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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE

STEVEN PORTER, individually, on a representative basis, and on behalf of all others similarly situated;

Plaintiff,

vs.

JOHN CHRISTNER TRUCKING, LLC, an Oklahoma Limited Liability Company; HIRSCHBACH, INC., an Indiana Corporation; HIRSCHBACH MOTOR LINES, INC., an Iowa Corporation; and DOES 1 through 20, inclusive;

Defendants.

Case No.: CVRI2406864
[Assigned to Hon. Harold Hopp, Dept 1, for all purposes]

PLAINTIFFS' UNOPPOSED MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION AND PAGA SETTLEMENT

Filed Concurrently with: (1) [Proposed] Order, and (2) Declarations In Support of this Motion

<u>Hearing</u>
Date: March 12, 2026
Time: 8:30 a.m.
Dept.: 1

Pending Consolidation via Consolidated Complaint with:

1. *Stokes v. John Christner Trucking, LLC, et al.,* United States District Court, C.D. Cal., Case No. 5:24-cv-01921-KK-SP, and

2. *Gasser/Porter v. John Christner Trucking, LLC, et al.,* United States District Court, C.D. Cal., Case No. 5:25-cv-00619-JGB-SP

TO ALL PARTIES AND THEIR ATTORNEYS OF RECORD:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on March 12, 2026, at 8:30 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard by the Honorable Harold Hopp in Department 1 of the Riverside County Superior Court, located at 4050 Main Street, Riverside, CA 92501, Plaintiffs Steven Porter, Andre Stokes, Todd Gasser, Curtis Baldwin, Robb Lewis, Antonio Reyes, and Bernardo Romero ("Plaintiffs"),[1] individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, will and hereby do move the Court for entry of an Order preliminarily approving the Parties' Class Action and Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA") settlement between Plaintiffs and Defendants John Christner Trucking, LLC, Hirschbach, Inc., and Hirschbach Motor Lines, Inc. ("Defendants"), including:

1. Certifying the class for purposes of settlement only;
2. Preliminarily appointing Plaintiffs as the class representatives;
3. Appointing Plaintiffs' counsel as class counsel for purposes of settlement only;
4. Preliminarily approving the class action and PAGA settlement as fair, adequate, and reasonable, based upon the terms set forth in the Settlement Agreement;
5. Directing distribution of the Notice Packet, including notice of the opportunity to exclude oneself from, or object to, the settlement;
6. Setting a date for a final fairness hearing to determine, following dissemination of the Notice Packet, whether to grant final approval of the Settlement.

This motion is based upon this Memorandum of Points and Authorities in Support thereof; the Declaration of Plaintiffs' counsel (Brian Mankin and Peter Carlson of Lauby Mankin Lauby LLP); the Declaration of Defendants' counsel (Jared Kramer); the Declaration of Defendants' Representative (Mike Drapeau); the Declaration of Julie Green on behalf of the Settlement Administrator (CPT Group); the Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement (the "Settlement Agreement"); the proposed Order granting Preliminary Approval of the Settlement;

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[1] The Parties stipulated to allow Plaintiff Porter to file a First Amended Complaint to add Plaintiffs Stokes, Gasser, Baldwin, Lewis, Reyes, and Romero to this Action. However, as explained below, the Stipulation has not yet been signed, but the Parties expect that the FAC will be filed (and, thus, these individuals will be Plaintiffs) by the time this Motion is heard.

all other records, pleadings, and papers filed in this action; and upon such other evidence or argument as may be presented to the Court at the hearing of this motion.

Dated: February 18, 2026

LAUBY, MANKIN & LAUBY LLP

BY: ______________________
Brian J. Mankin, Esq.
Attorneys for Plaintiffs and the Class

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

Multiple Plaintiffs (Steven Porter, Andre Stokes, Todd Gasser, Curtis Baldwin, Robb Lewis, Antonio Reyes, and Bernardo Romero) have joined forces in this Action pursuant to the Consolidated Complaint,[2] and they now collectively seek preliminary approval of a $1,200,000 class action settlement on behalf of approximately 338 truck drivers who performed driving duties for Defendants John Christner Trucking, LLC, Hirschbach, Inc., and Hirschbach Motor Lines, Inc. ("Defendants") during the applicable periods discussed herein ("Class Members"[3]).

Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement, Defendants will not oppose Plaintiffs' Counsel's application for a reasonable award of attorneys' fees not to exceed $400,000 (1/3 of the Settlement Amount) and litigation expenses not to exceed $30,000, Settlement Administration Costs of $9,500, PAGA penalties of $40,000 (75% to LWDA and 25% to the PAGA Group Members), and Service Payments totaling $50,000 to the seven Plaintiffs ("Class Representatives").

After all Court-approved deductions from the Settlement Amount, it is estimated that $670,500.00 will be available to pay the Class Members, as follows:

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[2] The Parties filed a Stipulation to allow Plaintiff to file a FAC (the "Consolidated Complaint") on February 11, 2026. The Stipulation was not signed by the Court before this Motion was due, but that will occur soon, and the FAC will be filed before the hearing on this Motion.

[3] The following relevant definitions are found in in the Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement (the "Settlement Agreement" or "S.A.", attached as Exhibit A to the Decl. of Brian Mankin ["Mankin Decl."]):

(A) "Class Members" includes "all members of the Contractor Subclass and the Employee Subclass" (S.A. ¶ I(3));

(B) "Contractor Subclass" refers to truck drivers who were classified as independent contractor and is more specifically defined as "all current and former California resident truck drivers who, on behalf of themselves or a business, entered into a written contract to provide equipment and delivery services as independent contracts for any of the Defendants, and performed services for any of the Defendants in the State of California at any time during the Contractor Subclass Period of September 30, 2020, through the Preliminary Approval Date" (S.A. ¶¶ I(10, 11));

(C) "Employee Subclass" refers to truck drivers who were classified as employees of Defendants and are defined to include "all current and former California resident truck drivers employed by any of the Defendants who drove in California at any time during the Employee Subclass Period of March 11, 2020, through the Preliminary Approval Date" (S.A. ¶¶ I(16, 17)).

Settlement Amount	**$ 1,200,000.00**
Attorneys' Fees (1/3)	$ 400,000.00
Litigation Costs (not to exceed)	$ 30,000.00
Administrator Costs	$ 9,500.00
PAGA Penalties	$ 40,000.00
Class Representative Service Awards	$ 50,000.00
Net Settlement Amount	**$ 670,500.00**

Assuming 338 total Class Members, the average payment will be $1,983.73 ($670,500 / 338). However, the actual payments will be calculated based on each individual's Qualifying Class Workweeks and a Share Point system, described in detail below. In addition, approximately 200 PAGA Group Members will receive a share of the $10,000 PAGA Penalties (25% of the $40,000 allocation), calculated pro-rata based on Qualifying PAGA Workweeks.

Because the settlement is fair, reasonable, and negotiated at arm's length by experienced counsel and an experienced mediator following a sufficient exchange of information and documents prior to mediation, it should be preliminarily approved. Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court enter an order preliminarily approving the settlement, conditionally certifying the Class under Code of Civil Procedure § 382 for settlement purposes, approving the proposed Class Notice, appointing Plaintiffs' counsel as class counsel, appointing CPT Group as the Administrator, and scheduling a hearing for final approval.

II. BACKGROUND

A. THE CLASS

The Class is defined as follows: "all members of the Contractor Subclass and the Employee Subclass." (S.A. ¶ I(3)).

The "Contractor Subclass" is defined as: "all current and former California resident truck drivers who, on behalf of themselves or a business, entered into a written contract to provide equipment and delivery services as independent contracts for any of the Defendants, and performed services for any of the Defendants in the State of California at any time during the Contractor Subclass Period." (S.A. ¶ I(10)). And the "Contractor Subclass Period" is defined as "the period of September 30, 2020 through the earlier of the Preliminary Approval Date or 120 days following the date this Agreement is fully executed by the Parties." (S.A. ¶ I(11)).

The "Employee Subclass" is defined as: "all current and former California resident truck drivers employed by any of the Defendants who drove in California at any time during the Employee Subclass Period." (S.A. ¶ I(16)). And the "Employee Subclass Period" is defined as "the period of March 11, 2020 through the earlier of the Preliminary Approval Date or 120 days following the date this Agreement is fully executed by the Parties." (S.A. ¶ I(17)).

B. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On March 11, 2024, Plaintiff Stokes filed a putative class action against Defendants in San Bernardino County Superior Court, Case No. CIVSB2402376 and later filed an amended complaint adding PAGA claims (the "*Stokes* Action"). Then, on September 9, 2024, Defendants removed the *Stokes* Action to the United States District Court, Central District of California, Case No. 5:24-cv-01921-KK-SP. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 13).

On September 30, 2024, Plaintiffs Gasser and Porter filed a putative class action against Defendants in Riverside County Superior Court, Case No. CVRI2405581 (the "*Gasser* Action"). On March 7, 2025, Defendants removed the *Gasser* Action to the United States District Court, Central District of California, Case No. 5:25-cv-00619-JGB-SP. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 14).

On December 6, 2024, Plaintiff Porter filed this Action on a PAGA-only basis against Defendants (the "*Porter* Action"). (Mankin Decl. ¶ 15).

Ultimately, after discovery and discussions among counsel, the Parties agreed to attend mediation covering all three cases filed against Defendants, *i.e.*, the *Stokes* Action, *Gasser* Action, and *Porter* Action (the "Actions"). In preparation for mediation, the Parties informally exchanged documents and information that allowed both sides to calculate the potential damages and evaluate potential risk, including policies and procedures pertaining to the claims, statistics relating to the number of Class Members, number of workweeks and other relevant metrics, and a robust sampling of timekeeping and payroll for the Class. This information enabled both parties to take a deep dive into the claims. Additionally, during this process, Plaintiffs and their counsel analyzed, researched, and investigated the potential issues, including matters related to the calculation of damages, trial, and appellate issues and risks. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 17).

On October 14, 2025, the Parties attended private mediation with Stehpanie Chow, Esq., a well-respected mediator. After arms-length negotiations, the mediation resulted in an agreement to globally resolve all claims pending in the Actions. To that end, the Parties agreed that Plaintiff Porter would file an amended complaint in this action, adding all parties/claims present in the *Stokes* and *Gasser* Actions, and to also add Plaintiffs Baldwin, Lewis, Reyes, and Romero – each of which were essential to the success of the mediation. The Parties filed a Stipulation to Allow Plaintiff to file the FAC on February 11, 2026, but the Court has not yet signed the Stipulation. Assuming the Stipulation is signed before the hearing on this Motion, Plaintiffs will promptly file the FAC so all parties/claims are in the operative pleading for this action before the Court's ruling on preliminary approval. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 18).

C. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CLAIMS AND DEFENSES

Plaintiffs alleged numerous wage and hour violations on behalf of the Class. However, Defendants vigorously contested and denied each of Plaintiffs' material allegations on the merits and as to the propriety of a class action or PAGA representative action. Still, Plaintiffs believed there were several strong claims. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 19)

For instance, Plaintiffs alleged that Defendants classified the Contractor Subclass as independent contractors despite that, under applicable standards of California law, these workers should have been classified as employees. However, Defendants vehemently denied liability for misclassification and argued that the Contractor Subclass were, at all times, properly classified as independent contractors. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 20).

Plaintiffs also argued that Defendants violated California law due to a piece-rate pay plan (either "per-mile" or "per-day") that subjected the Class Members to recurring unpaid wages for non-driving tasks like pre-trip inspections, refueling, detention time, and completing paperwork. But Defendants raised strong challenges and defenses to this claim, including that: (1) at the class certification stage, this claim would fail as it requires the prototypical "individualized issues" for which certification must be denied, and (2) on the merits, this claim fails because Defendants properly and contractually defined the scope of their piece-rate compensation system in line with *Ayala v. U.S. Xpress Enters., Inc.* (9th Cir. 2021) 851 Fed.Appx. 53, 54 and *Oman v.*

Delta Air Lines, Inc. (2020) 9 Cal.5th 762, 782. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 21).

Plaintiffs further alleged other claims (which Defendants disputed), such as the failure to reimburse business expenses, failure to timely pay wages each period and upon separation of employment and failure to provide accurate itemized wage statements. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 22).

Finally, Defendants raised several strong "threshold" defenses that they claimed could, on a wholesale basis, either defeat or greatly limit Plaintiffs' claims. For instance, Defendants argued that the Class Members primarily worked out of California and, as such, California law would not apply if it was shown that a driver's "principal place of work" was *outside* California. Additionally, Defendants argued that a high percentage of the Class Members signed documents with either a forum selection clause or class action waiver. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 23).

Despite the disputed nature of the claims, the Parties concluded that further litigation of the Action would be protracted and expensive, and that it is desirable that the Action be fully and finally settled to limit further risk, expense, and protracted litigation. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 24).

III. SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT

The following is a summary of the principal terms of the Settlement Agreement.

A. SETTLEMENT CONSIDERATION AND ALLOCATION

The $1,200,000 Settlement Amount [4] is non-reversionary and will be paid out to Class Members without the need to submit a claim form or take any affirmative action. It includes (1) Plaintiffs' attorneys' fees and costs, as approved by the Court; (2) service awards of $10,000 to Plaintiffs Porter, Stokes, and Gasser, and $5,000 each to Plaintiffs Baldwin, Lewis, Reyes, and Romero; (3) Settlement Administration Costs, not to exceed $9,500; (4) a $40,000 PAGA award, with 75% paid to the LWDA and 25% to the PAGA Group Members; and (5) the aggregate of all Individual Class Payments to the Participating Class Members. Defendants will also separately pay their share of employer payroll taxes. (S.A. ¶ 50).

[4] The Gross Settlement Amount is subject to increase if the "Escalator Clause" is triggered. If the total number of Class Members exceeds 335, then the Gross Settlement Amount shall increase by $3,550.30 for each additional Class Member above 355. (S.A. III(I)(4)). And, if this occurs, other figures will also shift upward along with the Settlement Amount, such as attorneys' fees (but this is still constrained to 1/3 of the Settlement Amount).

B. <u>NOTICE PROCEDURES</u>

The Parties will provide notice of this settlement in compliance with the Court's standard Class Action Case Management Order #1 (the "CMO"). Thus, as required by CMO ¶ G(3)(k), the Parties will send each Class Member a Class Notice, a Request for Exclusion Form and an Objection Form. (S.A. ¶ 64, attached to the Mankin Decl. as Exhibits B, C and D, respectively).

The proposed Notice complies with CMO ¶ G(5) because it informs each Class Member of the estimated recovery, the number of Qualifying Class and PAGA Workweeks that each Class Member is credited with, and the applicable average payments, minimum, and high payments. The Notice Packet will be provided in English and Spanish. (S.A. ¶ III(D)(2)).

Within 30 calendar days of the Preliminary Approval Date, Defendants shall provide the Settlement Administrator with the "Settlement Data" consisting of Class Member names, addresses, Social Security Numbers, and applicable dates of work. (S.A. ¶¶ I(52) and III(D)(1)). Within 15 calendar days of receipt of the Settlement Data, the Settlement Administrator shall calculate the numbers for each Class Member, populate the Notice, and send each Class Member the Notice Packet via first-class, United States mail. (S.A. ¶ III(D)(2)).

If a Notice is returned as undelivered by the U.S. Postal Service, the Settlement Administrator shall perform a skip trace and seek an address correction for the Class Member(s), and a second Notice will be sent to any new or different address obtained. (S.A. ¶ III(E)).

C. <u>EXCLUSION AND OBJECTION PROCEDURES</u>

Class Members who do not timely Opt-Out of the Settlement will be deemed to participate in the Settlement and shall become a Participating Class Member without having to submit a claim form or take any other action. To Opt-Out of the Settlement, the Class Member must submit a written request to the Administrator no later than 45 days after being mailed by the Settlement Administrator ("Response Deadline"). (S.A. ¶ I(47)). Any Opt-Out request that is not postmarked by the Response Deadline will be invalid, unless a Notice was remailed in which case the Class Member's exclusion or objection must be returned by the later of the original Response Deadline or 10 calendar days after the remailing of the notice. (S.A. ¶ III(E)(3).

The Class Notice shall inform Class Members of their right to object to the Settlement. Any Participating Class Member who wishes to object to the Settlement must complete the Objection Form in the Notice Packet. To be valid, any Objection Form must be mailed to the Settlement Administrator and postmarked on or before the Response Deadline. (S.A. ¶ III(I)(1)).

D. SETTLEMENT ALLOCATION FORMULA FOR SETTLEMENT SHARES

The amount of each Class Member's Individual Class Payment is tied to the number of Qualifying Class Workweeks and Share Points for each Class Member.

In this regard, "Share Points" will be calculated as follows: (1) each Qualifying Contractor Subclass Workweek during the Contractor Subclass Period shall be credited with 3 Share Points, and (2) each Qualifying Employee Subclass Workweek during Employee Subclass Period shall be credited with 1 Share Point." (S.A. ¶ I(53)).

The Net Settlement Amount shall then be divided among the Class Members and apportioned by: (a) dividing the Net Settlement Amount by the number of Share Points by all Participating Class Members during the Class Periods, and (b) multiplying the result (the Share Point Rate) by each Participating Class Members' Individual Share Points. (S.A. ¶ III(K)(1)).

Additionally, certain Class Members are entitled to a share of the "Lost Equity Fund", which is $120,000 and "which shall be paid from the Gross Settlement Amount, divided and payable in equal shares to Participating Class Members that: (A) are members of the Contractor Subclass, and (B) had active equipment leases terminated by any of the Defendants in June or July 2025." (S.A. ¶ I(23)).

PAGA Group Members will also receive a share from the PAGA Fund, with $10,000 divided on a pro rata basis based on the number of Qualifying PAGA Workweeks that the PAGA Group Member worked during the PAGA Period. (S.A. III(K)(2)).

The Class Notice will inform Class Members and PAGA Group Members of the Qualifying Class Workweeks and Share Points, Qualifying PAGA Workweeks, and the amounts to which a Class Member is entitled from the Lost Equity Fund (if applicable). (S.A. ¶ III(K)(3)). of the number of Class Members may dispute their Weeks Worked by timely submitting evidence to the Settlement Administrator. (S.A. ¶ III(K)(4)).

E. Timing of Settlement Disbursements

Pursuant to the terms of the Settlement Agreement, Defendants are required to fund the Settlement Amount, plus its share of payroll taxes owed on the Individual Class Payments, no later than 10 days after the Effective Date. (S.A. ¶ III(N)).

Within 10 days after receiving each payment, the Settlement Administrator shall mail Individual Class Payments to the Participating Class Members, Individual PAGA Payments to the PAGA Group Members, payment to Class Counsel for the Attorneys' Fees and Costs Award, Service Payments to the Class Representatives, payment to the LWDA for PAGA Penalties, and Settlement Administration Costs. (S.A. ¶ III(K)(5)).

Participating Class Members and PAGA Group Members shall have 180 calendar days after mailing by the Settlement Administrator to cash each settlement check. If a check is not cashed within the 180-day period, the check will be voided, and a stop-payment will be issued. The Settlement Administrator shall issue all unclaimed funds to the California State Controller's Office in the name of the Participating Class Member or PAGA Group Member. (S.A. ¶ III(P)).

As required by CMO ¶ G(3)(c)(i), Plaintiffs' Counsel explains the reasoning for this method of distribution at Mankin Decl. ¶¶ 59-64.

F. Tax Treatment

The Parties agree that 15% of the Individual Class Payments to the Employee Subclass, which is attributable to Qualifying Employee Subclass Workweeks, will be allocated as wages subject to withholding of all applicable local, state and federal taxes and the remaining 85% will be allocated for interest and penalties (pursuant to, *e.g.*, California Labor Code §§ 203, 210, 226, 2699 etc.) from which no taxes will be withheld. (S.A. ¶ III(M)(3)). The Parties further agree that 100% of the amount of each Individual Class Payment to each member of the Contractor Subclass and 100% of the amount of each Individual PAGA Payment to each PAGA Group Member shall be paid pursuant to IRS Form 1099 and shall not be subject to withholding. (*Id.*)

G. Participating Class Members' Release of Claims

In exchange for these payments, the Settlement Agreement at ¶ I(42) defines the "Released Class Claims" as follows:

> any claims alleged in the Consolidated Complaint and any claims based upon the facts alleged in the Consolidated Complaint, including: claims for misclassification, unpaid wages, failure to pay minimum wages, failure to pay regular wages, failure to reimburse business expenses, failure to pay for rest and recovery periods, lost equity, failure to provide accurate itemized wage statements, failure to maintain records, improper deduction of wages, failure to timely pay wages during employment, failure to timely pay final wages at termination, and unfair business practices. The Released Class Claims include all claims arising under federal and state law based on the facts or claims asserted in the Consolidated Complaint, including the Fair Labor Standards Act ("FLSA"), 29 U.S.C. § 201, *et seq.*; and California Labor Code sections 200, 201, 202, 203, 218.6, 221, 223, 226, 226.2, 226.3, 226.8, 558, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, and 2802; as well as all such claims brought under California Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders, and California Business and Professions Code sections 17200 *et seq*, including claims of Unfair and Unlawful Competition for lost equity arising from allegations that Defendants deprived individuals who participated in Defendants' "lease purchase" program of equity accrued in vehicles they leased when their lease was terminated prior to completion of the lease term. The Released Class Claims includes claims for restitution, interest, costs and expenses, attorneys' fees, declaratory relief, injunctive relief, liquidated damages, equitable remedies, and/or pre- or post-judgment interest at any time during the Class Period to the extent such claims arise from the facts or claims asserted in the Consolidated Complaint.

It is understood and agreed that the Settlement Agreement will not release any person, party or entity from claims, if any, by Class Members for any other claims, including claims for vested benefits, wrongful termination, violation of the Fair Employment and Housing Act, unemployment insurance, disability, social security, workers' compensation, or claims based on facts occurring outside the Class Period.

H. PAGA GROUP MEMBERS' RELEASE OF CLAIMS

The Settlement Agreement at ¶ I(43) also defines the "Released PAGA Claims" as follows:

> any PAGA Claims that Plaintiffs alleged against the Defendants or Released Parties and any PAGA claims based on the facts alleged in the Consolidated Complaint and PAGA Letters, including all claims seeking civil penalties under PAGA premised upon claims for: misclassification, unpaid wages, failure to pay minimum wages, failure to pay regular wages, failure to pay overtime wages, failure to reimburse business expenses, failure to pay for rest and recovery

> periods, lost equity, failure to provide accurate itemized wage statements, failure to maintain records, payroll recordkeeping, reporting time, improper deduction of wages, failure to pay sick wages at the regular rate, failure to timely pay wages during employment, failure to timely pay final wages at termination, and all other claims for civil penalties recoverable under PAGA based on the facts or claims alleged in the PAGA Letters and Consolidated Complaint, including claims for civil penalties under PAGA based on alleged violations of California Labor Code §§ 200, 201, 202, 203, 218.6, 221, 222, 223, 226, 226.2, 226.3, 226.8, 558, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, and 2802, as well as California Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Order No. 9, § 4 and California Code of Regulations, title 8, § 11090. The Released PAGA Claims shall also include all claims for restitution, interest, costs and expenses, attorneys' fees, declaratory relief, injunctive relief, liquidated damages, equitable remedies, and/or pre- or post-judgment interest at any time during the PAGA Period to the extent such claims arise from the PAGA claims asserted in the Consolidated Complaint. The Released PAGA Claims shall include all such claims accrued during the PAGA Period.

Moreover, even if a PAGA Group Member requests exclusion from the Class settlement, that individual will still be subject to the Released PAGA Claims and will receive a pro-rata share of PAGA Penalties. (S.A. ¶ I(48); CMO ¶ G(9)(c)).

IV. PROVISIONAL CERTIFICATION OF THE CLASS IS APPROPRIATE FOR PURPOSES OF SETTLEMENT

California Rule of Court 3.769(d) provides that the Court may make an order approving certification of a provisional settlement class at the preliminary approval stage. It is well-established that trial courts should use a "lesser standard of scrutiny" for determining the propriety of certifying a settlement class, as opposed to a litigation class. *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.* (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1807 at n.19; *Officers for Justice v. Civil Service Com.* (9th Cir. 1982) 688 F.2d 615, 633 ("[C]ertification issues raised by class action litigation that is resolved short of a decision on the merits must be viewed in a different light."); *Amchem Prods., Inc. v. Windsor* (1997) 521 U.S. 591, 620 ("Confronted with a request for settlement-only class certification, a district court need not inquire whether the case, if tried, would present intractable management problems . . . for the proposal is that there be no trial."). As discussed below, for the purposes of this settlement only, Plaintiffs request that this Court provisionally certify the Class, as defined above, under Code of Civil Procedure § 382.

A. <u>ASCERTAINABILITY AND NUMEROSITY</u>

In determining whether a class is ascertainable, the court considers "(1) the class definition, (2) the size of the class, and (3) the means available for identifying the class members." *Reyes v. San Diego County Board of Supervisors* (1987) 196 Cal.App.3d 1263, 1271; *Medrazo v. Honda of N. Hollywood* (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 89, 101 (proposed settlement class is ascertainable if the class members can be objectively identified and given notice of the litigation without unreasonable time or expense). According to Defendants' records, there are approximately 338 Class Members that are easily identifiable and fall within the defined Class. Thus, Plaintiffs' proposed Class meets the ascertainability and numerosity requirements.

B. <u>WELL-DEFINED COMMUNITY OF INTEREST</u>

1. <u>Commonality</u>

To justify certification, the class proponent must show that questions of law or fact common to the class predominate over the questions affecting the individual members. *Arenas v. El Torito Rests., Inc*. (2010) 183 Cal.App.4th 723, 732. Plaintiffs contend that the Class was subjected to common policies and practices relating to payment of wages, reimbursement of expenses, and so on. While the Parties dispute whether a class would be appropriate if the litigation were to continue, they agree to class certification for the purposes of settlement only.

2. <u>Typicality</u>

Typicality "focuses on whether there exists a relationship between the Plaintiff's claims and the claims alleged on behalf of the class." *See* Herbert B. Newberg & Alba Conte, *Newberg on Class Actions* ("*Newberg*") § 3:13 (4th ed. 2002). The Parties dispute whether Plaintiffs' claims are typical of the Class for the purposes of any continued litigation of the Action, but agree for the purposes of this settlement only, that Plaintiffs assert typical claims regarding Defendants' pay policies, expense reimbursement practices, wage statements, and the provisions governing the timely and complete payment of wages that are at the core of the lawsuit.

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3. Adequacy of Representation

The proposed class representative must establish that he or she will adequately represent the proposed class. *Barboza v. West Coast Digital GSM, Inc.* (2009) 179 Cal.App.4th 540, 546. Plaintiffs are adequate to represent the class because they allegedly were employed by Defendants during the Class Period, experienced the same wage and hour practices as the rest of the Class, understood their duties as the Class Representatives, have been willing to undergo the risks of litigation, and have no conflict of interest.

Adequacy may be established by the fact that counsel are experienced practitioners. See *Local Joint Exec. Bd. v. Las Vegas Sands, Inc.* (9th Cir. 2001) 244 F.3d 1152, 1162. Here, Plaintiffs are represented by Class Counsel with extensive experience in wage and hour class actions like this matter. (Mankin Decl. ¶¶ 2-6; Carlson Decl. ¶¶ 3-9).

4. Superiority

Certification of the Class for settlement purposes is superior here because there will be a global resolution of all claims at once, which fosters judicial economy. Class certification for settlement purposes is also vastly superior to litigation of numerous individual claims because most of the claims are too small to litigate outside of the class context.

V. THE COURT SHOULD PRELIMINARILY APPROVE THE SETTLEMENT, WHICH IS FAIR, ADEQUATE, AND REASONABLE

A. CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO JUDICIAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL UNDER THE CALIFORNIA RULES OF COURT

The law favors settlements. *Bush v. Superior Court* (1992) 10 Cal.App.4th 1374. This is particularly true in class actions where substantial resources can be conserved by avoiding the time, cost, and rigors of formal litigation. However, a class action may not be dismissed, compromised, or settled without the Court's approval. Cal. R. Ct. 3.769(a). The California Rules of Court set forth the procedures for court approval of a class action settlement: (1) the Court preliminarily approves the settlement; (2) class members receive notice as directed by the Court; and (3) the Court conducts a final approval hearing to inquire into the fairness of the proposed settlement. *See* Cal. R. Ct. 3.769(c), (e-g).

The decision to approve or reject a proposed settlement lies within the Court's sound discretion. *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 234-35. And the Court's ultimate duty is to determine whether the settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable. *Dunk,* 48 Cal.App.4th at 1801 (setting forth the "fair, adequate, and reasonable" standard).

Thus, at the preliminary approval stage, the Court need only determine that the settlement falls within the "range of possible judicial approval," so that notice to the class and the scheduling of the fairness hearing are worthwhile. *See Newberg* § 11:25. The Court should grant preliminary approval if there are no "grounds to doubt its fairness or other obvious deficiencies . . . and [the settlement] appears to fall within the range of possible approval." *Manual For Complex Litigation* (Third) § 30.41 (1995); see *Dunk*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1802. A "presumption of fairness exists where: (1) the settlement is reached through arm's-length bargaining; (2) investigation and discovery are sufficient to allow counsel and the court to act intelligently; (3) counsel is experienced in similar litigation; and (4) the percentage of objectors is small." *Dunk*, *supra* (citing *Newberg* § 11:41). As shown below, the settlement falls well within the range of approval because there are no grounds to doubt its fairness.

B. THE SETTLEMENT IS THE RESULT OF SERIOUS, INFORMED, NON-COLLUSIVE NEGOTIATIONS

The settlement was the product of extensive arm's length negotiations between counsel and was facilitated by an experienced wage-and-hour class action mediator. Though cordial and professional, the settlement negotiations were adversarial and non-collusive in nature. The settlement reached is the product of substantial effort by the parties and their counsel. Although Plaintiffs and their counsel believed that there was a possibility of certifying the claims, they recognized the potential risk, expense, and complexity posed by litigation, such as unfavorable decisions on class certification, summary judgment, at trial and/or on the damages awarded, and/or on an appeal that can take several more years to litigate. In addition, if Defendants prevailed on any of the defenses, the employees may not have received any monetary recovery.

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C. THE EXTENT OF THE INVESTIGATION WAS MORE THAN SUFFICIENT TO PERMIT PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF THE SETTLEMENT

Plaintiffs thoroughly investigated and evaluated the factual and legal strengths and weaknesses of this case before reaching the settlement. As described above, the settlement was reached after extensive investigation and research, thorough calculations and risk evaluation, and a substantial exchange of information prior to mediation. *See Munoz v. BCI Coca-Cola Bottling Co.* (2010) 186 Cal.App.4th 399, 410 (approving settlement where "considerable information [exists] from which to assess the strength of the class claims" and litigation risks).

D. THE SETTLEMENT IS A REASONABLE COMPROMISE OF CLAIMS

To evaluate a settlement, the parties must provide the trial court with "basic information about the nature and magnitude of the claims in question and the basis for concluding that the consideration being paid for the release of those claims represents a reasonable compromise." *Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc.* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 116, 133.

However, *Kullar* does not require review of the outer reaches of possible exposure without considering actual risks of certification, decertification, dispositive motions, and trial, rather only a record which allows "an understanding of the amount that is in controversy and the realistic range of outcomes of the litigation." *Munoz*, 186 Cal.App.4th at 408-9. Thus, a settlement is not judged against what might have been recovered had a plaintiff prevailed at trial, nor does the settlement have to provide 100% of the damages sought to be fair and reasonable. *Wershba,* 91 Cal.App.4th at 250 ("Compromise is inherent and necessary in [settlement] … even if the relief afforded by the proposed settlement is substantially narrower than it would be if the suits were to be successfully litigated, this is no bar to a class settlement because the public interest may indeed be served by a voluntary settlement in which each side gives ground in the interest of avoiding litigation.")

Here, Defendants raised significant legal and factual defenses that weigh in favor of the reasonableness of the proposed Settlement. In addition to disputing the merits of Plaintiffs' claims, Defendants strongly disputed that Plaintiffs could obtain class certification, arguing a lack of commonality of the legal claims and injuries. Defendants further argued that it complied with the applicable law and that any purported deviations therefrom were individualized in nature, thereby limiting Plaintiffs' ability to certify the class. Thus, while Plaintiffs assert that this is a suitable case for certification, they realize that there is always a significant risk associated with class certification proceedings, which could limit the claims they could pursue on a class basis.

Considering the uncertainties of protracted litigation, this negotiated settlement reflects the best practicable recovery for the Class. While the total Settlement Amount is, of course, a compromise figure, the potential risks and opportunities of both parties were effectively weighed and considered by the parties, resulting in a fair and equitable settlement.

Based upon data obtained through formal and informal discovery, Plaintiffs' counsel estimated the following through the date of settlement: (1) 338 Class Members, (2) 300 *former* Class Members for Labor Code § 203, (3) 10,732 workweeks with California drivetime, (4) 45,424 shifts worked, and (4) approximately 6,663 wage statements during the PAGA Period. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 28).

From these numbers, and by applying violations rates derived from analysis of extensive documents and data from Defendants, Plaintiffs calculated the following maximum amounts assuming all claims were entirely successful at trial: class damages and penalties of $14,417,650, and PAGA penalties of $4,916,500. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 52). Then, by applying risks at class certification and on the merits, and when considering other factors (such as evidentiary burdens of proof), Plaintiffs calculated the risk-adjusted award at trial for the class claims to be $2,876,530 and for PAGA as $613,750. (Mankin Decl. ¶ 52). As required by CMO ¶ G(3)(a)(i and ii), the full analysis of the maximum and risk-adjusted values is contained in the Mankin Decl. at ¶¶ 27-52 (and, for the sake of brevity, that information is not duplicated in this Motion).

Thus, the reasonableness of the settlement is apparent from the fact that the proposed settlement is 41.7% of the risk-adjusted class damages and penalties. And, for that reason and the others discussed in this Motion, the Parties submit that this settlement is fair and reasonable.

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E. PLAINTIFFS' COUNSEL IS EXPERIENCED IN WAGE-AND-HOUR LITIGATION

The view of attorneys conducting the litigation is entitled to significant weight deciding whether to approve a settlement. *Ellis v. Naval Air Rework Facility* (N.D. Cal. 1980) 87 F.R.D. 15, 18; *Kullar,* 168 Cal.App.4th at 128 (court must consider "the experience and view of counsel"). Plaintiffs' Counsel are highly experienced in Class/PAGA litigation, having repeatedly been named "Super Lawyer" in employment litigation (a distinction awarded to only 5% of litigators), having achieved large settlements and verdicts, including one of the largest PAGA awards in California's history, collecting over $250 million for its clients, having tried class and PAGA cases against Fortune 100 companies, among other things. (Mankin Decl. ¶¶ 2-6; Carlson Decl. ¶¶ 3-9). Plaintiffs' counsel, operating at arm's length, weighed the strengths and risks of this case, and are of the view that this is a fair and reasonable settlement considering the nature of the claims, realistic risk adjusted value, the complexities of the case, state of the law, and uncertainties of class certification and litigation.

F. THE CLASS NOTICE CONFORMS TO ALL APPLICABLE STATUTES AND RULES

The proposed Notice should be approved, as it fully informs the Class Members of the nature of the lawsuit and each Class Member's rights under terms of the Settlement Agreement and applicable law. The way the Class Notice shall be disseminated ensures that all or nearly all of the Class Members shall be properly notified of the proposed settlement.

The proposed Notice and proposed plan for the Administrator to mail the Notice to the last known address of all class members complies with all the requirements of Cal. Rule of Court 3.769(f) and 3.766(b). The proposed Notice includes: (1) the material terms of the settlement; (2) the proposed attorneys' fees, litigation expenses, and the costs of administration; (3) details about the final fairness hearing and how class members may elect to exclude themselves or make an objection; (4) how class members can obtain additional information; and (5) each Class Members' Individual Class and PAGA Payments. *See* Class Notice (Exhibit B to Mankin Decl.).

The Court has wide discretion in approving the means of providing notice, so long as the class representative "provide(s) meaningful notice in a form that should have a reasonable chance of reaching a substantial percentage of class members." *Archibald v. Cinerama Hotels*,

(1976) 15 Cal.3d 853, 861. The Notice Packet will be disseminated directly to the Class Members by first class mail by the Settlement Administrator, since Defendants have the last known addresses of all class members and the Settlement Administrator will perform a skip trace and update those addresses for any Notice Packets that are returned and re-send the same.

The Notice satisfies the requirements of Rule of Court 3.766 and affords Class Members with all due process protections required by the U.S. Constitution. Moreover, the contents of the Notice comply with Cal. R. Ct. 3.766(d), because the Notice includes, without limitation (1) a detailed explanation of the case, including the basic contentions or denials of the parties; (2) a statement that the court will exclude the member from the class if the member so requests by a specified date; (3) a procedure for the member to follow in requesting exclusion from the class; (4) a statement that the judgment, whether favorable or not, will bind all members who do not request exclusion; and (5) a statement that any member who does not request exclusion may, if the member so desires, enter an appearance through counsel. The 45-day deadline to opt-out or object is also reasonable, as it provides Class Members sufficient time to do so and, if they so choose, to seek independent legal advice in the interim. If a Class Member does not opt-out, he or she will automatically be sent a settlement check.

G. THE NON-REVERSIONARY "CHECKS CASHED" DISTRIBUTION ENSURES MAXIMAL RECOVERY FOR CLASS MEMBERS

The fact that each member who does not opt out of the Settlement shall be mailed a check ensures that every Class Member will be paid unless they affirmatively act to request exclusion. Moreover, the Settlement Amount is non-reversionary, which means that no settlement funds will revert to Defendants; instead, if any checks are uncashed by the deadline, the funds will be transferred to the State Controller's Office subject to approval of the Court. Such terms are favored by Courts and demonstrate that there was no collusion between counsel for the parties and that the Settlement is fair and favorable to the Class Members.

H. THE ATTORNEY'S FEES AND COSTS ALLOCATION IS FAIR

Under the terms of the Settlement Agreement, Class Counsel is seeking reimbursement of up to $30,000 in litigation costs, along with attorneys' fees equal to one-third of the

Settlement Amount. See, *e.g.*, *Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th. 480 (approving 1/3 fee in the amount of $6.33 million at a 2.13 lodestar multiplier, and holding that when class action litigation establishes a monetary fund for the benefit of the class members, the trial court may determine the amount of a reasonable fee by choosing an appropriate percentage of the fund created); *Stuart v. RadioShack Corp*. (N.D. Cal. Aug. 9, 2010) 2010 WL 3155645 (approving fee 1/3 from settlement amount of $4.5 million since 1/3 was "well within the range of percentages which courts have upheld as reasonable in other class action lawsuits").

Once the Court grants preliminary approval and Notice is disseminated, Plaintiffs' counsel will submit a comprehensive request for attorneys' fees and costs with their request for final approval of settlement.

I. THE REQUESTED SERVICE AWARD REQUEST IS FAIR AND APPROPRIATE

The Settlement Agreement provides incentive award payments of $10,000 each to Class Representatives Porter, Stokes, and Gasser, and $5,000 each to Plaintiffs Baldwin, Lewis, Reyes, and Romero. These requests are reasonable given the recovery Class Members will receive on average, as well as the time and effort Plaintiffs devoted to this case. Their efforts included: (1) providing factual background for the litigation; (2) providing documents and information about Defendants' compensation plan; (3) participating in phone calls to discuss litigation and settlement strategy; (4) making themselves available throughout the litigation to assist with analyzing the claims and defenses; (5) helping Class Counsel prepare for the mediation; and (6) reviewing the settlement documents. The Class Representatives also assumed significant risk bringing this litigation – had they lost, they could have been ordered to pay Defendants' costs.

The requested service award falls within the range of incentive payments typically awarded to Class Representatives in similar class actions. See, *e.g.*, *Bond v. Ferguson Enterprises, Inc*. (E.D. Cal. 2011) 2011 WL 2648879 (approving $11,250 service awards in class action); *Ross v. US Bank National Association* (N.D. Cal. 2010) 2010 WL 3833922, at *2 (approving $20,000 enhancement award in California wage-and-hour class settlement); *Vasquez v. Coast Valley Roofing, Inc*. (E.D. Cal. 2010) 266 F.R.D. 415, 493 (approving service awards of $15,000 from a $300,000 settlement fund in a wage/hour class action); *West v. Circle K Stores,* *Inc*. (E.D. Cal. 2006) 2006 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 76558, at *28 (finding service awards "of $ 15,000 each to be reasonable."); *Glass v. UBS Fin. Servs*. (N.D. Cal. 2007) 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 8476, at *52 (finding "requested payment of $25,000 to each of the named Plaintiff is appropriate" in wage and hour settlement).

VI. THE COURT SHOULD APPOINT CPT GROUP AS THE ADMINISTRATOR

Subject to the Court's approval, the parties agreed to CPT Group serving as the Settlement Administrator. CPT Group is experienced in administering class action settlements and has provided a flat-fee proposal to administer this settlement for $9,500. (Mankin Decl. ¶¶ 65, 83; Decl. of Julie Green of CPT Group).

VII. TIMELINE AND SCHEDULING A FINAL APPROVAL HEARING

The last step in the approval process is the final approval hearing, whereby proponents of the Settlement may explain and describe its terms and conditions and offer argument in support of approval, and Class Members or their counsel may be heard in support of or in opposition to the settlement. Subject to the Court's approval, the Parties propose that the Court schedule a final approval hearing approximately 145 days after the Preliminary Approval Date, as follows:

March 12, 2026	Preliminary Approval (PA) hearing
April 27, 2026 *(45 days after PA + 1 for weekend)*	Deadline for Administrator to complete first mailing of the Notice Packet to all Class Members.
June 11, 2026 *(45 days after mailing)*	Deadline for Class Members to submit Requests for Exclusion and Objections to the settlement.
16 court days before Final Approval hearing	Deadline for Plaintiffs to file and serve Motion for Final Approval and application for award of fees, costs and service payments.
9 court days before Final Approval hearing	Deadline for filing of any written opposition to Plaintiffs' Motion for Final Approval, or filing response to an objection.
5 court days before final approval hearing	Deadline for filing of any written reply to opposition Motion for Final Approval
Approx. August 4, 2026 (145 days after PA)	Final Approval Hearing

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VIII. CONCLUSION

For all the foregoing reasons, Plaintiffs respectfully request that the Court grant the motion for preliminary approval of the settlement.

Dated: February 18, 2026

LAUBY, MANKIN & LAUBY LLP

BY: ______________________

Brian J. Mankin, Esq.
Attorneys for Plaintiffs and the Class

PROOF OF SERVICE
(Pursuant to CCP §§ 1013(a)(1) and 2015.5)

STATE OF CALIFORNIA)
) ss.
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE)

I am employed in the County of Riverside, State of California. I am over the age of 18 and not a party to the within action; my business address is 5198 Arlington Avenue, PMB 513, Riverside, CA 92504.

On February 18, 2026, I caused to be served the foregoing document(s) described as follows:

PLAINTIFFS' UNOPPOSED MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION AND PAGA SETTLEMENT

I declare that I am "readily familiar" with the firm's practice of collection and processing correspondence for mailing. It is deposited with the U.S. postal service on that same day in the ordinary course of business. I am aware that on motion of party served, service is presumed invalid if postal cancellation date or postage meter date is more than one day after date of deposit for mailing in affidavit.

[ ] **By Mail** I deposited such envelope in the mail at Riverside, California. The envelope was mailed with postage thereon fully prepaid.

[ ] **By Facsimile** I sent this document via fax to all parties as listed on attached service list, on

[ ] **By Overnight Service** I deposited such envelope in a facility regularly maintained by the United Parcel Service for receipt of items for overnight delivery, with overnight delivery expenses prepaid, addressed to the person to be served.

[X] **By Email or Electronic Transmission:** Pursuant to CCP § 1010.6 or an agreement of the parties to accept service by email or electronic transmission, I caused the document(s) to be sent from email address tracie@lmlfirm.com to the persons at the electronic notification address listed in the service list. I did not receive, within a reasonable time after the transmission, any electronic message or other indication that the transmission was not successful.

[ ] **By Certified Mail-Return Receipt Requested** I caused such envelope with postage fully prepaid thereon, to be placed in the United States mail at Riverside, California

[ ] **By Personal Service** I caused said document(s) to be personally served by hand on the parties listed on the attached service list.

[X] **State** I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the above is true and correct. Executed on February 18, 2026, Riverside, California.

[ ] **Federal** I declare that I am employed in the office of a member of the bar of this court at whose direction the service was made.

Tracie Chiarito

Tracie Chiarito, Declarant

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