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

BRYAN DIAZ, individually, and on behalf of
other aggrieved employees pursuant to the
California Private Attorneys General Act;

Plaintiff,

vs.

TAWA RETAIL GROUP, INC., a California
corporation; TAWA SERVICES, INC., a
California corporation; TAWA
SUPERMARKET, INC., a California
corporation; TAWA INC. (RETAIL), a
California corporation; and DOES 1 through
100, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: 24TRCV00332

Honorable Gary Y. Tanaka
Department M

**PLAINTIFF'S NOTICE OF MOTION AND
MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF PRIVATE
ATTORNEYS GENERAL ACT (CAL.
LABOR CODE § 2698,
ET SEQ.) SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT
AND AWARD OF ATTORNEYS' FEES
AND COSTS, GENERAL RELEASE FEE,
AND SETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION
COSTS; MEMORANDUM OF POINTS
AND AUTHORITIES**

[Declaration of Plaintiff's Counsel
(Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell); Declaration of
Plaintiff (Bryan Diaz); and [Proposed] Order and
Judgment filed concurrently herewith]

Reservation ID: 770059785051
Date: April 15, 2025
Time: 8:30 a.m.
Department: M

Complaint Filed: January 31, 2024
Trial Date: None Set

1 **PLEASE TAKE NOTICE** that on April 15, 2025, at 8:30 a.m. or as soon thereafter as the
2 matter may be heard before the Honorable Gary Y. Tanaka in Department M of the Superior Court of the
3 State of California, for the County of Los Angeles, located at 825 Maple Avenue, Torrance, CA 90503,
4 Plaintiff Bryan Diaz (“Plaintiff”) will and hereby does move for entry of the following orders:

- 5 1. Granting approval, pursuant to California Labor Code §2699(l)(2), of the settlement between
6 Plaintiff and Defendant Tawa Retail Group, Inc. (“Defendant”) of the claims brought
7 pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 (“PAGA”), as set forth in the Private
8 Attorneys General Act Settlement Agreement and Release (“Settlement,” “Agreement,” or
9 “Settlement Agreement”), attached as “**EXHIBIT 2**” to the Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-
10 Mansell, including and not limited to, the plan of allocation and distribution of the Total
11 Settlement Amount for payment of the LWDA Payment to the California Labor and
12 Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”), Individual Settlement Shares to the Aggrieved
13 Employees, Attorneys’ Fees and Costs to Plaintiff’s Counsel, Settlement Administration
14 Costs to the PAGA Settlement Administrator, and General Release Fee to Plaintiff;
- 15 2. Approving the Net Settlement Amount, estimated to be approximately \$326,357.25, which
16 will be distributed to the LWDA and the Aggrieved Employees, pursuant to California Labor
17 Code §2699(i), 75% to the LWDA (“LWDA Payment”) and 25% to the Aggrieved
18 Employees (“Employees’ Portion”);
- 19 3. Appointing Simpluris, Inc. (“Simpluris”) as the PAGA Settlement Administrator, to handle
20 the administration of the Settlement;
- 21 4. Directing Defendant to fund the Total Settlement Amount, and directing the PAGA
22 Settlement Administrator to distribute payments in accordance with the Settlement
23 Agreement;
- 24 5. Directing the mailing of Individual Settlement Share checks to the Aggrieved Employees
25 along with the Cover Letter, which is substantially similar in content and form to that
26 attached as “**EXHIBIT A**” to the [Proposed] Order and Judgment Granting Approval of
27 Private Attorneys General Act (Cal. Labor Code § 2698, *Et Seq.*) Settlement Agreement and
28 Award of Attorneys’ Fees and Costs, General Release Fee, and Settlement Administration
Costs (“[Proposed] Order and Judgement”) filed concurrently herewith;

6. Awarding \$10,000.00 to Plaintiff Bryan Diaz as his General Release Fee;
7. Awarding up to \$10,000.00 to the PAGA Settlement Administrator as Settlement Administration Costs; and
8. Awarding to Lawyers for Justice, PC (“Plaintiff’s Counsel”) the amount of \$192,500.00 as compensation for reasonable attorneys’ fees and the amount of \$15,142.75 for reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses (together, “Attorneys’ Fees and Costs”), pursuant to California Labor Code §2699(g)(1).
9. Dismissing Defendants Tawa Services, Inc., Tawa Supermarket, Inc., and Tawa Inc. (Retail) without prejudice.

Unless otherwise specified, all citations and references to the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code §2698, *et seq.* (“PAGA”) are to the version of the statute prior to the recent amendment effective July 1, 2024; the amended statute does not apply to the above-captioned action and the Settlement pursuant to California Labor Code §2699(v)(1), as amended, because the above-captioned action was filed prior to June 19, 2024.

The Settlement Agreement is being concurrently submitted to the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency in conformity with California Labor Code §2699(l)(2).

This motion is made pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699(l)(2), which provides for review and approval by the Court of the settlement of a civil action filed pursuant to PAGA. This motion will be based upon the following Memorandum of Points and Authorities, the Settlement Agreement, the Declarations of Plaintiff’s Counsel (Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell) and Plaintiff Bryan Diaz in support thereof, as well as the pleadings and other records on file with the Court in this matter, and such evidence and oral argument as may be presented at the hearing on this motion.

Dated: February 28, 2025

LAWYERS for JUSTICE, PC

By: 
Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell
Attorneys for Plaintiff

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. SUMMARY OF MOTION

Plaintiff Bryan Diaz (“Plaintiff”) seeks approval of the Private Attorneys General Act Settlement Agreement and Release (“Settlement,” “Agreement,” or “Settlement Agreement”) entered into between Plaintiff, individually and on behalf of the State of California with respect to Aggrieved Employees, and Defendant Tawa Retail Group, Inc. (“Defendant”), pursuant to California Labor Code section 2699(l)(2).¹ Plaintiff and Defendant (together, the “Parties”) have agreed to resolve the above-captioned action, brought pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code section 2698, *et seq.* (“PAGA”), for a Total Settlement Amount of \$550,000.00.²

The Settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable, as it represents a reasoned compromise of a disputed claim that has been reached through arm’s-length negotiations, in light of the risks, complexity, and expense of further litigation, and the strengths of the PAGA claim. The Settlement meets the requirements for Court approval based upon the relevant fairness factors. The Court is respectfully requested to approve the Settlement, award the Attorneys’ Fees and Costs, Settlement Administration Costs, and General Release Fee and approve the LWDA Payment.

The Settlement Agreement is being submitted to the LWDA concurrently with the filing of this Motion, and Plaintiff now moves for an order granting approval of the Settlement, in conformity with California Labor Code section 2699(l)(2).³

II. FACTUAL BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT PROCEDURAL HISTORY

For a discussion of relevant procedural history and facts regarding this case, please see the Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell at paragraphs 7 to 12.

III. SUMMARY OF THE SETTLEMENT TERMS

A. Scope of the Settlement

If the Court grants approval of the Settlement, Plaintiff and the State of California with respect to

¹ The Private Attorneys General Act Settlement Agreement and Release (“Settlement Agreement”) is attached as “EXHIBIT 2” to the Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell (“LeBlanc-Mansell Decl.”).

² Settlement Agreement, § 5(a). If the number of Compensable Pay Periods during the PAGA Period is more than ten percent (10%) above 31,105, the Total Settlement Amount will be increased by the percentage that the actual number exceeds 34,216 Compensable Pay Periods. Settlement Agreement, § 5(b). Defendant has represented that the number of Compensable Pay Periods does not exceed 34,216.

³ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl. ¶ 33.

Aggrieved Employees⁴ will release the Released Parties⁵ from the Released Claims.⁶

B. Funding and Distribution of the Total Settlement Amount

Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement, Defendant will pay a Total Settlement Amount of \$550,000.00⁷, which is inclusive of the following: (1) Attorneys' Fees and Costs to be paid to Lawyers for Justice, PC ("Plaintiff's Counsel"), (2) General Release Fee to Plaintiff, (3) Settlement Administration Costs to be paid to the PAGA Settlement Administrator, and (4) Net Settlement Amount to be paid to the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and Aggrieved Employees. The Net Settlement Amount will be the Total Settlement Amount less the Court-approved Attorneys' Fees and Costs, Settlement Administration Costs, and General Release Fee; the Net Settlement Amount is currently estimated to be approximately \$326,357.25.⁸ The Net Settlement Amount will be distributed as follows: 75% of the Net Settlement Amount (or approximately \$244,767.94) will be distributed to the LWDA ("LWDA Payment") and 25% of the Net Settlement Amount (or approximately \$81,589.31) ("Employees' Portion") will be distributed to the Aggrieved Employees on a *pro rata* basis, based on their Compensable Pay Periods.⁹

Within 30 calendar days of (1) the Court's order granting approval of the Settlement; and (2) the Court's dismissal of the Class Action and dismissal of Tawa Services, Inc., Tawa Supermarket, Inc., and Tawa Inc. (Retail) from the PAGA Action without prejudice, Defendant will transmit the Total Settlement Amount to a qualified settlement account established by the PAGA Settlement Administrator for administration of the Settlement.¹⁰ Within 14 calendar days after the Court's order granting approval of the Settlement, Defendant will provide the PAGA Settlement Administrator with the Aggrieved Employees' List, containing the contact information and other information required to calculate payment for each Aggrieved Employee.¹¹

⁴ "[A]ll current and former hourly-paid or non-exempt employees who worked for Defendant during the PAGA Period. Settlement Agreement, § 5(a)(5).

⁵ See Settlement Agreement, § 10(a).

⁶ The Released Claims include claims for civil penalties under PAGA for violations of California Labor Code sections 201, 202, 203, 204, 226(a), 226.7, 510, 512, 551, 552, 558, 1174(d), 1194, 1197, 1197.1, 1198, 2800, and 2802 and the relevant Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders. Settlement Agreement, § 10(a).

⁷ Settlement Agreement, § 5(a), and see footnote 2.

⁸ *Id.*, § 5(a)(4).

⁹ Settlement Agreement, § 9(b).

¹⁰ Settlement Agreement, § 9(a).

¹¹ *Id.*, § 9(c)(1).

Within 14 calendar days after the PAGA Settlement Administrator receives the Aggrieved Employees' List and the Total Settlement Amount, the PAGA Settlement Administrator will calculate payments and mail the agreed-upon Cover Letter¹² and Individual Settlement Share¹³ checks (together, the "PAGA Settlement Package(s)") to all Aggrieved Employees by first-class United States mail. For each PAGA Settlement Package that is returned as undeliverable within 30 calendar days of the initial mailing, the PAGA Settlement Administrator will promptly attempt to locate an alternate, updated address for the Aggrieved Employee at issue by using a skip-trace search and shall attempt one (1) re-mailing of the PAGA Settlement Package.¹⁴

The Individual Settlement Share checks issued to Aggrieved Employees will remain valid for 90 calendar days, and thereafter, will be canceled. Funds associated with canceled checks will be transmitted to the State Controller's Office Unclaimed Property Division in the name of the Aggrieved Employee(s) at issue and in the amount of their respective Individual Settlement Share(s).¹⁵

C. Standards for Approval of PAGA Settlement

The PAGA allows an "aggrieved employee" to bring a civil action on behalf of the State of California to recover civil penalties that normally the LWDA can pursue on behalf of employees against an employer without employees' involvement or approval. Unnamed employees need not be given notice of the PAGA claim, nor do they have the ability to opt-out of the representative PAGA claim.¹⁶ Before bringing a civil action under PAGA, an employee must comply with California Labor Code section

¹² The Parties have prepared a simple Cover Letter for transmission to the PAGA Members along with their Individual Settlement Share checks, substantially in the form attached as "EXHIBIT A" to the [Proposed] Order and Judgment and as "EXHIBIT A" to the Settlement Agreement. The Cover Letter informs the PAGA Members about the Actions and the Settlement.

¹³ Each PAGA Member's share of the Employees' Portion ("Individual Settlement Share"), will be calculated by the PAGA Settlement Administrator based on their Compensable Pay Periods. *Id.*, § 9(b). The payments to PAGA Members for their Individual Settlement Share are considered 100% penalties to be reported on IRS Form 1099, if required. *Id.*, §§ 5(b) & 9(b)(1).

¹⁴ *Id.*, § 9(c)(3).

¹⁵ *Id.*, § 9(c)(4).

¹⁶ *Robinson v. Southern Counties Oil Co.* (2020) 53 Cal.App.5th 476 (aggrieved employee cannot opt out of a PAGA settlement); *Williams v. Superior Court* (2017) 3 Cal.5th 531, 546-548 ("[A] PAGA action is a statutory action for penalties brought as a proxy for the State," "whatever personal claims the absent employees might have for relief are not at stake[.]" as such, "there is no need to protect absent employees' due process rights" and they "will be bound by the outcome of any PAGA action[.]"); *Ochoa-Hernandez v. CJADERS Foods, Inc.* (N.D. Cal. Apr. 2, 2010), 2010 WL 1340777, at *5 (Unnamed employees need not be given notice); *Arias v. Superior Court* (2009) 46 Cal.4th 969, 984-86 (Same).

2699.3. See Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(a). Plaintiff has complied.¹⁷

The settlement of a PAGA action requires court approval. See Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(l)(2). However, a PAGA claim is asserted on a representative basis and is not a class action but a law enforcement action.¹⁸ A court's review of a PAGA settlement involves consideration of unique factors that render the approval process distinct from, and simpler than the two-step court approval process for a class action settlement. A court reviewing a PAGA settlement need only "ensur[e] that a negotiated resolution is fair to those affected." *Williams v. Superior Court* (2017) 3 Cal.5th 531, 549 (citing Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(l)(2)). In a PAGA case, the court's focus is not the monetary amount which aggrieved employees or the State stand to receive, but instead, whether the total settlement amount achieves the PAGA's objectives. The purpose of the PAGA is "to incentivize private parties to recover civil penalties for the government that otherwise may not have been assessed and collected by overburdened state enforcement agencies." See *Ochoa-Hernandez, supra*, 2010 WL 1340777, at *4 (citing *Arias, supra*, 46 Cal.4th at 986). Penalties recovered under the PAGA are, in part, to "be distributed to the [LWDA] for enforcement of labor laws. . . and for education of employers and employees about their rights and responsibilities under this code, to be continuously appropriated to supplement and not supplant the funding to the agency for those purposes." See Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(j).

IV. THE SETTLEMENT IS FAIR AND SHOULD BE APPROVED

The Settlement resulted from hard-fought negotiations; fulfills the objectives of the PAGA statute; is fair, adequate, and reasonable; and meets all of the criteria for approval for the reasons discussed below.

A. The Factors Giving Rise to a Presumption of Fairness Exist

The Parties reached the Settlement after conducting extensive, arm's-length settlement negotiations with the involvement of a neutral mediator Monique Ngo-Bonnici, Esq.¹⁹ A settlement that

¹⁷ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., Exh. 1.

¹⁸ *Casida v. Sears Holdings Corp.* (E.D. Cal. Jan. 26, 2012) 2012 WL 253217, at *3; *Thomas v. Aetna Health of Cal., Inc.* (E.D. Cal. June 2, 2011) 2011 WL 2173715, at *11; *Arias, supra*, 46 Cal.4th at 980-88 (affirming lower court's holding that "plaintiff need not satisfy class action requirements" to assert a PAGA claim); *Pedroza v. PetSmart, Inc.* (C.D. Cal. Jan. 28, 2013) 2013 WL 1490667, at *15; *Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 1756, AFL-CIO v. Superior Court* (2009), 46 Cal.4th 993, 1003; see also *Iskanian v. CLS Transportation Los Angeles, LLC* (2014) 58 Cal.4th 348, 381.

¹⁹ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶ 17-18.

is “the product of extensive and hard-fought adversarial negotiations between the parties” is entitled to a presumption of fairness. *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 245.

As discussed in the Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell, the Settlement is presumptively fair because: (1) it is the product of adversarial non-collusive, and arm’s-length negotiations with the assistance of an independent mediator knowledgeable in complex labor and employment matters; (2) it was negotiated by counsel with significant experience in similar complex labor and employment matters; and (3) it occurred after counsel for the Parties engaged in significant investigation to evaluate the strength and potential value of the PAGA claim, and risks and expenses of litigating this claim through trial.²⁰

Based on all of the information available to the Parties, the Parties agree that this matter is well-suited for settlement given the strengths and weaknesses of the PAGA claim and the facts and circumstances of the case.²¹ Plaintiff’s Counsel has extensive experience handling representative and class action wage-and-hour litigation and used that experience to achieve a settlement recovery for Plaintiff, the State of California, and the Aggrieved Employees.²² Therefore, the Court should give considerable weight to the competency, experience, and opinion of counsel and the involvement of a neutral mediator in assuring that the settlement is a product of arm’s length bargaining.²³

B. The Relative Strengths and Weaknesses of the PAGA Claim and the Range of Possible Outcomes Strongly Favor Approval of the Settlement

For a discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the PAGA claim, see the Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell at paragraphs 21-32.

C. The Settlement Avoids Risky, Complex, and Lengthy Further Litigation

Courts favor voluntary conciliation and settlement of complex litigation. *Class Plaintiffs v. City of Seattle* (9th Cir. 1992) 955 F.2d 1268, 1276. Generally, unless the settlement is clearly inadequate, its

²⁰ *Id.*, ¶¶ 2-6, 16-32.

²¹ *Id.*, ¶ 37.

²² *Id.*, ¶¶ 2-6.

²³ See *Kirkorian v. Borelli* (N.D. Cal. 1988) 695 F.Supp. 446, 451 (opinion of experienced counsel is entitled to considerable weight); *Boyd v. Bechtel Corp.* (N.D. Cal. 1979) 485 F.Supp. 610, 616-17, 622 (recommendations of plaintiffs’ counsel should be given a presumption of reasonableness); see also *Satchell v. Fed. Express Corp.* (N.D. Cal. Apr. 13, 2007) 2007 WL 1114010, at *4 (stating that the “assistance of an experienced mediator in the settlement process confirms that the settlement is non-collusive”).

1 acceptance and approval are preferable to lengthy and expensive litigation with uncertain results. *Nat'l*
2 *Rural Telecomms. Coop. v. DIRECTV, Inc.* (C.D. Cal. Jan. 5, 2004) 221 F.R.D. 523, 526.

3 Prior to reaching the Settlement, the Parties investigated the veracity, strength, and scope of the
4 PAGA claim and allegations and considered a large volume of information, documents, and data relevant
5 to Plaintiff's claim and Defendant's defenses thereto.²⁴ The Parties thoroughly and sufficiently evaluated
6 the PAGA claim and related allegations, including, and not limited to, calculating the potential monetary
7 recovery under PAGA.²⁵ Plaintiff's Counsel performed other work as well, which is discussed in the
8 Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell.²⁶

9 Had the case not settled, the Parties would have conducted extensive additional formal discovery,
10 including propounding additional written discovery requests and conducting multiple depositions of party
11 and percipient witnesses all over the State of California, to prepare the case for trial. From the inception of
12 this litigation, Defendant indicated that it would aggressively litigate the case.²⁷ Even if Defendant failed
13 on its defenses, litigating a complex PAGA action is inherently expensive, and the litigation could
14 continue beyond entry of judgment if either party were to appeal adverse rulings.²⁸ Additionally, there is a
15 real possibility that Plaintiff could recover nothing, either for himself or on behalf of the State of
16 California or other Aggrieved Employees after years of costly and labor-intensive litigation. Avoiding
17 these risks and the likelihood of future contentious litigation, which would involve significant costs,
18 favors settlement.

19 **D. The Settlement Is Fair, Adequate, and Reasonable**

20 The Settlement provides significant benefits to the State of California and the Aggrieved
21 Employees and falls well-within the range of acceptable settlements under the circumstances. "[T]he very
22 essence of a settlement is compromise, 'a yielding of absolutes and an abandoning of highest hopes.'"
23 *Officers for Justice v. Civil Service Comm'n* (9th Cir. 1981) 688 F.2d 615, 624. "The proposed settlement
24 is not to be judged against a hypothetical or speculative measure of what might have been achieved by the
25 negotiators." *Id.* at 625.

26 ²⁴ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶ 19.

27 ²⁵ *Ibid.*

28 ²⁶ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶ 2-32.

²⁷ *Id.*, ¶¶ 22-26.

²⁸ *Id.*, ¶¶ 19, 30-31, & 35.

1 The Settlement is a compromise of highly disputed claims. Plaintiff and his counsel recognize the
2 expense and length of continued proceedings necessary to pursue the matter through trial and any
3 possible appeals.²⁹ Plaintiff and his counsel have also taken into account the uncertainty and risk of the
4 outcome of further litigation, and the difficulties and delays inherent in such litigation.³⁰ Plaintiff and his
5 counsel are also aware of the burdens of proof necessary to establish liability, both generally and in
6 response to Defendant's defenses thereto, and the difficulties in establishing Defendant's liability for, and
7 the right to recover, penalties on behalf of Plaintiff, the State of California, and other Aggrieved
8 Employees.³¹ Plaintiff and his counsel have also taken into account Defendant's agreement to enter into a
9 settlement that confers significant relief upon the Aggrieved Employees and the State of California.³²

10 Considering all of the facts in this case, Plaintiff and his counsel have determined that the
11 Settlement represents a fair, adequate, and reasonable resolution of the PAGA claim, and that it is in the
12 best interests of the Aggrieved Employees and the State of California.³³

13 The result achieved in this case, and the monetary recovery provided by this settlement, are well-
14 within the range of an acceptable settlement under the circumstances, especially when compared to trial
15 court penalties assessments in contested cases and the settlement of PAGA claims in other cases. Here,
16 the value obtained for settlement of the PAGA claim is significant, and it will be distributed in accordance
17 with and in fulfillment of the objectives of the PAGA statute.

18 **E. The Experience and Views of Plaintiff's Counsel Favor Approval of the Settlement**

19 Plaintiff's Counsel is highly experienced in complex representative and class action wage-and-
20 hour litigation.³⁴ In the view of Plaintiff's Counsel, the benefits conferred by the settlement are eminently
21 fair and reasonable, and in the best interests of the State of California and the Aggrieved Employees in
22 light of the risk, delay, and uncertainty of continued litigation and the substantial monetary benefits
23 provided for by the Settlement.³⁵ Furthermore, courts have acknowledged that "the interests of plaintiff,
24 counsel and other potentially aggrieved employees are largely aligned. All stand to gain from proving as

25 ²⁹ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶¶ 19, 30-31, & 35.

26 ³⁰ *Ibid.*

27 ³¹ *Id.*, ¶¶ 21-29.

28 ³² *Id.*, ¶ 15.

³³ *Id.*, ¶ 37.

³⁴ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶¶ 2-6.

³⁵ *Id.*, ¶¶ 19, 30-31, 35, & 37.

convincingly as possible as many Labor Code violations as the evidence will sustain[.]” *Williams, supra*, 548 (citing Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(g)(1)(i)).

V. THE REQUESTED ATTORNEYS’ FEES AWARD SHOULD BE APPROVED

A. A Fee Award of a Percentage of the Entire Fund Is Appropriate

The Settlement provides for attorneys’ fees in an amount of up to 35% of the Total Settlement Amount, which is \$192,500.00 (assuming the Total Settlement Amount remains \$550,000.00)³⁶, subject to approval and award by the Court.³⁷ The requested attorneys’ fees award is commensurate with: (1) the risk that Plaintiff’s Counsel took in bringing and litigating the case, (2) the time, effort, and expense dedicated to the case, (3) the skill and determination that Plaintiff’s Counsel has shown, (4) the results that Plaintiff’s Counsel has achieved in the case, (5) the value that Plaintiff’s Counsel has achieved in the case, and (6) the other cases that Plaintiff’s Counsel has turned down in order to work on this matter.

Plaintiff’s Counsel is entitled to recover reasonable attorneys’ fees and costs as a matter of right under PAGA. *See* Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(g)(1) (“Any employee who prevails in any [PAGA] action shall be entitled to an award of reasonable attorney’s fees and costs”). Plaintiff’s Counsel is also entitled to fees and costs under California Code of Civil Procedure section 1021.5, as the instant PAGA action is by definition “for the benefit” of others and secures monetary recovery for a large number of allegedly aggrieved employees, as well as the State of California.³⁸ The settlement will also provide funds to the state labor agency, to enhance enforcement of labor laws and education of “employers and employees about their rights and responsibilities under [the California Labor Code].” Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(i).

Courts may calculate and award attorneys’ fees as a percentage of a monetary fund that has, by litigation, been preserved or recovered for the benefit of others. *Laffitte v. Robert Half Int’l, Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480 at 486 & 506. Trial courts “retain the discretion to forgo a lodestar cross-check and [may] use other means to evaluate the reasonableness of a requested percentage fee.” *Id.* (internal quotes omitted); *see also Wershba, supra*, 91 Cal.App. 4th at 253.

³⁶ See note 2.

³⁷ *Id.*, § 5(a)(1).

³⁸ *See Estrada v. FedEx Ground Package Sys. Inc.* (2007) 154 Cal.App.4th 1, 16-17 (recognizing that recovery obtained on behalf of 209 individuals satisfies the “significant benefit,” “public interest,” and “large class of persons” requirements of Code of Civil Procedure section 1021.5, regardless of plaintiff’s personal motivation).

Courts award fees as an economic incentive for lawyers to pursue litigation that will enhance and facilitate access to the judicial system for meritorious claims, deter wrongdoing, and address multiple similar alleged wrongs that would not be economically feasible to pursue individually, such as here. See A. Conte, *Attorney Fee Awards* (2d ed. 1993) 104, at 6.

The percentage method is particularly appropriate where a monetary settlement has been recovered and “the benefit [recovered can be] easily quantified.” *In re Bluetooth Headset Prods. Liab. Litig.* (9th Cir. 2011) 654 F.3d 935, 942. Where the amount of a settlement is a “certain easily calculable sum of money,” California courts may calculate attorneys’ fees as a reasonable percentage of the settlement created. Weil and Brown, California Practice Guide, *Civil Procedure Before Trial*, Chapter 14, section 14:145; *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.* (1996) 48 Cal. App. 4th 1794, 1808.

The percentage fee method is preferred in representative actions because “it better approximates the workings of the marketplace than the lodestar approach.” *Lealao v. Beneficial Cal., Inc.* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 19, 49. California law provides that the award for attorneys’ fees should be equivalent to fees freely negotiated in the legal marketplace and paid in comparable litigation based on the result achieved and risk incurred. See *Lealao, supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 47-50; *Laffitte, supra*, 1 Cal.5th 480 at 503. In cases where the settlement agreement provides that the defendant will pay the plaintiff’s attorneys a percentage of the fund created by the settlement, use of that percentage method is appropriate. *Lealao, supra*, 82 Cal.App.4th at 32. Fee awards that are too small will “chill the private enforcement essential to the vindication of many legal rights and obstruct the representative actions that often relieve the courts of the need to separately adjudicate numerous claims.” *Id.* at 53. Therefore, fees in representative actions should approximate the probable terms of a contingent fee contract negotiated by a sophisticated attorney and client in comparable litigation. *Id.* at 48. “The ultimate goal . . . is the award of a ‘reasonable’ fee to compensate counsel for their efforts, irrespective of the method of calculation.” *Consumer Privacy Cases* (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 545, 557-58 (quoting *Apple Computer, Inc. v. Superior Court* (2005) 126 Cal.App.4th, 1253, 1270).

Plaintiff’s Counsel’s application for attorneys’ fees in light of the facts and circumstances surrounding the case is well-within the range of reasonableness. Courts have awarded fees as high as 50%

of the settlement in complex actions, depending on the circumstances of the case.³⁹

Plaintiff's Counsel has performed significant work in this matter, as discussed in the Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell, with the very real possibility of an unsuccessful outcome and no fee recovery of any kind.⁴⁰ In the present matter, Plaintiff's Counsel has borne all of the risks and costs of litigation and will not receive any compensation until recovery is obtained.⁴¹ Plaintiff's Counsel is experienced in complex wage-and-hour litigation and used that experience to obtain a significant settlement recovery for Plaintiff, the Aggrieved Employees, and the State of California.⁴² Considering the amount of fees requested, work performed, risks incurred, results obtained, and experience of Plaintiff's Counsel in handling similar matters, Plaintiff maintains that the requested attorneys' fees are reasonable and should be awarded.

B. The Requested Fee Award Is Reasonable Based on the Factors Considered in Determination of Fee Awards

The factors which courts consider in determining whether fee awards are reasonable, all of which support the fee award requested by Plaintiff's Counsel, are: the time and labor required; the novelty and difficulty of the questions involved; the skill requisite to perform the legal services properly; the preclusion of other employment by the attorney due to the acceptance of the case; the customary fee; whether the fee is fixed or contingent; the time limitation imposed by the client or the circumstances; the amount involved and results obtained; the experience, reputation, and ability of the attorney; the undesirability of the case; the nature and length of the professional relationship with the client; and awards in similar cases. *Camden I Condominium Association, Inc. v. Dunkel* (11th Cir. 1991) 946 F.2d 768, 772. Some of the most relevant factors to this Court's fee determination will be addressed below.

It should be highlighted that the percentage award sought is commensurate with the time, effort, and expense dedicated to the case, the contingent nature of Plaintiff's Counsel's representation and the

³⁹ See *In re Ampicillin Antitrust Litig.* (D.D.C. 1981) 526 F.Supp. 494 (awarding attorneys' fees in the amount of 45% of the \$7.3 million total settlement amount); *Beech Cinema, Inc. v. Twentieth-Century Fox Film Corp.* (S.D.N.Y. 1979) 480 F.Supp. 1195 (awarding approximately 53% of the settlement as attorneys' fees). California courts routinely approve attorneys' fees awards "average[ing] around one-third of the recovery." *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 66 n.11 (lower court found the range of contingency fees in marketplace to be 20%-40% and determined such a percentage fee was appropriate).

⁴⁰ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶¶ 34.

⁴¹ *Id.*, ¶ 35.

⁴² *Id.*, ¶¶ 2-6.

risks taken in commencing the case, the skill and determination required, the results that Plaintiff's Counsel has achieved, and the value of the settlement that Plaintiff's Counsel has obtained on behalf of Plaintiff, the Aggrieved Employees, and the State of California. For the reasons discussed herein, an award of attorneys' fees in the amount of 35% of the Total Settlement Amount is reasonable.

1. Time & Labor

Plaintiff's Counsel has used its experience and skills in litigating complex wage-and-hour actions to bring this matter to a successful conclusion. Prior to commencing this lawsuit, Plaintiff's Counsel conducted significant investigation, formal and informal discovery, and the exchange of information, documents, and data regarding the facts of the case, including and not limited to, the review, consideration, and analysis of a large volume of information, documents, and data obtained from Plaintiff, Defendant, and other sources.⁴³ During the litigation of the case, Plaintiff's Counsel performed other work, including *inter alia*, propounding multiple sets of formal written discovery requests onto each named Defendant (specifically, Requests for Production of Documents (Set One), Requests for Admission (Set One), Special Interrogatories (Sets One and Two), and Form Interrogatories – General (Set One)). The information, documents, and data that were reviewed and analyzed by Plaintiff's Counsel included, and were not limited to, Plaintiff's personnel file; a detailed sampling of Aggrieved Employees' time and pay data; multiple iterations of Defendant's Employee Handbook; job descriptions; various forms, agreements, and acknowledgments (such as, Defendant's Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement, Acknowledgement of Receipt for the Employee Handbook, and Second Meal Period Waiver); and Defendant's operations and employment practices, policies, and procedures (such as, Defendant's Meal and Rest Periods Policy), among other documents.⁴⁴ Plaintiff's Counsel also met and conferred with Defendant's counsel regarding the pleadings, case management, discovery, arbitration, mediation, and settlement negotiations, among other issues.⁴⁵ Other work performed by Plaintiff's Counsel included, but was not limited to: case strategy and analysis; researching, drafting, reviewing, and revising pleadings, court filings, motion-related papers (e.g., with

⁴³ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶¶ 8 & 18.

⁴⁴ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶ 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

1 respect to settlement approval motion papers), briefs for settlement negotiations and mediation,
2 and the settlement agreement; propounding written discovery requests; claims evaluation and
3 analysis; preparing for and participating in settlement negotiations and the mediation; and
4 appearing for court proceedings.⁴⁶

5 Plaintiff's Counsel dedicated the full extent of staffing and monetary resources necessary to
6 prosecute the case with maximum efficiency and has fully and actively participated in the litigation
7 process. In light of the value of time expended and the carrying of costs involved in this litigation, the
8 requested attorneys' fees award is fair, adequate, and reasonable.

9 ***2. The Skill Required to Perform Legal Services Properly***

10 The skill required to properly litigate this case is evident not only in the results achieved, but in
11 the steps necessary to reach the same. Defendant retained highly-respected counsel to represent its
12 defenses. Plaintiff's Counsel's effort and skill were used to, among other things, investigate the
13 allegations and gather facts, research the legal issues, analyze data, documents, and information obtained
14 from Defendant, Plaintiff, and through other sources, to evaluate the PAGA claim and negotiate the
15 settlement. Despite all of the obstacles that had to be overcome, Plaintiff's Counsel used its extensive
16 experience and skill in the handling of complex wage-and-hour matters to advocate for and obtain a
17 recovery now, with maximum efficiency, as opposed to the possibility of recovery in the future, after
18 significant additional expense and time.⁴⁷

19 ***3. Whether the Fee Is Fixed or Contingent***

20 Plaintiff's Counsel has provided representation in this matter on a contingency basis, has borne all
21 of the risks and costs of litigation, and will not receive any compensation until recovery is obtained.⁴⁸
22 Plaintiff's Counsel is also requesting reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses of \$15,142.75.⁴⁹ If
23 Plaintiff's Counsel had not been successful, the time that they have devoted to litigating the case would
24 have been for naught and would not have produced any fee or any reimbursement of costs or expenses.
25 Plaintiff's Counsel is well-experienced in complex wage-and-hour litigation and used that experience to

26 ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

27 ⁴⁷ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶¶ 16-31.

28 ⁴⁸ *Id.*, ¶¶ 34-35.

⁴⁹ *Id.*, ¶¶ 35 & Exh. 4.

1 obtain a great result in this matter.⁵⁰ The skill and determination that Plaintiff's Counsel has shown
2 throughout the prosecution of the case justifies the requested attorneys' fees and costs. Considering the
3 amounts requested, work performed, and risks incurred, the requested fees and costs are reasonable and
4 should be awarded.

5 **4. The Amount Involved and the Results Achieved**

6 The Settlement represents an excellent resolution of this lawsuit, given the uncertainty and risks
7 of further litigation.⁵¹ Had the case not settled, Defendant would have vigorously defended the case, and
8 would have challenged manageability and liability, and also sought a reduction in the amount assessed as
9 civil penalties. Defendant, however, faced risks too, including and not limited to, the risk of trial and the
10 risk of having the Court assess civil penalties. Additionally, preparing for trial would have been
11 extraordinarily expensive for the Parties. At this stage, the settlement is preferred over continued litigation
12 because such resolution saves time and money that would otherwise go to litigation. The risks and
13 expenses of further litigation outweighed any benefit that might have been gained otherwise. The
14 Settlement provides an immediate recovery and avoids an uncertain result in the future and additional
15 risk, expense, and delay (e.g., prolonged expert discovery, trial preparation, and appellate review of those
16 proceedings).

17 The results achieved, in light of the difficulties inherent in similar cases and the specific
18 difficulties faced in this case, are considerable. Plaintiff's Counsel obtained a settlement that provides for
19 a Total Settlement Amount of \$550,000.00, and it is currently estimated that the Net Settlement Amount
20 available for distribution to the Aggrieved Employees and the LWDA is approximately \$326,357.25.⁵²

21 **5. The Reputation and Ability of the Attorneys**

22 Plaintiff's Counsel is a recognized class action and complex litigation law firm, and its attorneys
23 employed their knowledge, skill, and experience to bring the case to a successful conclusion. Plaintiff's
24 Counsel has years of wage-and-hour class action and complex litigation experience, has recovered
25

26 ⁵⁰ See LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶¶ 2-6.

27 ⁵¹ *Id.*, ¶¶ 15, 19-20, 31 & 37.

28 ⁵² Settlement Agreement, § 5(a) and see footnote 2.

millions of dollars on behalf of thousands of individuals in California, and has successfully handled numerous significant wage-and-hour class action and representative action cases.⁵³

VI. REIMBURSEMENT OF PLAINTIFF'S COUNSEL LITIGATION COSTS AND EXPENSES SHOULD BE APPROVED

The Settlement provides for reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses of up to \$20,000.00. As set forth in the Declaration of Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell, Plaintiff's Counsel seeks reimbursement of \$15,142.75 in litigation costs and expenses.⁵⁴ These expenses were reasonable and necessary in the prosecution of this matter and to obtain the Settlement, and is less than the maximum amount allocated under the Settlement Agreement.⁵⁵ The cost savings of \$4,857.25 will be part of the Net Settlement Amount⁵⁶ Accordingly, the Court is requested to award reimbursement of litigation costs and expenses to Plaintiff's Counsel in the amount of \$15,142.75.

VII. THE SETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION COSTS SHOULD BE APPROVED

As set forth in the Settlement Agreement, the Parties have agreed to retain, subject to approval by the Court, Simpluris, Inc. to handle the administration of the Settlement. The fees and expenses of the PAGA Settlement Administrator are estimated not to exceed \$6,000.00., based on the quote provided by Simpluris, Inc., although the Parties have allocated up to \$10,000.00 for the payment of Settlement Administration Costs. The cost savings of at least \$4,000.00 will be part of the Net Settlement Amount. The costs expended for the administration of the Settlement include, but are not limited to, expenses for preparing, printing, and mailing the Cover Letter and Individual Settlement Share checks to the Aggrieved Employees (i.e., PAGA Settlement Packages); performing skip-trace searches; re-mailing the returned PAGA Settlement Packages; and handling inquiries from Aggrieved Employees regarding the Settlement, among other things. Accordingly, the Court should grant approval of the Settlement Administration Costs in the amount of up to \$6,000.00 to Simpluris, Inc., a necessary third-party for handling the settlement process.

⁵³ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶¶ 2-6.

⁵⁴ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶ 35.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

VIII. THE GENERAL RELEASE FEE SHOULD BE APPROVED

The Settlement provides for a General Release Fee to be paid to Plaintiff in the amount of up to \$10,000.00 for his broader individual waiver and release of claims with a California Civil Code Section 1542 waiver (set forth in Section 10(b) of the Settlement Agreement).⁵⁷ It is reasonable and just for Plaintiff to receive this payment. It should also be noted that Plaintiff contributed considerable time and effort to the litigation of the cases in order to enforce the California Labor Code on behalf of the State of California and for the benefit of other Aggrieved Employees. Plaintiff discussed his employment with his counsel, gathered and produced relevant documents and information, and provided the facts and evidence necessary to attempt to prove the allegations.⁵⁸ Plaintiff was available whenever his counsel needed him and tried to obtain and provide documents and information that would aid in the litigation of the PAGA claim and pursuit of recovery on behalf of the State of California and Aggrieved Employees.⁵⁹

IX. CONCLUSION

For the reasons discussed above and in the accompanying declarations, the Court is respectfully requested to approve the Settlement, including the plan of allocation and distribution of the Total Settlement Amount.

Dated: February 28, 2025

LAWYERS for JUSTICE, PC

By: _____


Melissa LeBlanc-Mansell
Attorneys for Plaintiff

⁵⁷ Settlement Agreement, §§ 5(a)(2) & 10(b). The PAGA statute recognizes that a plaintiff employee may pursue or recover other remedies and relief available to the plaintiff employee under state or federal law through an action under PAGA. See, Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(k)(1) (formerly Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(g)(1). As such, it is appropriate for Plaintiff to receive a payment for his broader individual release of claims.

⁵⁸ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶ 36; Declaration of Bryan Diaz (“Diaz Decl.”), ¶¶ 3 & 4.

⁵⁹ LeBlanc-Mansell Decl., ¶ 35; Diaz Decl., ¶¶ 3 & 4.



Make a Reservation

BRYAN DIAZ vs TAWA RETAIL GROUP, INC., A CALIFORNIA CORPORATION, et al.

Case Number: 24TRCV00332 Case Type: Civil Unlimited Category: Other Employment Complaint Case
Date Filed: 2024-01-31 Location: Torrance Courthouse - Department M

Reservation

Case Name: BRYAN DIAZ vs TAWA RETAIL GROUP, INC., A CALIFORNIA CORPORATION, et al.	Case Number: 24TRCV00332
Type: Motion re: (MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF PRIVATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL ACT SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT AND RELEASE, AWARD OF ATTORNEYS' FEES AND COSTS, GENERAL RELEASE FEE, AND SETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION COSTS)	Status: RESERVED
Filing Party: Bryan Diaz (Plaintiff)	Location: Torrance Courthouse - Department M
Date/Time: 04/15/2025 8:30 AM	Number of Motions: 1
Reservation ID: 770059785051	Confirmation Code: CR-YNEZT8ZQHSNJRYCNV

Fees			
Description	Fee	Qty	Amount
Motion re: (name extension)	0.00	1	0.00
TOTAL			\$0.00

Payment

Amount: \$0.00	Type: NOFEE
Account Number: n/a	Authorization: n/a
Payment Date: n/a	

