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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

DANIEL R. PEREZ, an individual and on behalf of all others similarly situated; Plaintiff, vs. HILLSIDES, a California non-profit corporation; and DOES 1 through 50, Defendants.	Case No.: 24STCV24099 [Assigned for All Purposes to: Hon. Elaine Lu, Dept. 9] **PLAINTIFF'S NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION AND PAGA SETTLEMENT; MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES** (Filed concurrently with Supporting Declarations and [Proposed] Order) DATE: August 11, 2026 TIME: 10:00 a.m. DEPT: 9 Action Filed: September 17, 2024 Trial Date: Not Set

TO THE HONORABLE COURT, ALL PARTIES, AND THEIR ATTORNEYS OF RECORD:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that pursuant to Rule 3.769 of the California Rules of Court, on August 11, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. in Department 9 of the Los Angeles Superior Court, Spring Street Courthouse, located at 312 North Spring Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012, Plaintiff Daniel R. Perez ("Plaintiff"), individually and on behalf of a class of similarly situated individuals, will and hereby does move this Court for:

1. Preliminary approval of the proposed class settlement of this lawsuit;

2. Pursuant to section 382 of the California Code of Civil Procedure, provisional certification of the following Class defined as follows:

> All current and former non-exempt, hourly paid employees who worked for Defendant Hillsides in California at any time during the Class Period of November 12, 2023 through January 17, 2026.

3. Preliminary appointment of Plaintiff as Class Representative;

4. Preliminary appointment of William C. Sung, Tiffany L. Luu, and Joseph C. Ramli of Justice for Workers, P.C. as Class Counsel;

5. The scheduling of a hearing to consider whether the Settlement should be finally approved and to permit a Class Representative Service Payment to Plaintiff, civil penalties payable to the LWDA, settlement administration costs, and attorney's fees and costs to Class Counsel;

6. Appointment of Phoenix Settlement Administrators as the third-party Administrator for mailing notices and administering the Settlement; and

7. Approval of the proposed Class Notice and an order that it be disseminated to the proposed Class as provided in the Settlement Agreement.

This Motion is based on this Notice of Motion; the attached Memorandum of Points and Authorities; the supporting declarations of William C. Sung, Plaintiff Daniel R. Perez, and Jodey Lawrence of Phoenix Settlement Administrators, and the exhibits attached thereto; the pleadings, and other papers filed in this Action; and on any further oral or documentary evidence or argument presented at the time of the hearing.

/ / /

DATED: March 13, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

JUSTICE FOR WORKERS, P.C.

By: ______________________

William C. Sung
Tiffany L. Luu
Joseph C. Ramli
Attorneys for Plaintiff Daniel R. Perez

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MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Daniel R. Perez ("Plaintiff") brought this wage and hour class and representative action on behalf of a Class of all current and former non-exempt employees who worked for Defendant Hillsides ("Defendant") within the State of California during the Class Period of November 12, 2023 through January 17, 2026. The primary issues in this case pertain to Defendant's alleged unpaid wages due to regular rate violations and alleged meal and rest period violations. Plaintiff contends Defendant is also liable for inaccurate wage statement penalties, waiting time penalties, and civil penalties under the California Private Attorney's General Act ("PAGA"). Plaintiff now requests that this Court preliminarily approve this non-reversionary, common-fund class action settlement[1], in which Defendant has agreed to pay the Gross Settlement Amount of Three Hundred Eight Thousand Five Hundred Eighty-Three Dollars and Zero Cents ($308,583.00) to approximately 321 Class Members.

After deducting administration costs, Plaintiff's requested Class Representative Service Payment, the amount set aside as PAGA Payment, and requested Class Counsel Fees Payment and Litigation Expense Payment, the Net Settlement Amount of approximately $151,772.00 will be distributed to all Class Members who do not opt out of the Settlement based on the proportionate number of Workweeks worked by each Class Member during the Class Period. Employees with standing for PAGA Payment will receive additional consideration for their release of PAGA claims.

Significantly, all Class Members will automatically receive a payment unless they affirmatively opt-out. There are approximately 321 Class Members, and **the average payment to participating Class Members is projected to be approximately $472.81**. This is an excellent result for Class Members, who will be releasing only those claims alleged or which could have been alleged in the Action. The proposed Settlement is within the range of possible approval in light of

[1] The Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement and Class Notice ("Settlement" or "Agreement") is attached to the Declaration of William C. Sung as **Exhibit 1**. The proposed Class Notice is attached to the Agreement as **Exhibit A**. All defined terms in this motion have the same definition as that in the Agreement. A redlined copy of the Agreement is attached as **Exhibit 2** and a redlined copy of the Class Notice is attached as **Exhibit A** to the redlined Agreement.

the significant legal and factual obstacles that Plaintiff faced, the risks and costs of further litigation, and the tangible monetary benefits to be received by the Class. For the reasons discussed herein, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court grant preliminary approval of the Settlement.

II. SUMMARY OF THE LITIGATION

A. THE PARTIES AND BRIEF PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Defendant owns and operates a youth mental health treatment facility in Pasadena, California. Declaration of William C. Sung ("Sung Decl."), ¶ 9. Defendants employed Plaintiff as an hourly-paid, non-exempt employee from approximately May 1, 2023 to approximately August 20, 2024 as a Child Care Counselor. Declaration of Daniel R. Perez ("Perez Decl."), ¶ 2.

On September 17, 2024, Plaintiff sent a notice letter under PAGA to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") and gave notice to Defendant. Sung Decl., ¶ 10, **Exh. 3** (PAGA Notice). On the same day, September 17, 2024, Plaintiff alleged claims for (1) Minimum Wage Violations; (2) Overtime Wage Violations; (3) Meal Period Violations; (4) Rest Period Violations; (5) Wage Statement Penalties; (6) Waiting Time Penalties; (7) Failure to Pay Vested Vacation Wages; and (8) Unfair Competition. Sung Decl., ¶ 11. On October 28, 2024, Plaintiff filed the operative First Amended Complaint ("Operative Complaint") adding a cause of action for Civil Penalties Under PAGA against Defendant. Sung Decl., ¶ 12, **Exh. 4** (Operative Complaint).

B. PLAINTIFF'S CLAIMS AND DEFENDANT'S DEFENSES

1. Unpaid Wages

Regular rate of pay, which can change from pay period to pay period, includes adjustments to the straight time rate, reflecting, among other things, shift differentials and the per-hour value of any nonhourly compensation the employee has earned." *Alvarado v. Dart Container Corp. of California* (2018) 4 Cal.5th 542, 554; *see also Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal. 5th 858, 863 (meal and rest period premiums to be paid at regular rate of pay); Lab. Code § 246(l)(1) (paid sick leave to be paid at the regular rate of pay or at a rate based on a 90-day lookback of compensation earned); *Mills v. Target Corporation* (9th Cir., Mar. 6, 2023, No. 21-56308) 2023 WL 2363959, at *1 (final rate for payment of invested vacation wages includes employee's base rate plus shift differentials).

Here, Plaintiff contended that Defendant failed to properly factor in non-discretionary renumeration, including shift differentials, flat-sum bonuses, and sign-on bonuses into the regular rate of pay for overtime, meal period premiums, rest period premiums, paid sick leave, and vested vacation wages. Sung Decl., ¶ 13. In response, Defendant argued that that it properly factored shift differentials and flat-sum bonuses into the regular rate for overtime, meal period premiums, and rest period premiums; and it was not legally obligated to pay paid sick leave and vested vacation wages at the regular rate; and sign-on bonuses need not be factored into the regular rate. *Ibid.* Defendant further argued that any regular rate damages were *de minimis* and Plaintiff's analysis grossly overvalued damages. *Ibid.*

2. Meal Period Violations

Plaintiff claimed that he and other employees were required to remain with patients on their meal breaks and unable to take any off-duty meal breaks, resulting in meal break violations. Sung Decl., ¶ 14. Defendant countered that it provides 24-hour fostering and residential care for teenage youth and Plaintiff and other employees met the meal period exemption under IWC Wage Order 5, § 11(E). *Ibid.* Section 11(E) of Wage Order 5 provides:

> "Employees with direct responsibility for children who are under 18 years of age or who are not emancipated from the foster care system and who, in either case, are receiving 24 hour residential care, and employees of 24 hour residential care facilities for the elderly, blind or developmentally disabled individuals may be required to work on-duty meal periods without penalty when necessary to meet regulatory or approved program standards and one of the following two conditions is met: (1) The residential care employees eats with residents during residents' meals and the employer provides the same meal at no charge to the employee; or (2) The employee is in sole charge of the resident(s) and, on the day shift, the employer provides a meal at no charge to the employee."

Defendant further argued that for employees who were not subject to this exemption, it maintained compliant meal period policies and practices throughout the Class Period and always provided compliant meal periods in line with those policies. Sung Decl., ¶ 14*; see Brinker Rest. Corp. v. Superior Court* (2012) 53 Cal.4th 1004, 1040-1041 (holding employers need only "provide" meal periods to employees and are not obligated to "police" meal periods). Defendant pointed to the fact that it paid meal period premiums as evidence of its superior meal period compliance practices. Sung Decl., ¶ 14. As such, Defendant maintained Plaintiff is not a suitable class representative because of his exemption status and that Plaintiff's meal period claim is not suited for class certification since individual inquiries would be needed to assess which employees, if any, took non-compliant meal periods, how many meal periods were non-compliant, and the reasons why a particular employee did not take a meal period on a particular shift and a meal period premium was not paid. *Ibid.*

3. Rest Period Violations

Plaintiff claimed that he and other employees were required to remain with patients on their meal breaks and unable to take any off-duty meal breaks, resulting in meal break violations. Sung Decl., ¶ 15. Defendant countered that it provides 24-hour fostering and residential care for teenage youth and Plaintiff and other employees meet the rest period exemptions under IWC Wage Order 5, § 12(C). *Ibid.* Section 12(C) of Wage Order 5 provides:

> "However, employees with direct responsibility for children who are under 18 years of age or who are not emancipated from the foster care system and who, in either case, are receiving 24 hour residential care and employees of 24 hour residential care facilities for elderly, blind or developmentally disabled individuals may, without penalty, require an employee to remain on the premises and maintain general supervision of residents during rest periods if the employee is in sole charge of residents. Another rest period shall be authorized and permitted by the employer when an employee is affirmatively required to interrupt his/her break to respond to the needs of residents."

Defendant further countered that it has maintained compliant rest period policies and practices and provided compliant rest periods in line with those policies. Sung Decl., ¶ 15. Defendant pointed to the fact that it paid rest period premiums as evidence of its superior rest period compliance practices. *Ibid.* Defendant further maintained Plaintiff is not a suitable class representative because of his exemption status and that Plaintiff's rest period claim is not suited for class certification since individual inquiries would be needed to assess which employees, if any, took non-compliant rest periods, how many rest periods were non-compliant, and the reasons why a particular employee did not take a rest period on a particular shift. *Ibid.*

4. Waiting Time and Wage Statement Penalties

As a result of the unpaid wages and meal and rest period premium wages described above, Plaintiff contended that Defendant failed to comply with its final pay obligations set forth in Labor Code §§ 201 to 203 to former employees and failed to issue accurate itemized wage statements to

Class Members as set forth in Labor Code § 226(a). Sung Decl., ¶ 16. Thus, the claims for waiting time and wage statement penalties are derivative of the underlying claims. *Ibid.*

Defendant argued that it possessed strong, good faith defenses to Plaintiff's underlying claims and these claims cannot meet the willfulness standard in Labor Code § 203 or the knowing and intentional standard in Labor Code § 226(e). Sung Decl., ¶ 16. Notably, Defendant relied on the California Supreme Court decision in *Naranjo v. Spectrum Security Services, Inc.* (2024) 15 Cal.5th 1056, 1065, which held that an employer's good-faith defenses precludes a "willfulness" finding under Labor Code § 203 and a "knowing and intentional" finding under Labor Code § 226(e) for the imposition of statutory penalties. *Ibid.* Defendant further asserted that Plaintiff's waiting time and wage statement penalty exposure was inflated as not every employee experienced the alleged Labor Code violations. *Ibid.*

5. PAGA Civil Penalties

Plaintiff further contended that, as a result of the foregoing Labor Code violations, Defendant is liable for civil penalties under the PAGA. Sung Decl., ¶ 17. Since Plaintiff's PAGA claims are derivative of Plaintiff's underlying wage claims, Defendant asserted the PAGA claim would fail with those claims. *Ibid*; *see Price v. Starbucks Corp.* (2011) 192 Cal.App.4th 1136, 1147 ("Because the underlying causes of action fail, the derivative UCL and PAGA claims also fail."). Defendant further maintained that, given its good faith defenses, this Court would exercise its discretion to substantially reduce any PAGA penalties if it were to find Defendant liable for any of Plaintiff's claims. Sung Decl., ¶ 17; *see* Lab. Code § 2699(e)(2) (pre-2024 amendment); *Thurman v. Bayshore Transit Mgmt., Inc.* (2012) 203 Cal.App.4th 1112, 1135 (affirming reduction of PAGA penalties); *Fleming v. Covidien Inc.* (C.D. Cal. 2011) Case No. ED CV10-01487 RGK (OPx), 2011 WL 7563047, at *4 (reducing PAGA penalties by over 82% in part because employer "not aware" of violations); *Carrington v. Starbucks Corp.* (2018) 30 Cal.App.5th 504, 529 (affirming PAGA civil penalty of just $5 per pay period where employer made "good faith attempts" to comply with the law).

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C. DISCOVERY AND MEDIATION

In connection with mediation, the Parties engaged in extensive informal discovery. Sung Decl., ¶ 18. Defendant produced (1) a class list with employee numbers, dates of employment, positions, and hourly rates; (2) time and payroll records for an approximate 16.5% random sampling of Class Members; (3) a list of Class Members who were required to be on duty and on premises for meal and rest breaks and subject to the Wage Order 5 exemptions discussed above; (5) Defendant's employee handbooks and standalone policy documents; and (6) Plaintiff's personnel records and wage statements. *Ibid.*

Plaintiff submits that the sampling of Class Members' time and payroll records is statistically significant and reliable. Sung Decl., ¶ 19. The timekeeping data and payroll data produced for mediation were generated from uniform timekeeping and payroll systems, which allowed Class Counsel to extrapolate his and his expert's findings with confidence. *Ibid.* Class Members worked in similar job positions and were subject to the same wage and hour policies and procedures. *Ibid.* Given these circumstances, the experiences of a subset of employees – the sampling – can be probative as to the experiences of all Class Members. *Ibid; see e.g., Tyson Foods, Inc. v. Bouaphakeo* (2016) 136 S.Ct. 1036 (holding that statistical evidence was admissible to prove liability and damages across a class, thereby allowing it to support class certification); *Lubin v. The Wackenhut Corp*. (2016) 5 Cal.App.5th 926, 938 (following *Tyson* and finding that a sampling of class records is probative as to the experience of the entire class).

In preparation for mediation, Class Counsel worked with an expert data analyst and conducted a comprehensive analysis and extrapolation of the payroll and timekeeping data produced by Defendant to create a detailed exposure analysis for all claims at issue. Sung Decl., ¶ 20. This discovery and analysis allowed the Parties to assess the merits and value of Plaintiff's claims, the chances of certification of Plaintiff's claims, and Defendant's potential defenses. *Ibid.*

On November 17, 2025, the Parties participated in a full-day mediation with Gig Kyriacou, Esq. a well-respected wage and hour class action mediator. Sung Decl., ¶ 21. During mediation, the Parties vigorously debated their opposing legal positions, the likelihood of certification of Plaintiff's claims, and the legal basis for the claims and defenses. *Ibid.* The Parties reached a tentative class and PAGA settlement at the mediation. *Ibid*. The Parties then finalized the terms of the Settlement and executed Agreement now before the Court. *Ibid*; *see* Sung Decl., ¶ 7, **Exh. 1** (Agreement).

III. THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT

A. ESSENTIAL TERMS OF THE SETTLEMENT

If the Court preliminarily approves the Settlement, Defendant will pay a Gross Settlement Amount of $308,583.00. Agreement, § 1.22 (Exh. 1 to Sung Decl.). Significantly, this Settlement is non-reversionary, and no Class Member will have to submit a claim form to receive an Individual Settlement Payment. Agreement, § 3.1. Each Class Member will automatically receive an Individual Settlement Payment unless they affirmatively opt out of the Settlement. Agreement, § 7.5. The monetary terms of the Settlement are summarized below:

Gross Settlement Amount:	$308,583.00
Minus Court-approved attorneys' fees:	$102,861.00
Minus Court-approved verified costs (up to):	$20,000.00
Minus Court-approved Service Payment:	$10,000.00
Minus estimated settlement administration costs:	$8,950.00
Minus amount set aside as PAGA Payment:	$15,000.00
Net Settlement Amount:	$151,772.00
Plus 25% "PAGA Payment" to Class:	$5,250.00
Total Amount Paid to Class Members:	**$157,022.00**

Sung Decl., ¶ 22.

1. The Settlement Provides for Reasonable Monetary Payments

After deducting amounts for the Court-approved attorneys' fees and costs, Class Representative Service Payment to Plaintiff, the amount set aside as PAGA Payment, and settlement administration costs, the Settlement requires Defendant to pay a Net Settlement Amount of at least **$151,772.00** to all Class Members who do not timely opt-out. Agreement, § 3.2. The Net Settlement Amount shall be distributed to participating Class Members as Individual Class Payment, calculated by (a) dividing the Net Settlement Amount by the total number of Workweeks worked by all Participating Class Members during the Class Period and (b) multiplying the result by each Participating Class Member's Workweeks. Agreement, § 3.2.4. Additionally, $5,250.00 of the Gross Settlement Amount has been designated as Individual PAGA Payments to Aggrieved Employees and shall be distributed to Aggrieved Employees (including those who submit a valid and timely Request for Exclusion from the class action settlement) who were employed during the

PAGA Period proportionally based on the number of Pay Periods worked during the PAGA Period. Agreement, §§ 3.2.5, 7.5.4. In addition to the Gross Settlement Amount, Defendant is obligated to pay the employer's share of payroll taxes on Individual Class Payments allocated to settlement of wage claims. Agreement, § 3.1.

According to Defendant, there are approximately 321 Class Members. Sung Decl., ¶ 23. Therefore, the average Individual Class Payment from the Net Settlement Amount is projected to be approximately **$472.81**. *Ibid.* There are also approximately 321 Aggrieved Employees during the PAGA Period who will each receive an average of approximately **$16.36** as Individual PAGA Payments. *Ibid.* Class Members will have 45 calendar days from the mailing of the Class Notice to opt-out or object to the Settlement, thereby providing ample time to review the Class Notice without unduly delaying the Settlement. Agreement, §§ 1.43, 7.5, 7.7.

Effective on the date when Defendant fully funds the Gross Settlement Amount and employer taxes, Participating Class Members will release any and all claims that were or could have been alleged in the Operative Complaint that arose during the Class Period; and all Aggrieved Employees are deemed to release all claims, demands, rights, liabilities and causes of action under the California Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act that were alleged, or reasonably could have been alleged, based on the claims asserted in the Operative Complaint, the PAGA Notice (and any amendments thereto) arising during or with respect to the PAGA Period. Agreement, §§ 5, 5.2, 5.3. Defendant shall fund the Gross Settlement Amount no later than 65 days after the Effective Date (i.e., the date the Court enters a Judgment on its Order Granting Final Approval and the Judgment is final). Agreement, §§ 1.18, 4.3.

Prior to the hearing on Preliminary Approval, Defendant will verify the number of Workweeks during the Class Period and advise the Court as to whether the Escalator Clause is triggered, and if yes, whether Defendant will modify the Class Period end date. Agreement, § 8.

2. Attorneys' Fees and Costs, Service Payment, and PAGA Payment

Plaintiff will apply for a Class Representative Service Payment at the time of seeking final approval of the proposed class action settlement in the amount of $10,000.00 for Plaintiff's service to the Class. Agreement, § 3.2.1. "[I]ncentive awards are fairly typical in class action cases . . . and are intended to compensate class representatives for work done on behalf of the class [and] to make up for financial or reputational risk undertaken in bringing the action." *In re Cellphone Fee Termination Cases* (2010) 186 Cal.App.4th 1380, 1393-94. Plaintiff's requested Service Payment is intended to recognize the time and effort Plaintiff expended on behalf of the Class, including providing substantial information and documents to Class Counsel, discussing the claims at issue in the litigation, actively participating in the prosecution of Plaintiff's claims, as well as the risks Plaintiff undertook by agreeing to serve as the named plaintiff in this case. *See* Perez Decl., ¶¶ 4-6.

Class Counsel will also apply for an attorneys' fees award of 33 1/3% of the Gross Settlement Amount, which is equivalent to $102,861.00, and up to $20,000.00 in verified costs reimbursement. Agreement, § 3.2.2. The requested fee is fair compensation for undertaking complex, risky, expensive, and time-consuming litigation on a purely contingent fee basis. Sung Decl., ¶ 24. Class Counsel have incurred substantial attorneys' fees and costs conducting pre-filing investigation, analyzing Plaintiff's claims, conducting legal research, conducting informal discovery, analyzing Class Members' time and payroll records, creating a comprehensive damages model, preparing for and attending mediation, negotiating and preparing the long-form Agreement, preparing this Motion, and otherwise litigating the case. *Ibid.* Class Counsel expect to expend additional attorney time in attending the hearing on this Motion, overseeing the Class Notice process and fielding questions from Class Members, preparing the Final Approval papers, and attending the Final Approval hearing. *Ibid.*

California courts recognize that an appropriate method for awarding attorneys' fees in class actions is to award a percentage of the "common fund" created as a result of a settlement. *See, e.g., Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l, Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 506 (holding "the percentage of fund method survives in California class action cases"). Class Counsel's request for fees of 33 1/3% of the Gross Settlement Amount is well within the range of reasonableness and indeed is considered the typical rate for common fund settlements. Historically, courts have awarded percentage fees in the range of 20% to 50%, depending on the circumstances of the case. *See* 4 Newberg on Class Actions § 14.6 (4th Ed. 2013). Class Counsel submit that their request for attorneys' fees is reasonable when viewed as an overall percentage of the Settlement and in light of the substantial risks and significant work undertaken, the results obtained, and the efficiency with which the litigation has been conducted. Should the Court grant preliminary approval, Class Counsel will seek an award of attorneys' fees and verified costs upon seeking Final Approval.

Additionally, the parties have agreed to designate $15,000.00 of the Gross Settlement Amount as PAGA civil penalties, of which $9,750.00 (75%) will be paid to the LWDA, with the remaining $5,250.00 (25%) for distribution to the Aggrieved Employees pursuant to Labor Code § 2699(i) (pre-July 1, 2024 PAGA amendment). Agreement, § 3.2.5. Plaintiff submits this allocation to the LWDA for civil PAGA penalties is appropriate. *See, e.g., Chu v. Wells Fargo Investments, LLC* (N.D. Cal. 2011) Case No. C 05-4526 MHP, 2011 WL 672645 at *1 (approving PAGA payment of $7,500 to LWDA out of $6.9 million common-fund settlement); *Lazarin v. Pro Unlimited, Inc.* (N.D. Cal. 2013) Case No. C11-03609 HRL, 2013 WL 3541217 (approving PAGA payment of $7,500 to LWDA out of $1.25 million common-fund settlement).

IV. LEGAL ARGUMENT

A. PRELIMINARY APPROVAL IS WARRANTED

California Rule of Court 3.769 conditions settlement of a class action on court approval, which is generally evaluated under the federal standards applicable under Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *See Reed v. United Teachers Los Angeles* (2012) 208 Cal.App.4th 322, 337 (Rule 3.769 requires trial court to determine "that the settlement is fair, reasonable and adequate to all concerned"); *Hanlon v. Chrysler Corp*. (9th Cir. 1998) 150 F.3d 1011, 1026 (Rule 23(e) requires the trial court to determine "whether a proposed settlement is fundamentally fair, adequate, and reasonable"). Settlement is the preferred means of dispute resolution, particularly in complex class action litigation. *See In re Syncor ERISA Litig* (9th Cir. 2008) 516 F.3d 1095, 1101. The Court's role in evaluating a proposed settlement is limited to ensuring that the agreement taken as a whole is fair. *See e.g., Hanlo*n, 150 F.3d at 1027. There is an initial presumption of fairness where, as here, the Settlement was negotiated at arm's-length by class counsel and with the assistance of an experienced wage and hour class action mediator. *See e.g., Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc.* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 116, 130.

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To make a fairness determination, the Court should consider "the strength of Plaintiffs' case, the risk, expense, complexity and likely duration of further litigation, the risk of maintaining class action status through trial, the amount offered in settlement, the extent of discovery completed and the stage of the proceedings, [and] the experience and views of counsel." *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.* (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1801. "The list of factors is not exclusive, and the court is free to engage in a balancing and weighing of the factors depending on the circumstances of each case." *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 230, 245. Here, the proposed Settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable in light of the overall balance of factors in this case.

1. The Strength of Plaintiff's Case and Risk, Expense, Complexity, and Duration of Further Litigation

Although Plaintiff maintains that Plaintiff's claims are meritorious, Plaintiff acknowledges that there were substantial risks and uncertainty in proceeding with litigation. Sung Decl., ¶ 25. As described above, Defendant presented multiple defenses to Plaintiff's claims, both on the merits and with respect to class certification. *Ibid.* Thus, while Plaintiff was prepared to litigate these claims through class certification and ultimately trial, success was far from certain. Although the Parties engaged in significant informal discovery prior to mediation, the Parties still had significant formal discovery to complete if the Action did not resolve. *Ibid.* This would have required the expenditure of substantial time and resources by both Parties that would have very likely spanned several years. *Ibid.* Even if Plaintiff were to certify the class, the Parties would incur considerably more attorneys' fees and costs through a possible decertification motion, trial, and possible appeal. *Ibid.* This Settlement avoids those risks and the accompanying expense. *Ibid.*

Plaintiff has not yet filed a motion for class certification, and as such, the extent to which Plaintiff's proposed classes were certifiable is somewhat speculative. Sung Decl., ¶ 26. Absent settlement, there was a risk that there would not be a certified class at the time of trial, or if there were, it would consist of a significantly smaller group of employees than the proposed Class due to a narrowing of the class definition in a Court order on a contested motion for class certification. *Ibid.* Thus, this factor, too, supports preliminary approval of the settlement.

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2. Amount Offered in Settlement Given Realistic Value of Claims

The Settlement provides a positive recovery for the Class in the face of disputed claims. Plaintiff conducted a detailed analysis of alleged unpaid wages and meal and rest period premium payments owing, wage statement penalties, waiting time penalties, and PAGA civil penalties. A summary of the results of Plaintiff's exposure analysis are discussed below:

Regular Rate Violations. Class Counsel found Defendant's maximum damages for unpaid wages due to regular rate violations—underpaid overtime, meal and rest period premiums, and paid sick leave wages—to be approximately $59,157.51. Sung Decl., ¶ 27. As discussed above, Defendant argued that that it properly factored shift differentials and flat-sum bonuses into the regular rate for overtime, meal period premiums, and rest period premiums; and it was not legally obligated to pay paid sick leave and vested vacation wages at the regular rate; and sign-on bonuses need not be factored into the regular rate. *Ibid.* Thus, Plaintiff discounted Defendant's maximum exposure by 20% to account for the risk of non-certification and for Defendant's defenses on the merits or failing to recover the full amount sought to arrive at an estimated realistic recovery of approximately **$47,326.01**. *Ibid.*

Meal and Rest Period Premiums. After excluding employees who may be required to take meal breaks on duty under the exemption for IWC Wage Order 5, § 11(E) as discussed above and after applying meal period premiums paid, Plaintiff's expert found a 0.10% violation rate by shift (i.e., 1 out of 1,000 shifts had a non-compliant meal period punch). Sung Decl., ¶ 28. Moreover, as discussed above, Defendant contended that it maintain compliant meal and rest period polices, it paid both meal and rest period premiums, Plaintiff is not a suitable class representative because he was subject to the off-duty meal and rest period exemptions in IWC Wage Order 5, §§ 11(E) and 12(C), and that these claims are not suited for class certification since individual inquiries would predominate. *Ibid.* In light of these defenses, Plaintiff does not place a monetary value on these claims. *Ibid.*

Waiting Time Penalties: As a result of the regular rate violations described above, Plaintiff contends that Defendant failed to comply with its final pay obligations set forth in Labor Code §§ 201 to 203 to former employees. Sung Decl., ¶ 29. Based on Class Counsel's analysis, approximately 63.46% of employees in the sampling had one or more regular rate violations. *Ibid.* Extrapolated to 106 former employees, at average hourly rates of $23.39 and average hours worked of 8.53 hours, and over 30 days, Plaintiff estimates Defendant's maximum exposure for waiting time penalties is $634,463.11. *Ibid.*

Defendant presented several defenses, including that because they possessed good-faith defenses to the underlying wage claims, any failure to pay wages was not "willful" as a matter of law; Plaintiff's waiting time penalty exposure was grossly inflated as not every former employee experienced the alleged Labor Code violations; and because the waiting time claim is derivative of Plaintiff's underlying wage claims, Plaintiff would need to overcome Defendant's defenses, both as to class certification and on the merits, as to the underlying claims. *Ibid.* Thus, Plaintiff discounted Defendant's maximum exposure by 60% to account for the risk of non-certification and Defendant's defenses on the merits or failing to recover the full amount sought, to arrive at an estimated realistic recovery of approximately **$253,785.24**. *Ibid.*

<u>Wage Statement Penalties:</u> Plaintiff alleged that Defendant is liable for wage statement penalties as a result of unpaid wages. Sung Decl., ¶ 30. Those penalties are calculated as $50 for each "initial" violation and $100 for each "subsequent" violation, with a maximum of $4,000 per employee. Lab. Code § 226(e). Class Counsel found in the sampling approximately 22.21% of pay periods had a regular rate violation, and at $50 for the initial violation and $100 for each subsequent violation per employee, Defendant's maximum exposure for wage statement penalties is $242,053.83. Sung Decl., ¶ 30.

As discussed above, Defendant presented several defenses, most notably their assertion that because they possessed good-faith defenses to the underlying claims for meal period violations and any failure to pay wages was not "knowing and intentional" as a matter of law and because the wage statement claim is derivative of Plaintiff's underlying wage claims, Plaintiff would need to overcome Defendant's defenses, both as to class certification and on the merits, as to his underlying claims. *Ibid.* Thus, Plaintiff discounted Defendant's maximum exposure by 60% to account for the risk of non-certification and Defendant's defenses on the merits or failing to recover the full amount sought, to arrive at an estimated realistic recovery of approximately **$96,821.53**. *Ibid.*

PAGA Penalties: Based on Class Counsel's analysis, Plaintiff estimated a maximum total PAGA exposure of approximately $468,845.52. Sung Decl., ¶ 31; *Amaral v. Cintas Corp. No. 2* (2008) 163 Cal.App.4th 1157, 1207 (finding "initial" violation rate applies until employer is notified that it is violating a Labor Code provision). However, these penalties derive from the underlying wage and hour violations discussed above, which Defendant disputes vigorously. Sung Decl., ¶ 31*; see e.g., Green v. Lawrence Service Co.* (C.D. Cal. 2013) 2013 WL 3907506, *5, n.5 (explaining that a PAGA claim's success was determined by the merits of its underlying claims). Defendant also assert that the Court would drastically reduce any award of PAGA penalties as "confiscatory." Sung Decl., ¶ 31; *see also Thurman*, 203 Cal.App.4th at 1135 (affirming reduction of PAGA penalties); *Fleming*, 2011 WL 7563047, at *4 (reducing PAGA penalties from $2.8 million to $500,000). Therefore, Plaintiff discounted the maximum figure by 75% for the risk of losing on the merits and/or not recovering a PAGA penalty for each and every pay period and to account for the possibility of this Court reducing penalties, to arrive at an estimated exposure of approximately **$117,211.38**. Sung Decl., ¶ 31.

Conclusion: Using these estimated figures for each of the claims described above, Plaintiff predicted that the potential realistic recovery for the Class would be approximately **$515,144.2**. Sung Decl., ¶ 32. The proposed Settlement of $308,583.00 represents approximately **59.90%** of the reasonably forecasted recovery for the Class. *Ibid.* Preliminary approval is appropriate since the Settlement will provide significant monetary relief to the Class, which is consistent with what Class Counsel believes could have been recovered had the case proceeded through trial. *Ibid.*

3. The Experience and Views of Counsel

"Parties represented by competent counsel are better positioned than courts to produce a settlement that fairly reflects each party's expected outcome in litigation." In *In re Pacific Enterprises Securities Litigation* (9th Cir. 1995) 47 F.3d 373, 378. Here, Plaintiff is represented by competent, experienced counsel who possess extensive experience prosecuting and defending wage-and-hour class actions and who have been appointed as class counsel. *See* Sung Decl., ¶¶ 2-7. Class Counsel conducted an in-depth review of class records and drew on their extensive experience in similar cases to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Plaintiff's case. The Settlement was also reached with the assistance of an experienced and respected wage-and-hour class action mediator. This factor strongly supports preliminary approval of the Settlement. *See Kullar,* 168 Cal.App.4th at 130.

4. The Preliminary Approval Standard Is Met

At this stage, the Court can grant preliminary approval of the Settlement and direct that notice be given if the proposed Settlement: (1) falls within the range of possible approval; (2) appears to be the product of serious, informed, and non-collusive negotiations; and (3) has no obvious deficiencies. *See* Manual for Complex Litigation § 30.41(3rd Ed. 1995); 4 Newberg on Class Actions § 11:24-25 (4th Ed. 2013).

The proposed Settlement reflects approximately **59.90%** of the estimated recovery the Class could reasonably expect in light of the significant litigation risks and will provide tangible, substantial monetary compensation for hotly disputed claims. Indeed, the percentage of the liability exposure recovered in this case far exceeds percentages routinely approved by courts. *See, e.g., Glass v. UBS Finan. Servs.* (N.D. Cal. 2007) Case No. C-06-4068 MMC, 2007 WL 221862, *4 (approving settlement representing 25% to 35% of potential damages); *Dunleavy v. Nadler* (9th Cir. 2000) 213 F.3d 454, 459 (approving settlement representing about one-sixth of potential recovery); *Nat'l Rural Telecomm. Coop. v. DirecTV, Inc.* (C.D. Cal. 2004) 221 F.R.D. 523, 527 ("it is well-settled law that a proposed settlement may be acceptable even though it amounts to only a fraction of the potential recovery that might be available to the Class Members at trial"). The average Individual Class Payment of approximately **$472.81** exceeds average payments achieved in other wage and hour class action settlements.[2] Thus, the proposed settlement is within the range of possible approval, such that notice should be provided to the Class Members so that they can

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[2] *See e.g., Bercea v. AE Retail West*, Case No. 34-2012-00123947 (Sacramento County Super. Ct. May 9, 2012) (average recovery of approximately $105); *Ressler v. Federated Department Stores, Inc.*, Case No. BC335018 (Los Angeles County Super. Ct. Jan. 2, 2009) (average recovery of approximately $90); *Palencia v. 99 Cents Only Stores*, Case No. 34-2010-00079619 (Sacramento County Super. Ct.) (average recovery of approximately $80); *Doty v. Costco Wholesale Corp.*, Case No. CV05-3241 FMC-JWJx (C.D. Cal. May 14, 2007) (average recovery of approximately $65); *Lim v. Victoria's Secret Stores, Inc.*, Case No. 04CC00213 (Orange County Super. Ct. Jan. 20, 2006) (average net recovery of approximately $35); *Gomez v. Amadeus Salon, Inc.*, Case No. BC392297 (Los Angeles County Super. Ct. July 23, 2010) (average net recovery of approximately $20); *Sorenson v. PetSmart, Inc.*, Case No. 2:06-CV-02674-JAM-DAD (E.D. Cal. Dec. 17, 2008) (wage and hour class action settlement approved where average recovery was approximately $60).

consider the Settlement. The Court will have the opportunity to again assess the reasonableness of the Settlement after the Class Members have had the opportunity to opt-out or object.

The Settlement resulted from an exchange of substantial information, arm's-length negotiations by counsel, a full-day mediation before an experienced wage and hour mediator, and additional months of negotiating the long-form settlement agreement. Thus, the Settlement is entitled to an initial presumption of fairness. *See Kullar, supra*, 168 Cal.App.4th at 130. As discussed above, Plaintiff carefully vetted the claims at issue, analyzed extensive sampling time and payroll data, and conducted a detailed damages analysis to arrive at the estimated class-wide damages figures. *See* Sung Decl., ¶¶ 27-32. Thus, this factor supports preliminary approval.

Preliminary approval of the Settlement is also warranted because there are no obvious deficiencies. The Settlement will provide substantial monetary relief to the Class. The amounts proposed for Class Counsel's attorneys' fees and costs, LWDA payment, and Plaintiff's Class Representative Service Payment, are all reasonable and appropriate based on the facts of this case. Because the Settlement is devoid of obvious deficiencies, this factor supports preliminary approval.

B. THE COURT SHOULD CERTIFY THE CLASS

The Class satisfies the criteria for certification of a settlement class under California law because: (1) the Class is so numerous that joinder would be impractical; (2) common questions of law and fact predominate over individual questions such that class certification is the most efficient and desirable way to maintain this litigation; (3) Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of absent Class Members; and (4) Plaintiff and Class Counsel will fairly and adequately represent Class Members' interest. *See* Code Civ. Proc. § 382.

A class is "ascertainable" where the members "may be readily identified without unreasonable expense or time by reference to official [or business] records." *See Sevidal v. Target Corp.* (2010) 189 Cal.App.4th 905, 916 (alterations in original). Here, the Class is defined as "all current and former non-exempt employees who worked for Defendant within the State of California during the Class Period." Therefore, Class Members can be identified from Defendant's personnel and employment records. Defendant represents that the Class consists of approximately 321 current and former non-exempt employees. It would therefore be impracticable to bring all Class Members before the Court or for each Class Member to bring an individual lawsuit. Thus, the proposed Class satisfies numerosity. *See, e.g., Bowles v. Superior Court* (1955) 44 Cal.2d 574 (holding a class representing 10 beneficiaries of a trust sufficiently numerous).

The focus in a certification dispute is not on the merits but rather on what types of questions, "common or individual," are likely to arise in the Action. *See Sav-On Drug Store, Inc. v. Superior Court (Rocher)* (2004) 34 Cal.4th 319, 327. Plaintiff's claims are predicated on, among other issues, Defendant's uniform policy and practice regarding provision of meal and rest periods, regular rate of pay, timekeeping, and provision of wage statements and final wages. These types of claims are commonly held to be proper for class certification. *See e.g., Benton v. Telecom Network Specialists, Inc.* (2013) 220 Cal.App.4th 701, 726 (certifying meal and rest period claims*); Sav-On Drug Stores, Inc. v. Superior Court* (2004) 34 Cal.4th 319, 324 (certifying exemption misclassification and unpaid overtime claim).

The typicality requirement is satisfied where class representatives have claims that are typical of those of the rest of the class. *B.W.I. Custom Kitchen v. Owens-Illinois, Inc.* (1987) 191 Cal.App.3d 1341, 1347 (finding typicality satisfied where named Plaintiff purchased the same goods as the putative class in a consumer class action). Here, Plaintiff's claims are typical of those held by the Class Members. First, Defendant employed Plaintiff as non-exempt employee during the Class Period, and Plaintiff was subject to Defendant's wage and hour policies at issue in this case. Perez Decl., ¶¶ 2-3. Second, Plaintiff was injured by the same challenged policies/practices that allegedly injured the Class as a whole: meal/rest period violations, regular rate violations resulting in underpayment of wages, and derivative statutory and civil penalties. Perez Decl., ¶ 3. Because Plaintiff has suffered the same injuries as the other members of the Class, the typicality requirement is satisfied.

The adequacy requirement examines conflicts of interest between named parties and the class(es) they seek to represent. *See Capital People First v. State Dept. of Developmental Services* (2007) 155 Cal.App.4th 676, 697. Plaintiff and Class Counsel will adequately represent the Class, as there are no conflicts between Plaintiff and the proposed Class, and Plaintiff possesses claims that are in line with those of the Class. Sung Decl., ¶ 33; Perez Decl., ¶ 5; *see McGhee v. Bank of*

America (1976) 60 Cal.App.3d 442, 450-51 (adequacy satisfied where there was no indication that Class Counsel were not qualified and the named plaintiff had no interests antagonistic to those of the proposed class). Class Counsel also have extensive experience in wage and hour class action litigation. *See* Sung Decl., ¶¶ 2-7.

C. THE COURT SHOULD ORDER DISTRIBUTION OF THE CLASS NOTICE

This Court should order distribution to the Class of the proposed Class Notice by U.S. Mail, postage prepaid using the last known mailing address information provided by Defendant. *See* Agreement, §§ 1.8, 7.4.2, **Exhibit A** (Class Notice). The Class Notice will be distributed in English and Spanish. Agreement, § 1.11. This manner of giving notice is the "best notice practicable" under the circumstances because it provides "individual notice to all members who can be identified through reasonable effort." *See Eisen v. Carlisle & Jacquelin* (1974) 417 U.S. 156, 173.

Here, the Parties have agreed that the Settlement be administered by Phoenix Settlement Administrators ("Administrator"), an experienced class action settlement administrator. *See generally* Declaration of Jodey Lawrence ("Administrator Decl.") and attached exhibits. Class Members' addresses will be ascertainable through Defendant's personnel and payroll records, which Defendant will provide to the Administrator within 15 days of preliminary approval of the Settlement. Agreement, § 4.2. Within 14 days of receipt of the Class Members' addresses, the Administrator will run the names of all Class Members through the National Change of Address database to update addresses and mail the Class Notice to all Class Members. Agreement, § 7.4.2. To the extent that any notices are returned, the Administrator will perform a "skip trace" to track any Class Member's current mailing address and remail the notice within 3 business days. Agreement, § 7.4.3.

The content of the proposed Class Notice satisfies California Rule of Court 3.766(d) because it advises Class Members of the nature of the claims, basic contentions and denials of the parties, and the key terms of the Settlement, the 45-day deadline to opt-out or object to the Settlement and the procedures by which to do so, explains the recovery formula and expected recovery amount for each Class Member, and advises them that they will be bound by the terms of the Agreement if they do not opt-out. *See* Agreement, **Exhibit A** (Class Notice). The proposed Class Notice will also notify Class Members of the final approval hearing date and provides the Class contact information for Class Counsel and advises Class Members that they may enter an appearance through counsel if they wish to. *Ibid.* This manner of giving notice satisfies California Rule of Court 3.766(e) as the most reliable and cost-effective method of reaching Class Members.

D. THE COURT SHOULD SET A FINAL APPROVAL HEARING

Finally, this Court should set a hearing for Final Approval of the Settlement on a date appropriately scheduled to follow the deadline by which Class Members must file objections to the Settlement or opt-out. *See* California Rule of Court 3.769.

V. <u>CONCLUSION</u>

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court preliminarily approve the proposed Settlement, provisionally certify the Class, and enter the Proposed Order submitted concurrently herewith.

DATED: March 13, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

JUSTICE FOR WORKERS, P.C.

By: ______________________

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