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10 **SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

11 **IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF KERN**

12 TAWNEE RIOS, an individual, on behalf of
13 herself and on behalf of all persons similarly
14 situated,

Plaintiff,

15 v.

16 BARNES & NOBLE COLLEGE
17 BOOKSELLERS, LLC, a limited liability
18 company; and DOES 1 through 50, inclusive,

20 Defendants.
21

Case No. BCV-24-101007

**DECLARATION OF TAWNEE RIOS IN
SUPPORT OF MOTION FOR
PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS
SETTLEMENT**

Hearing Date: September 5, 2025

Hearing Time: 8:30 a.m.

Judge: Hon. T. Mark Smith

Dept: T-2

Action Filed: March 20, 2024

1 I, Tawnee Rios, declare as follows:

2 1. I am over the age of eighteen, a Plaintiff and a proposed Class Representative in the above-
3 entitled matter. I submit this declaration in support of the Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class
4 Settlement and in support of my application for a class representative service award.

5 2. I have personal knowledge of all the facts stated herein. I could and would competently
6 testify under oath to these facts in court if requested to do so.

7 3. I worked for Defendant Barnes & Noble College Booksellers, LLC ("Barnes & Noble") in
8 California from January of 2017 to December of 2022, and during that time period I was classified
9 by Barnes & Noble as a non-exempt employee.

10 4. I retained my attorneys who are experienced in both class action and PAGA representative
11 action litigation and claims against employers for violations of the California Labor Code. I have
12 no personal relationship or family ties to my attorneys or any officer of the Court. I am not aware
13 of having any actual or potential conflicts of interest with another class member in this case. I am
14 not aware of any other pending matter or action asserting claims that will be extinguished or
15 adversely affected by this settlement.

16 5. I decided to file this class action lawsuit and be a plaintiff/class representative because I felt
17 that my legal rights as an employee and others like me were violated. For example, I was frequently
18 forced to work off the clock, as the computer I used to clock in would take several minutes to boot
19 up, and I was required to fill out a COVID symptom questionnaire prior to clocking in. Further,
20 each day after clocking out, I was required to have my bag checked by management, and I was not
21 paid for my time. Additionally, I rarely received compliant meal and rest breaks which were often
22 late, short or missed entirely, and was not always paid the break penalties I was entitled to.
23 Defendant also miscalculated my regular rate by underpaying overtime and meal premiums by
24 failing to include bonuses in my regular rate. Further, I was not properly reimbursed for required
25 business expenses, including the use of my personal cell phone.

26 6. I spoke to my attorneys several times and discussed how Barnes & Noble implemented its
27 company policies and procedures. I also assisted my attorneys in their investigation into my claims
28 by providing them documents and answering their questions. I reviewed the complaint before it

1 was filed and was given access to an electronic file sharing program that alerted me via email when
2 important documents were filed so that I could review them and keep up with the developments in
3 the case which I understood was one of my duties as a class representative. I could also access court
4 filings from this case on my attorney's law firm website. Also, I was informed that Barnes & Noble
5 had the right to take my deposition, and that the preparation and deposition itself could take multiple
6 days. Although my deposition was not taken, I feel I would have been adequately prepared and
7 comfortable to give testimony on my experiences.

8 7. Even though this action is in the process of settling, I was and remain prepared to perform
9 all the duties of a class representative. I understand that as a class representative I have assumed a
10 fiduciary responsibility to prosecute this class action on behalf of the absent class members. I have
11 understood that as a fiduciary, I have a duty to prosecute this action for the benefit of the class
12 members and surrender any right to compromise the group action for an individual gain.

13 8. I understood that being a plaintiff/class representative in this case meant that I was seeking
14 damages not only for myself but also other current and/or former non-exempt employees working
15 for Barnes & Noble in California who make up the class. I felt that these individuals were not aware
16 of their labor law rights and even if they were they would probably be apprehensive about speaking
17 up or even simply because of the time, effort and risk involved in filing a class action lawsuit.

18 9. I understood that being a part of this lawsuit involved risks. For example, my attorneys
19 explained to me that if the case went to trial and we lost, I could be held responsible to pay for all
20 or part of the attorney fees and costs paid by Barnes & Noble to defend this lawsuit. Also, I knew
21 there was a risk that future employers, if they ever find out about this lawsuit, could hold it against
22 me or downgrade me as a potential hire. As the only named Plaintiff in this case it would not be
23 difficult for a future employer to become aware that I sued a former employer for labor law
24 violations. Ultimately, I decided these risks were worth it and decided to fight for my rights and
25 the rights of others regardless of the risks, time and effort I spent on this case.

26 10. During the lawsuit I stayed in touch with my attorneys by phone and email. I also kept up
27 to date on important developments by reviewing court filings that were made available to me
28 electronically as I described above.

1 11. A mediation took place on December 17, 2024, with Monique Ngo-Bonnici, a well-
2 respected and experienced mediator of wage and hour class actions. After the mediation the parties
3 were able to come to an agreement to settle the action. I communicated with my attorneys regarding
4 the terms of the settlement which was reached between the parties and understood that I was
5 representing absent class members and therefore wanted the best possible result to be obtained for
6 the class members and I believe a very positive result was in fact achieved via settlement. I also
7 closely reviewed and signed the Settlement Agreement.

8 12. I have been actively involved with this lawsuit performing the duties described above.
9 Although I did not keep time records, I was in regular contact with my attorneys, reviewed court
10 filings and spent a significant amount of time on the issues presented during the lawsuit and in the
11 settlement process. I estimate that I spent approximately 30-40 hours working on this case up until
12 this point. I believe I have been diligent and have done what is expected of a named plaintiff and a
13 proposed class representative to date, and will continue to do so. I have and always will maintain
14 the best interest of the class members.

15 13. My attorneys explained to me that the settlement process involves a two-step review by the
16 Court to determine whether the settlement is fair before approving the settlement. I know this
17 process also involves notifying all class members of the settlement terms and of their rights to make
18 a claim for their settlement share, to opt out of the settlement or to object to the settlement.

19 14. I believe I did the right thing by filing this case on behalf of the class members who, subject
20 to court approval, are in line to receive monetary payments as a result of this case and settlement.
21 This is money they may never have ever gotten if I did not pursue this action on their behalf. I feel
22 significant personal satisfaction to know that I played a role in the class members being entitled to
23 monetary payments as a result of the filing of this lawsuit. I also believe that the requested class
24 representative service award of \$10,000 from the settlement is fair compensation for the work I
25 performed and the risks I undertook.

26 15. As part of the settlement, it was necessary for me to sign a general release of claims I may
27 have against Barnes & Noble. I believe the class representative service payment I have requested
28 provides me with some compensation for this agreed release.

16. In light of all the time and effort I have spent on this case, the risk I undertook by suing a former employer, the exposure to being responsible for paying Barnes & Noble costs in the event we did not win the case, the reputational risk that future employers may hold this lawsuit against me, the general release and in light of the size of the settlement, I believe the request for \$10,000 as a class representative service payment is fair and reasonable.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on 08/13/2025, at Bakersfield, California.
(date) (city, state)

Tawnee Rios

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