pay, including minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime compensation. Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 204, 510, 1194, 1197, 1197.1 and 1198.

Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek unpaid wages; PAGA default penalties; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 558, 1197.1, and 1199; compensation pursuant to Labor Code Section 1194; and attorneys' fees and costs.

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

Employer failed to provide Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees with legally-compliant 30-minute meal periods. Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees were required by Employer to work more than five (5) hours per day, but were not provided with timely uninterrupted 30-minute meal periods. Further, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees were not provided with a



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second uninterrupted 30-minute meal period when they worked over ten (10) hours per day. Employer regularly required Ms. Challenger-Kueth and 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. On the occasions that Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees did take a meal period, their meal periods were frequently interrupted or cut short.

Employer's policies, practices, and procedures were responsible for the violations alleged above and prevented Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, complete and duty-free meal periods because, amongst other reasons: (1) Employer did not have legally-compliant policies regarding the provision and timing of meal periods or systematically disregarded its own purported meal period policies; (2) Employer's management at various levels, affecting all hourly-non-exempt employees, failed and refused to implement and enforce legally compliant meal period policies and practices; (3) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees regarding their right to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods; (4) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees about their right to premium wages for non-compliant meal periods; (5) Employer failed to ensure that there was adequate staffing to allow Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods; (6) Employer required Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees to remain on-call and respond to work-related requests at all times, including during meal periods, which included responding to telephone calls, intercom announcements, and in-person verbal interruptions; and (7) Employer's policy and culture prevented Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods because of the priority placed on completing job requirements over employees right to receive timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal periods. Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees are sometimes permitted only a shortened meal period, depending on workload demands. They regularly experience late, shortened, and missed meal periods. Even on occasions when a meal period is permitted, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees are not fully relieved of all duties, as they are required to monitor their work cell phones, remain attentive to the intercom, and respond to in-person interruptions from supervisors. Moreover, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees are regularly pressured to skip meal periods in order to keep up with workload demands and are not permitted to leave the work premises during their meal periods.

Ms. Challenger-Kueth and 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, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 226.7, 512(a) and 1198.

Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; penalties pursuant to California Labor Code sections 558 and 1199; and attorneys' fees and costs.



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

Employer failed to authorize and permit Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees take legally-compliant 10-minute rest periods. Employer required Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees to work through rest periods. Ms. Challenger-Kueth 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, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and 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, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees were not completely relieved of duty as required by *Augustus v. ABM Security Services, Inc.*, 2 Cal.5th 257 (2016).

Employer's policies, practices, and procedures were responsible for the violations alleged above and prevented Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees from taking timely and complete rest periods because, amongst other reasons: (1) Employer did not have legally-compliant policies regarding the provision and timing of rest periods or systematically disregarded its own purported rest period policies; (2) Employer's management at various levels, affecting all hourly-non-exempt employees, failed and refused to implement and enforce legally compliant rest period policies and practices; (3) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees regarding their right to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods; (4) Employer failed to adequately inform and train Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees about their right to premium wages for non-compliant rest periods; (5) Employer failed to ensure that there was adequate staffing to allow Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees to take timely, uninterrupted, and duty-free rest periods; (6) Employer required Ms. Challenger-Kueth and other Aggrieved Employees to remain on-call and respond to work-related requests at all times, including during rest periods, which included responding to telephone calls, intercom announcements, and in-person verbal interruptions; and (7) Employer's policy and culture prevented Ms. Challenger-Kueth 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. Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees rarely receive rest periods and regularly experience interrupted, shortened, and missed rest periods. On the limited occasions when a rest period is provided, they are not fully relieved of all duties, as they must monitor their work cell phones, remain attentive to intercom announcements, and respond to in-person interruptions. As a result, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees are routinely pressured to work through their rest periods and experience missed, shortened, and interrupted rest periods approximately three (3) to four (4) times per week.

Ms. Challenger-Kueth and 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.



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Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 226.7, and 1198.

Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; California Labor Code sections 558 and 1199 penalties; and attorneys' fees and costs.

4. FAILURE TO TIMELY PAY WAGES DURING EMPLOYMENT

As to each pay period, Employer has failed to timely pay all wages earned because Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees were not paid all the wages they were owed including, *inter alia*, overtime compensation, straight time wages, minimum wages, and meal and rest period premiums. Accordingly, Employer violated California Labor Code section 204(a).

Ms. Challenger-Kueth 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

As a result of the practices described above, the wage statements provided to Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees failed to include the actual hours worked, the actual gross wages earned, and the correct rates of pay. Accordingly, Employer violated California Labor Code section 226(a).

Ms. Challenger-Kueth 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

Employer has failed to maintain accurate records relating to Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees' work periods, meal periods, total daily hours worked, and total hours worked per payroll period. Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Wage Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 1198.5 and 1174(d).

Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; 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



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job duties or in direct consequence of his or her obedience to the directions of the employer. IWC Wage Order No. 5 requires employers to provide employees with the tools or equipment necessary for the performance of their job. During the relevant time period, Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees incurred necessary business-related expenses and costs that were not fully reimbursed by Employer. These costs include, but are not limited to, personal cellphone, stethoscope, and training for license.

Accordingly, Employer violated IWC Order No. 5 and California Labor Code sections 2800 and 2802.

Ms. Challenger-Kueth and Aggrieved Employees will therefore seek PAGA default penalties pursuant to Labor Code section 2699; penalties pursuant to paragraph (20)(A) of IWC Wage Order No. 5; and attorneys' fees and costs.

Therefore, on behalf of the State of California and all Aggrieved Employees, Ms. Challenger-Kueth may seek all applicable penalties related to these violations of the California Labor Code pursuant to PAGA. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very Truly Yours,

Ryan T. Kuhn

Notice provided to Employer via Certified Mail (7020 1290 0001 4025 7631)

John Muir Health
ATTN: Individual Rani Singh
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