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ALEXANDER HUETE

Per local Rule, This case is assigned to
Judge Treat, Charles S, for all purposes.

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF CONTRA COSTA

ALEXANDER HUETE, as a Private
Attorney General,

Plaintiff,

vs.

S.J. DISTRIBUTORS LLC, a
Californialimited liability company; and
DOES 1 through 50, inclusive,

Defendant.

C24-03347

Case No.:

**REPRESENTATIVE ACTION
COMPLAINT**

**(1) VIOLATION OF CALIFORNIA
LABOR CODE § 2699, ET SEQ.
(PRIVATE ATTORNEYS
GENERAL ACT)**

1 Plaintiff ALEXANDER HUETE (“Plaintiff”), as a Private Attorney General, for
2 Plaintiff’s representative claims only, also known as non-individual claims, pursuant to California
3 Labor Code § 2699, et seq. (“Private Attorneys General Act claims”), based upon facts that either
4 have evidentiary support or are likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity
5 for further investigation and discovery, allege as follows:

6 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

7 1. Plaintiff brings this action against Defendant S.J. DISTRIBUTORS LLC and
8 DOES 1 THROUGH 50 (hereinafter also collectively referred to as “Defendant”) as a
9 representative action for Plaintiff’s representative claims only, also known as non-individual
10 claims, on behalf of himself and certain other current and former non-exempt employees of
11 Defendant against whom one or more of the alleged violations was committed (hereinafter
12 collectively referred to as the “Aggrieved Employees”) pursuant to California Labor Code
13 sections 2698, *et seq.* Plaintiff is an aggrieved employee against whom one or more of the alleged
14 violations was committed. The civil penalties sought by Plaintiff exceed the minimal jurisdiction
15 limits of the Superior Court and will be established according to proof at trial.

16 2. The Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to the California Constitution,
17 Article VI, Section 10, which grants the superior court “original jurisdiction in all other causes”
18 except those given by statute to other courts. The statutes under which this action is brought do
19 not specify any other basis for jurisdiction.

20 3. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendant because, upon information and belief,
21 Defendant is a citizen of California, has sufficient minimum contacts in California, or otherwise
22 intentionally avails itself of the California market so as to render the exercise of jurisdiction over
23 it by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

24 4. Venue is proper in this Court because, upon information and belief, Defendant
25 maintains offices, has agents, and/or transacts business in the State of California, County of
26 Contra Costa.

26 **PARTIES**

27 5. Plaintiff ALEXANDER HUETE is an individual residing in the State of
28

California, County of Contra Costa. Plaintiff ALEXANDER HUETE is not suing in his individual capacity; he is proceeding solely under the PAGA, on behalf of the State of California for all aggrieved employees, including himself and other aggrieved employees.

6. Defendant S.J. DISTRIBUTORS LLC is, and at all times herein mentioned was, a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of California, and registered to do business in the state of California.

7. Plaintiff is ignorant of the identities of defendants Does 1 through 50, inclusive, and therefore sues these defendants by such fictitious names. The Doe defendants may be individuals, partnerships, or corporations. Plaintiff is informed and believe, and thereon alleges, that, at all times mentioned herein, each of the Doe defendants was the parent, subsidiary, agent, servant, employee, co-venturer, and/or co-conspirator of each of the other defendants, and was at all times mentioned acting within the scope, purpose, consent, knowledge, ratification and authorization of such agency, employment, joint venture and conspiracy. Plaintiff will amend this Complaint to allege their true names and capacities when ascertained. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that each of the fictitiously named Doe defendants is responsible in some manner for the occurrences herein alleged, and that Plaintiff's damages as herein alleged were proximately caused by its conduct.

8. Defendant is and at all times herein mentioned was, (a) conducting business in the County of Contra Costa, State of California, and (b) the employer of Plaintiff consistent with the California Labor Code and Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders ("Wage Orders").

9. Plaintiff further alleges that Defendant, directly or indirectly controlled or affected the working conditions, wages, working hours, and conditions of employment of Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees so as to make each of said Defendant employers and employers jointly liable under the statutory provisions set forth herein.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

10. Defendant is a distributor of meat and produce supplies to retail stores across California and beyond.

11. Defendant employed Plaintiff to work as a warehouse worker from approximately

August 2022 to the present.

12. At all relevant times set forth herein, Defendant employed Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees as hourly-paid or non-exempt employees.

13. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant had the authority to hire and terminate Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees; to directly or indirectly control work rules, working conditions, wages, working hours, and conditions of employment of Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees; and to hire and terminate the employment of Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees.

14. At all times herein mentioned, Defendant was subject to the Labor Code of the State of California and the applicable Industrial Welfare Commission Orders.

15. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges that Defendant engaged in an ongoing and systematic scheme of wage abuse against their hourly-paid or non-exempt employees. As set forth in more detail below, this scheme involved, *inter alia*, regularly requiring Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to work off the clock without compensation, thereby failing to pay them for all hours worked, including minimum and overtime wages. Defendant also implemented policies that prohibited Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees from accurately recording the actual time worked, resulting in a failure to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages owed. In addition, Defendant routinely failed to permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to take timely and duty-free meal periods and rest periods in violation of California law. Defendant also failed to reimburse Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all necessary business-related expenses, and unlawful deduction or withholding of wages.

16. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant implemented policies and practices which failed to provide Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees with timely and duty-free meal periods. Defendant routinely failed to relieve Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees of all duties during their meal periods, regularly failed to relinquish control over Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees during their meal periods, regularly failed to permit Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees a reasonable opportunity to take their meal periods, and regularly impeded or discouraged Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees from taking thirty (30) minute uninterrupted

1 meal breaks no later than the end of their fifth hour of work and/or from taking a second thirty
2 (30) minute uninterrupted meal break no later than their tenth hour of work for shifts lasting more
3 than ten (10) hours. Defendant also failed to maintain accurate records of meal periods taken by
4 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees.

5 17. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant did not adequately
6 inform Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees of their right to take meal periods under California
7 law. Moreover, Defendant systematically disregarded its own written policies regarding the
8 provision and timing of meal periods for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Instead,
9 Defendant's actual policy and practice was to schedule Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees in a
10 way the prohibited them from taking timely and duty-free meal periods, and to require Plaintiff
11 and Aggrieved Employees to work through their meal periods, for which they were not
12 compensated.

13 18. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant failed to pay Plaintiff
14 and Aggrieved Employees premium wages for meal periods that were missed, late, interrupted,
15 or shortened in violation of California law. Defendant knew or should have known that Plaintiff
16 and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive all meal periods or payment of one additional
17 hour of pay at their regular rate of pay when a meal period was missed, short, late, and/or
18 interrupted. Notwithstanding this knowledge, Defendant routinely failed to provide legally
19 compliant meal periods to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees, and routinely failed pay one
20 additional hour of pay to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees at their regular rate of pay when a
21 meal period was missed, short, late, and/or interrupted.

22 19. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant implemented policies
23 and practices which prohibited Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees from taking timely and duty-
24 free rest periods. Defendant regularly failed to provide, authorize, and permit Plaintiff and
25 Aggrieved Employees to take full, uninterrupted, off-duty rest periods for every shift lasting three
26 and one-half (3.5) to six (6) hours and/or two full, uninterrupted, off-duty rest periods for every
27 shift lasting six (6) to ten (10) hours, and failed to make a good faith effort to authorize, permit,
28 and provide such rest breaks in the middle of each work period.

1 20. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant did not adequately
2 inform Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees of their right to take rest periods under California law.
3 Moreover, Defendant systematically disregarded its own written policies regarding the provision
4 and timing of rest periods for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Instead, Defendant's actual
5 policy and practice was to schedule Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees in a way that regularly
6 prohibited them from taking timely and duty free rest periods, and to regularly require Plaintiff
7 and Aggrieved Employees to work through their rest periods.

8 21. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant failed to pay Plaintiff
9 and Aggrieved Employees premium wages for rest periods that were missed, late, interrupted, or
10 shortened in violation of California law. Defendant knew or should have known that Plaintiff and
11 Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive all rest periods or payment of one additional hour
12 of pay at their regular rate of pay when a rest period was missed, short, late, and/or interrupted.
13 Notwithstanding this knowledge, Defendant routinely failed to authorize and permit Plaintiff and
14 Aggrieved Employees to take duty-free rest periods, and failed to pay one additional hour of pay
15 to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees at their regular rate of pay when a rest period was missed,
16 short, late and/or interrupted.

17 22. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly required
18 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to perform work off-the-clock. Although Defendant prohibited
19 overtime, Defendant still regularly required Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees complete all of
20 their assigned duties. To do so, Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were regularly required to
21 perform work-off-the-clock for which they were not compensated.

22 23. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant implemented policies
23 that prohibited Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees from accurately recording the actual time
24 worked, resulting in a failure to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages owed.

25 24. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Plaintiff and Aggrieved
26 Employees worked more than eight (8) hours in a day, and/or forty (40) hours in a week.

27 25. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly failed to
28 pay overtime compensation to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees when they worked in excess

1 of eight (8) hours in a single work day and/or forty (40) hours in a single work week, or in excess
2 of twelve (12) hours in a single work day and/or eighty (80) hours in a single work week.
3 Defendant knew or should have known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to
4 receive certain wages for overtime or double overtime compensation and that they were not
5 receiving wages for overtime or double overtime compensation.

6 26. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant failed to pay overtime
7 to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all overtime hours worked based on regular rates of
8 pay correctly calculated to include all applicable remuneration.

9 27. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly failed to
10 pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees at least minimum wages for all hours worked.
11 Defendant knew or should have known that Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees were entitled
12 to receive at least minimum wages for all hours worked and that they were not receiving at least
13 minimum wages for all hours worked. Defendant's failure to pay minimum wages included, *inter*
14 *alia*, failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees at the required minimum wage pursuant
15 to California law, requiring Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to perform work off the clock.

16 28. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly failed to
17 pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages owed to them upon discharge or resignation.
18 Defendant knew or should have known that Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees were entitled
19 to receive all wages owed to them upon termination within the time permissible under California
20 Labor Code section 202. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees did not receive payment of all
21 final wages owed to them upon discharge or resignation, including overtime compensation and
22 minimum wages within any time permissible under California Labor Code section 202.

23 29. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly failed to
24 pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees all wages within any time permissible under California
25 law, including, *inter alia*, California Labor Code section 204. Defendant knew or should have
26 known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive all wages owed to them
27 during their employment. Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees did not receive payment of all
28 wages, including overtime compensation, minimum wages, and meal and rest period premiums,

1 within any time permissible under California Labor Code section 204.

2 30. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly failed to
3 provide complete or accurate wage statements to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Defendant
4 knew or should have known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive
5 complete and accurate wage statements in accordance with California law, but, in fact, they did
6 not receive complete and accurate wage statements from Defendant. The deficiencies included,
7 *inter alia*, the failure to include the total number of hours worked, the actual gross wages earned,
8 and the correct rates of pay.

9 31. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly failed to
10 keep complete or accurate payroll records for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Defendant
11 knew or should have known that Defendant was required keep complete and accurate payroll
12 records for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees in accordance with California law, but, in fact, did
13 not keep complete and accurate payroll records.

14 32. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly failed to
15 maintain accurate records relating to Plaintiff's and the Aggrieved Employees' work periods,
16 meal periods, total daily hours, hours per pay period, and applicable pay rates.

17 33. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant implemented policies
18 and practices that allowed Defendant to deduct medical expenses related to the treatment of a
19 work-related injury. from the wages paid to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees. Defendant's
20 policies and practices allowing for deduction of wages do not comport with any exception
21 enumerated in California Labor Code section 224, and is therefore unlawful under California law.

22 34. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant failed to reimburse
23 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all necessary business-related expenses, including but
24 not limited to, out-of-pocket expenses for the use of personal cell phones for work-related
25 purposes. Defendant knew or should have known that Defendant was required to reimburse
26 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all necessary business-related expenses and costs, but,
27 in fact, failed to do so in violation of California law.

35. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant knew or should have known that they had a duty to compensate Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees pursuant to California law. Defendant had the financial ability to pay such compensation, but willfully, knowingly, and intentionally failed to do so, and falsely represented to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees that they paid all wages owed to them, all in order to increase Defendant's profits.

36. On or about September 17, 2024, Plaintiff notified Defendant via certified mail and filed an online PAGA claim notice with the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) identifying Defendant’s violations of the California Labor Code identified in this Complaint and Plaintiff’s intent to bring a claim for civil penalties under California Labor Code section 2698 *et seq.* in accord with Cal. Lab. Code section 2699.3. As of the filing of this Complaint, the LWDA has not responded to Plaintiff’s PAGA claim notice.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of California Labor Code § 2699, Et Seq.)

(Against All Defendants)

37. Plaintiff incorporates by reference and re-alleges as if fully stated herein each and every allegation set forth above.

38. Plaintiff brings his first and only cause of action as a representative action on behalf of himself and similarly Aggrieved Employees in the capacity as a private attorney general pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code section 2698, et seq. (“PAGA”).

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

1 40. Plaintiff was employed by Defendant and the Labor Code violations alleged above
2 were committed him during his time of employment. Plaintiff and the other non-exempt employees
3 of Defendant are therefore “aggrieved employees” as defined by California Labor Code section
4 2699(c) in that they are all current or former employees of Defendant, and one or more of the
5 alleged violations were committed against them.

6 41. As set forth in detail above, during all times relevant to this Action, Defendant
7 has routinely subjected Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to violations of California Labor
8 Codes by:

- 9 a. Failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all earned minimum wage
10 compensation in violation of Labor Code §§ 1194 and 1198 *et seq.*
- 11 b. Failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all earned overtime
12 compensation in violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 510, 1194, and 1198 *et seq.*
- 13 c. Failing to provide legally required meal periods to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
14 Employees, and failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees an additional
15 hour of premium pay for meal period violations in violation of Labor Code §§
16 226.7 and 512.
- 17 d. Failing to provide authorize and permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to
18 take duty-free rest periods, and failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
19 Employees an additional hour of premium pay for rest period violations in
20 violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 512.
- 21 e. Failing to timely pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages at end of
22 their employment in violation of Labor Code § 203.
- 23 f. Failing to timely pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages owed
24 during employment in violation of Labor Code § 204.
- 25 g. Failing to furnish Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees with complete, accurate,
26 itemized wage statements in violation of Labor Code § 226.
- 27 h. Failing to maintain accurate records relating to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
28 Employees’ work periods, meal periods, total daily hours, hours per pay period,

total wages and compensation, and applicable pay rates in violation of Labor Code § 1174(d) and the applicable IWC Wage Order.

i. Unlawfully deducting, withholding, or collecting wages paid to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees in violation of Labor Code §§ 221.

j. Failing to reimburse Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for necessary business-related expenses in violation of Labor Code §§ 2800 and 2802.

42. Pursuant to California Labor Code sections 2699 and 2699.5, Plaintiff, on behalf of the Aggrieved Employees and the State of California, requests and is entitled to recover penalties against Defendant for the Labor Code violations described above, including but not limited to penalties under California Code of Regulations Title sections 11080, 11130, and 11140, penalties under California Labor Code sections 2699, 558, 210, 1197.1, 226, 226.3, 1174.5, and 1197.1, and any and all additional penalties and sums as provided by the California Labor Code and/or other statutes. The exact amount of the applicable penalties, in all, is in an amount to be shown according to proof at trial.

43. Plaintiff has exhausted his administrative remedies pursuant to Labor Code § 2699.3. On September 17, 2024, Plaintiff, through his counsel of record, by online filing with the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) and by certified mail to the Defendant, notified Defendant and the LWDA of the specific provisions of the Labor Code and IWC Wage Orders that Defendant violated, including the facts and theories to support the violations, and of Plaintiff’s intent to bring a claim for civil penalties under PAGA. Plaintiff also paid the filing fee required under Labor Code § 2699.3. As of the filing of this Complaint, more than 65 days have elapsed since the mailing of Plaintiff’s September 17, 2024 notice, and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency has not indicated that it intends to investigate the violations discussed in the notice. Accordingly, Plaintiff may commence a civil action to recover penalties for himself and other Aggrieved Employees pursuant to Labor Code § 2699.3.

44. Plaintiff was compelled to retain the services of counsel to file this court action to protect his interests and the Aggrieved Employees, and to assess and collect the civil penalties owed by Defendant. Plaintiff therefore seeks an award of reasonable attorney’s fees and costs

pursuant to Labor Code § 2699(g)(1), and any other applicable statute.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, on behalf of all other aggrieved employees, and as a private attorney general, prays for relief and judgment against Defendant, jointly and severally, as follows:

As to the First Cause of Action

1. For statutory attorneys' fees and costs pursuant to 2699(g)(1) of California Labor Code;
2. For the imposition of civil penalties pursuant to California Labor Code §§ 2699, 210, 558, 226, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1 and all other penalties allowed by the California Labor Code and/or other applicable statutes; and
3. For such other relief as the Court deems just and proper

Dated: December 9, 2024

PROTECTION LAW GROUP, LLP

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as Private Attorney General