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Superior Court of California
County of Stanislaus
Clerk of the Court
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**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF STANISLAUS**

JOHN ANDREW SAPWELL, JR., on behalf of
the State of California and other aggrieved
persons,

Plaintiff,

v.

CENTRAL VALLEY AG GROUP, LLC, a
limited liability company; and DOES 1 through
10, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: CV-24-008488

**PAGA REPRESENTATIVE ACTION
COMPLAINT:**

1. Civil Penalties Under PAGA [Cal. Lab.
Code §§ 2699, et seq.]

This case has been assigned to Judge Sandhu, Sonny S.
Dept. 24
Department _____, for all purposes including Trial.

1 Plaintiff John Andrew Sapwell, Jr. (“Plaintiff”), based upon facts that either have
2 evidentiary support or are likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity for
3 further investigation and discovery, alleges as follows:

4 **INTRODUCTION & PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

5 1. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendant CENTRAL VALLEY AG GROUP,
6 LLC and DOES 1 through 10 (CENTRAL VALLEY AG GROUP, LLC and DOES 1 through 10
7 are collectively referred to as “Defendants”) for civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General
8 Act of 2004, California Labor Code §§ 2698 *et seq.* (“PAGA”) stemming from Defendants’ failure
9 to pay for all hours worked (including minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime wages),
10 failure to provide meal periods, failure to authorize and permit rest periods, failure to pay all earned
11 wages twice per month, failure to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods,
12 failure to timely pay final wages, and failure to furnish accurate wage statements.

13 2. For over 50 years, California’s courts and legislature have recognized that this
14 State’s wage-and-hour laws serve a compelling public interest of fostering a stable job market.
15 Wages are not ordinary debts. Because of the economic position of the average worker and his or
16 her family, it is essential to the public welfare that employers obey the wage-and-hour laws so that
17 employees are promptly paid the minimum/overtime wages that the Legislature has required for
18 employees. So fundamental are California’s wage-and-hour laws that the Legislature has
19 criminalized certain types of violations. In extending extra protection to deter violations of these
20 underlying statutes—since Plaintiff is not seeking general and/or special damages, restitution, or
21 other damages other than civil penalties—California has enacted the PAGA to permit an individual
22 to bring an action for PAGA penalties only, which is the precise and sole nature of this action.

23 3. All California employees during the relevant statutes of limitations who are or were
24 harmed by Defendants’ illegal practices are “Aggrieved Employees.” The Aggrieved Employees
25 worked for Defendants as hourly-paid or non-exempt employees within the applicable statutory
26 period.

27 4. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendants seeking only to recover penalties on
28 behalf of all Aggrieved Employees that worked for Defendants, and on behalf of the State of

1 California. Plaintiff does not seek to recover anything other than penalties as permitted by
2 California Labor Code Section 2699 at this time. To the extent that statutory violations are
3 mentioned for wage violations, Plaintiff does not seek underlying general and/or special damages
4 for those violations, but simply penalties as permitted by California Labor Code Section 2699,
5 declaratory relief, and injunctive relief for himself and all Aggrieved Employees as permitted by
6 the PAGA.

7 5. Defendants own/owned and operate/operated an industry, business, and
8 establishment within the State of California, including Stanislaus County. As such and based upon
9 all the facts and circumstances incident to Defendants' business in California, Defendants are
10 subject to the California Labor Code, Wage Orders issued by the Industrial Welfare Commission
11 ("IWC"), and the California Business & Professions Code.

12 6. On information and belief, Defendants, and each of them were on actual and
13 constructive notice of the improprieties alleged herein and intentionally refused to rectify their
14 unlawful policies. Defendants' violations, as alleged above, during all relevant times herein were
15 willful and deliberate.

16 7. At all relevant times, Defendants were and are legally responsible for all of the
17 unlawful conduct, policies, practices, acts and omissions as described in each and all of the
18 foregoing paragraphs as the employer of Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees. Further,
19 Defendants are responsible for each of the unlawful acts or omissions complained of herein under
20 the doctrine of "respondeat superior".

21 **THE PARTIES**

22 **A. Plaintiff**

23 8. Plaintiff John Andrew Sapwell, Jr. is a resident of Stanislaus County, California
24 who worked for Defendants in California as an hourly-paid, non-exempt service champion from
25 approximately July 2022 to approximately April 2024.

26 **B. Defendants**

27 9. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based upon that information and belief
28 alleges, that CENTRAL VALLEY AG GROUP, LLC is, and at all times herein mentioned, was:

- 1 (a) A business entity conducting business in numerous counties throughout the
2 State of California, including Stanislaus County; and
- 3 (b) The former employer of Plaintiff and the current and/or former employer of
4 the Aggrieved Employees because Defendant CENTRAL VALLEY AG
5 GROUP, LLC suffered and permitted Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
6 Employees to work, and/or controlled their wages, hours, or working
7 conditions.

8 10. Plaintiff does not know the true names or capacities of the persons or entities sued
9 herein as Does 1-10, inclusive, and therefore sues said Defendants by such fictitious names. Each
10 of the Doe Defendants was in some manner legally responsible for the damages suffered by
11 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees as alleged herein. Plaintiff will amend this complaint to set
12 forth the true names and capacities of these Defendants when they have been ascertained, together
13 with appropriate charging allegations, as may be necessary.

14 11. At all times mentioned herein, the Defendants named as Does 1-10, inclusive, and
15 each of them, were residents of, doing business in, availed themselves of the jurisdiction of, and/or
16 injured a significant number of the Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees in the State of
17 California.

18 12. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that at all relevant times each
19 Defendant, directly or indirectly, or through agents or other persons, employed Plaintiff and the
20 other employees and exercised control over their wages, hours, and working conditions. Plaintiff
21 is informed and believes and thereon alleges that, at all relevant times, each Defendant was the
22 principal, agent, partner, joint venturer, officer, director, controlling shareholder, subsidiary,
23 affiliate, parent corporation, successor in interest and/or predecessor in interest of some or all of
24 the other Defendants, and was engaged with some or all of the other Defendants in a joint enterprise
25 for profit, and bore such other relationships to some or all of the other Defendants so as to be liable
26 for their conduct with respect to the matters alleged below. Plaintiff is informed and believes and
27 thereon alleges that each Defendant acted pursuant to and within the scope of the relationships
28 alleged above, that each Defendant knew or should have known about, and authorized, ratified,

1 adopted, approved, controlled, aided and abetted the conduct of all other Defendants.

2 **ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL CAUSES OF ACTION**

3 13. Plaintiff John Andrew Sapwell, Jr. worked for Defendants in Stanislaus County,
4 California from approximately July 2022 to approximately April 2024. At all times, Defendants
5 paid Plaintiff an hourly wage and classified him as non-exempt from overtime.

6 14. Throughout Plaintiff's employment, Defendants committed numerous labor code
7 violations under state law. As discussed below, Plaintiff's experience working for Defendants was
8 typical and illustrative.

9 **A. Failure to Pay for All Hours Worked, Including Minimum Wages, Straight**
10 **Time Wages, and Overtime Wages**

11 15. Under California law, an employer must pay for all hours worked by an employee.
12 "Hours worked" is the time during which an employee is subject to the control of an employer and
13 includes all the time the employee is suffered or permitted to work, whether or not required to do
14 so.

15 16. Labor Code § 510 provides that employees in California shall not be employed more
16 than eight hours in any workday or forty (40) hours in a workweek unless they receive additional
17 compensation beyond their regular wages in amounts specified by law.

18 17. Labor Code §§ 1194 and 1198 also provide that employees in California shall not
19 be employed more than eight hours in any workday unless they receive additional compensation
20 beyond their regular wages in amounts specified by law. Additionally, Labor Code § 1198 states
21 that the employment of an employee for longer hours than those fixed by the IWC is unlawful.

22 18. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants maintained a policy and practice of not
23 paying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all hours worked, including minimum, straight
24 time, and overtime wages. Defendants required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work
25 "off-the-clock", uncompensated, by, for example, requiring Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees
26 to perform work during legally required meals periods and after their work shifts ended. Some of
27 this unpaid work should have been paid at the overtime rate. In failing to pay for all hours worked,
28 Defendants also failed to maintain accurate records of the hours Plaintiff and the Aggrieved

1 Employees worked.

2 **B. Failure to Provide Meal Periods**

3 19. Under California law, employers have an affirmative obligation to relieve
4 employees of all duty in order to take their first 30-minute, duty-free meal periods no later than the
5 start of the sixth hour of work in a workday, and to allow employees to take their second 30-minute,
6 duty-free meal period no later than the start of the eleventh hour of work in a workday. Further,
7 employees are entitled to be paid one hour of additional wages for each workday they were not
8 provided with a required meal period(s).

9 20. Despite these legal requirements, Defendants wrongfully failed to provide Plaintiff
10 and the Aggrieved Employees with their legally mandated 30-minute, uninterrupted, and duty-free
11 meal period. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees routinely worked through meal periods “off-
12 the-clock,” and Defendants frequently paid Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees less than all
13 their work time. Much of this unpaid work should have been paid at the overtime rate. In failing
14 to pay for all hours worked, Defendants also failed to maintain accurate records of the hours
15 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees worked. Defendants also regularly, but not always,
16 required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work in excess of five consecutive hours a day
17 without providing a 30-minute, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal period for every five hours of
18 work, or without compensating Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for meal periods that were
19 not provided by the end of the fifth hour of work or tenth hour of work. Instead, Defendants
20 continued to assert control over Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees by requiring, pressuring,
21 or encouraging them to perform work tasks which could not be completed without working in lieu
22 of taking mandatory meal periods, or by denying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees
23 permission to take a meal period. Defendants also never informed Plaintiff of his right to, nor
24 permitted him to take, a second meal period when Plaintiff worked at least ten hours of work in a
25 workday. Accordingly, Defendants’ policy and practice was not to provide meal periods to
26 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees in compliance with California law.

27 21. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are thus entitled to be paid one hour of
28 additional wages for each workday he or she was not provided with all required meal period(s).

Defendants, however, regularly failed to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees the additional wages to which they were entitled for meal periods that were not provided.

C. Failure to Authorize and Permit Rest Periods

22. Employers are required by California law to authorize and permit breaks of ten uninterrupted minutes for each four hours of work or major fraction of four hours (i.e. more than two hours). Thus, for example, if an employee's work time is six hours and ten minutes, the employee is entitled to two rest breaks. Each failure to authorize rest breaks as so required is itself a violation of California's rest break laws.

23. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants wrongfully failed to authorize and permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to take legally compliant rest periods. Defendants regularly required Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to work in excess of four consecutive hours a day without Defendants authorizing and permitting them to take a 10-minute, uninterrupted, duty-free rest period for every four hours of work (or major fraction of four hours), or without compensating Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for rest periods that were not authorized or permitted. Instead, Defendants continued to assert control over Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees by requiring, pressuring, or encouraging them to perform work tasks which could not be completed without working in lieu of taking mandatory rest periods, or by denying Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees permission to take a rest period. Accordingly, Defendants' policy and practice was to not authorize and permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to take rest periods in compliance with California law.

24. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are thus entitled to be paid one hour of additional wages for each workday he or she was not authorized and permitted to take all required rest periods. Defendants, however, regularly failed to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees the additional wages to which they were entitled for rest periods and that they were not authorized and permitted to take.

D. Failure to Pay All Earned Wages Twice Per Month

25. Based on its failure to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all wages as discussed above, Defendants also violated Labor Code § 204.

1 26. Labor Code § 204 requires employers to pay employees all earned wages two times
2 per month. Throughout the statute of limitations period applicable to this cause of action,
3 employees were entitled to be paid twice a month at their regular rates, including all meal period
4 premium wages owed, rest period premium wages owed, and wages owed for overtime hours
5 worked. However, during all such times, Defendants systematically failed and refused to pay the
6 employees all wages due, and failed to pay those wages twice a month, in that employees were not
7 paid all wages for all meal periods not provided by Defendants, all wages for all rest periods not
8 authorized and permitted by Defendants, and all wages for all hours worked. As a result,
9 Defendants owe employees the legally required wages not paid, and Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
10 Employees suffered damages in those amounts.

11 E. **Failure to Maintain Accurate Records of Hours Worked and Meal Periods**

12 27. Plaintiff seeks penalties under California Labor Code § 1174(d). Pursuant to
13 California Labor Code § 1174.5, any person, including any entity, employing labor who willfully
14 fails to maintain accurate and complete records required by California Labor Code § 1174 is subject
15 to a penalty under § 1174.5. Pursuant to the applicable IWC Order § 7(A)(3), every employer shall
16 keep time records showing when the employee begins and ends each work period. Meal periods
17 and total hours worked daily shall also be recorded.

18 28. Defendants, however, failed to maintain accurate records of hours worked and all
19 meal periods taken or missed by Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees.

20 29. Defendants' failure to provide and maintain records required by the California
21 Labor Code and applicable IWC Wage Orders deprived Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees the
22 ability to know, understand and question the accuracy and frequency of meal periods, and the
23 accuracy of their hours worked stated in Defendants' records. Therefore, Plaintiff and the
24 Aggrieved Employees had no way to dispute the resulting failure to pay wages, all of which
25 resulted in an unjustified economic enrichment to Defendants. As a direct result, Plaintiff and the
26 Aggrieved Employees have suffered and continue to suffer, substantial losses related to the use
27 and enjoyment of such wages, lost interest on such wages and expenses and attorney's fees in
28 seeking to compel Defendants to fully perform its obligation under state law, all to their respective

1 damage in amounts according to proof at trial. As a result of Defendants' knowing failure to
2 comply with the California Labor Code and applicable IWC Wage Orders, Plaintiff and the
3 Aggrieved Employees have also suffered an injury in that they were prevented from knowing,
4 understanding, and disputing the wage payments paid to them.

5 **F. Failure to Timely Pay All Wages at Termination**

6 30. Labor Code §§ 201 and 202 provide that if an employer discharges an employee,
7 the wages earned and unpaid at the time of discharge are due and payable immediately, and that if
8 an employee voluntarily leaves his or her employment, his or her wages shall become due and
9 payable not later than seventy-two (72) hours thereafter, unless the employee has given seventy-
10 two (72) hours previous notice of his or her intention to quit, in which case the employee is entitled
11 to his or her wages at the time of quitting.

12 31. Within the applicable statute of limitations, the employment of Plaintiff and many
13 other Aggrieved Employees ended, i.e., was terminated by quitting or being discharged, and the
14 employment of others will be terminated. However, during the relevant time period, Defendants
15 failed, and continue to fail to pay Plaintiff and terminated Aggrieved Employees, without
16 abatement, all wages required to be paid by Labor Code sections 201 and 202 either at the time of
17 discharge, or within seventy-two (72) hours of their leaving Defendants' employment. These
18 unpaid wages include wages for unpaid work time (including minimum wages, straight time wages,
19 overtime wages, rest and recovery periods, and other nonproductive time), missed meal period
20 premium wages, and missed rest period premium wages.

21 32. Defendants' conduct violates Labor Code §§ 201 and 202. Labor Code § 203
22 provides that if an employer willfully fails to pay wages owed, in accordance with sections 201
23 and 202, then the wages of the employee shall continue as a penalty wage from the due date, and
24 at the same rate until paid or until an action is commenced; but the wages shall not continue for
25 more than thirty (30) days.

26 33. Accordingly, Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover from
27 Defendants their additionally accruing wages for each day they were not paid, at their regular
28 hourly rate of pay, up to thirty (30) days maximum pursuant to Labor Code § 203.

1 **G. Failure to Furnish Accurate Itemized Wage Statements**

2 34. Labor Code § 226(a) provides that every employer shall furnish each of his or her
3 employees an accurate itemized wage statement in writing showing nine pieces of information,
4 including: (1) gross wages earned, (2) total hours worked by the employee, (3) the number of piece-
5 rate units earned and any applicable piece rate if the employee is paid on a piece-rate basis, (4) all
6 deductions, provided that all deductions made on written orders of the employee may be aggregated
7 and shown as one item, (5) net wages earned, (6) the inclusive dates of the period for which the
8 employee is paid, (7) the name of the employee and the last four digits of his or her social security
9 number or an employee identification number other than a social security number, (8) the name
10 and address of the legal entity that is the employer, and (9) all applicable hourly rates in effect
11 during the pay period and the corresponding number of hours worked at each hourly rate by the
12 employee. An employee is presumed to suffer an injury if this information is missing. (Labor Code
13 § 226(e)(2)(B)(iii).)

14 35. The statute further provides: “An employee suffering injury as a result of a knowing
15 and intentional failure by an employer to comply with subdivision (a) is entitled to recover the
16 greater of all actual damages or fifty dollars (\$50) for the initial pay period in which a violation
17 occurs and one hundred dollars (\$100) per employee for each violation in a subsequent pay period,
18 not to exceed an aggregate penalty of four thousand dollars (\$4,000), and is entitled to an award
19 of costs and reasonable attorney’s fees.” (Labor Code § 226(e)(1).)

20 36. Throughout the statutory period, Defendants failed to furnish Plaintiff and the
21 Aggrieved Employees with accurate, itemized wage statements showing all applicable hourly rates,
22 and all gross and net wages earned (including correct hours worked, correct wages for meal periods
23 that were not provided in accordance with California law, and correct wages for rest periods that
24 were not authorized and permitted to take in accordance with California law).

25 37. Because Defendants violated Labor Code § 226, Plaintiff and similarly Aggrieved
26 Employees suffered injury and damage to their statutorily protected rights. Accordingly, Plaintiff
27 and similarly Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover from Defendants the greater of their
28 actual damages caused by Defendants’ failure to comply with Labor Code § 226(a), or an aggregate

1 penalty not exceeding four thousand dollars (\$4,000) dollars per employee.

2 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

3 **(Against all Defendants for Civil Penalties Under the Private Attorneys**

4 **General Act of 2004, Cal. Lab. Code §§ 2698, et seq.)**

5 38. Plaintiff incorporates by reference and re-alleges all preceding paragraphs as though
6 fully set forth herein.

7 39. At all times herein mentioned, Defendants were subject to the Labor Code of the
8 State of California and the applicable IWC Orders.

9 40. California Labor Code § 2699(a) specifically provides for a private right of action
10 to recover penalties for violations of the Labor Code: “Notwithstanding any other provision of law,
11 any provision of this code that provides for a civil penalty to be assessed and collected by the Labor
12 and Workforce Development Agency or any of its departments, divisions, commissions, boards,
13 agencies, or employees, for a violation of this code, may, as an alternative, be recovered through a
14 civil action brought by an aggrieved employee on behalf of himself and other current or former
15 employees pursuant to the procedures specified in Section 2699.3.”

16 41. Plaintiff has exhausted his administrative remedies pursuant to California Labor
17 Code § 2699.3. On June 19, 2024, he gave written notice by online filing to the Labor and
18 Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) and by certified mail to Defendants of the specific
19 provisions of the Labor Code that Defendants have violated against Plaintiff and current and former
20 Aggrieved Employees, including the facts and theories to support the violations. Plaintiff also paid
21 the filing fee on April 18, 2024. Plaintiff’s PAGA case number is LWDA-CM- 1034926-24 (*John*
22 *Andrew Sapwell, Jr. v. Central Valley AG Group, LLC*).

23 42. The statute of limitations is tolled while a plaintiff exhausts his or her administrative
24 remedies with California’s LWDA prior to suit, which is required by the statute. (*See* Labor Code
25 § 2699.3(d).)

26 43. More than sixty-five (65) days have elapsed since Plaintiff provided notice, but the
27 LWDA has not indicated that it intends to investigate Defendants’ Labor Code violations discussed
28 in the notice. Accordingly, Plaintiff may commence a civil action to recover penalties under Labor

Code § 2699 pursuant to § 2699.3 for the violations of the Labor Code described in this Complaint. These penalties include, but are not limited to, penalties under California Labor Code §§ 210, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1, and 2699(f)(2).

44. Based on the conduct described in this Complaint, Plaintiff is entitled to an award of civil penalties on behalf of the State of California and similarly Aggrieved Employees of Defendants. The exact amount of the applicable penalties, in all, is in an amount to be shown according to proof at trial. These penalties are in addition to all other remedies permitted by law.

45. In addition, Plaintiff seeks an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs pursuant to Labor Code § 2699(g)(1), which states, "Any employee who prevails in any action shall be entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs."

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Plaintiff, on behalf of all similarly aggrieved employees, prays for relief and judgment against Defendants, jointly and severally, as follows:

1. That the Court declare, adjudge and decree that Defendants violated the California Labor Code by failing to pay for all hours worked (minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime wages), failing to provide meal periods, failing to authorize and permit rest periods, failing to pay all earned wages twice per month, failing to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods, failing to timely pay final wages, and failing to furnish accurate wage statements;

2. An award of civil penalties on behalf of himself and all similarly aggrieved employees pursuant to PAGA;

3. Pre-judgment and post-judgment interest at the maximum rate allowed;

4. Attorneys' fees and costs reasonably incurred;

5. Injunctive and declaratory relief to the extent allowed by PAGA; and,

6. Such other and further relief that the Court deems proper.

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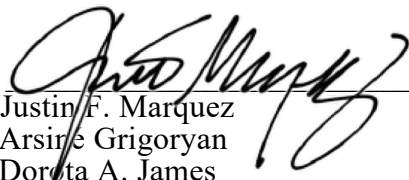
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Dated: October 22, 2024

Respectfully submitted,

WILSHIRE LAW FIRM

By: 
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