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County of San Diego
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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

CARMINA TORRES, on behalf of others similarly situated and the State of California under the Private Attorneys General Act,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

FIRST MERIDIAN HOME CARE SERVICES, INC. DBA MERIDIAN HOME CARE LLC and DOES 1 through 50, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No. 24CU016862C

Hon. Carolyn M. Caietti
Dept. 70

CLASS ACTION

FIRST AMENDED CLASS AND REPRESENTATIVE ACTION COMPLAINT

1. Minimum Wage Violations
2. Failure to Pay All Overtime Wages
3. Meal Period Violations
4. Rest Period Violations
5. Paid Sick Leave Violations
6. Untimely Payment of Wages
7. Wage Statement Violations
8. Waiting Time Penalties
9. Failure to Reimburse Business Expenses
10. Unfair Competition
11. Civil Penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act (Labor Code §§ 2698 *et seq.*)

Plaintiff CARMINA TORRES, on behalf of all others similarly situated and the State of California under the Private Attorneys General Act ("Plaintiff") brings this FIRST AMENDED CLASS AND REPRESENTATIVE ACTION COMPLAINT against Defendants FIRST MERIDIAN HOME CARE SERVICES, INC. DBA MERIDIAN HOME CARE LLC and DOES 1 through 50, inclusive (collectively "Defendants"), alleging as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. This is a wage and hour class and representative action for violations of the California Labor Code.

2. Defendants failed to compensate Plaintiff and Class Members for all hours suffered or permitted to work in violation of the applicable IWC Wage Order.

3. Defendants also underpaid the Class Members' wages by failing to include all forms of remuneration, including bonuses, into the regular rate of pay calculation for overtime, sick pay, and premium pay rates.

4. Plaintiff and Class Members were not always given an adequate opportunity to take compliant meal and rest breaks, yet Defendants did not pay Plaintiff and Class Members for meal or rest period premiums on those days.

5. Defendants also failed to adequately reimburse Plaintiff and Class Members for necessary expenses incurred in furtherance of the Class Members' job duties: notably, cell phone related expenses to communicate with coworkers and use an app to clock in and out, along with mileage costs.

6. Defendants' employment policies, practices, and payroll administration systems enabled and facilitated these violations on a company-wide basis with respect to the Class Members.

7. Defendants are further liable for derivative claims for wage statements, untimely payment, and other associated violations.

8. Plaintiff seeks to recover the damages, wages, interest, and penalties, in addition to attorneys' fees and costs, according to proof.

JURISDICTION & VENUE

9. Jurisdiction of this action is proper in this Court under Article VI, Section 10 of the California Constitution as the causes of action are premised upon violations of California law.

10. The monetary damages and restitution sought exceed the minimal jurisdiction limits of the Superior Court.

11. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because, upon information and belief, Defendants have sufficient minimum contacts in California, or otherwise intentionally avail themselves to the California economy so as to render the exercise of jurisdiction over them by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

12. Venue is proper in this Court under Code of Civil Procedure sections 393(a), 395, and/or 395.5 because, upon information and belief, Defendants conducted business and committed some of the alleged violations in this County.

PARTIES

A. Plaintiff Carmina Torres

13. Plaintiff Carmina Torres is an individual over 18 years of age who worked for Defendants in California as a non-exempt employee from about March 2022 to present. Plaintiff worked as a caregiver.

14. The State of California, via the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA"), is the real party in interest in this action. (*Kim v. Reins Int'l California, Inc.* (2020) 9 Cal. 5th 73, 81 [The "government entity on whose behalf the plaintiff files suit is always the real party in interest."]) To the extent permitted by law, including pursuant *Balderas v. Fresh Start Harvesting, Inc.*, Court of Appeals Case No. B326759 (2nd App. Dist.) ____ Cal. App. 5th _____ (Mar. 20, 2024, *as modified* Apr. 18, 2024), the PAGA claim is brought exclusively as a representative action and does not include arbitrable claims.

B. Defendants

15. Defendant First Meridian Home Care Services, Inc. dba Meridian Home Care LLC is a limited liability company that maintains operations and conducts business throughout the State of California, including in this county.

16. The true names and capacities, whether individual, corporate, or otherwise, of the parties sued as DOES 1 through 50, are presently unknown, unascertainable, or uncertain, and are sued by such fictitious names under Code of Civil Procedure section 474. Upon information and belief, each of DOES 1 through 50 constitutes a legal employer or is otherwise legally responsible in some manner for the acts and omissions alleged herein. This Complaint may be amended to reflect their true names and capacities once ascertained.

17. Upon information and belief, Defendants in this action are employers, co-employers, joint employers, and/or part of an integrated employer enterprise, as each of the Defendants exercised control over the wages, hours, and working conditions of the employees, suffered and permitted them to work, and otherwise engaged them as employees under California law.

18. Upon information and belief, at least some of the Defendants have common ownership, common management, interrelationship of operations, and centralized control over labor relations and are therefore part of an integrated enterprise and thus jointly and severally responsible for the acts and omissions alleged herein, including pursuant to Labor Code sections 558, 558.1, and 1197.1.

19. Upon information and belief, Defendants acted in all respects pertinent to this action as an alter-ego, agent, servant, joint employer, joint venturer, co-conspirator, partner, in an integrated enterprise, or in some other capacity on behalf of all other co-defendants, such that the acts and omissions of each defendant may be legally attributable to all others.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

20. This action is brought individually and on behalf of the following class pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 382:

a. All current and former non-exempt employees who worked for Defendants in California at any time from four years (plus the additional 178-day statutory tolling period under Emergency Rule 9) prior to the filing of this action through date of class certification.

21. Plaintiff reserves the right to establish various subclass definitions as appropriate at the class certification stage, according to proof.

22. The class is ascertainable and shares a well-defined community of interest in this litigation:

a. Numerosity: The class is estimated to exceed 50 individuals, although the precise membership of the entire class is unknown at this time. The class is so numerous that joinder of all Class Members is impracticable. The identities of Class Members are ascertainable by inspection of Defendants' employment and payroll records.

b. Typicality: Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the other Class Members. They were subject to the same policies and practices of Defendants, which resulted in losses to the class. Proof of common unlawful business practices, which Plaintiff experienced, will establish the right of the class to recover on the causes of action alleged herein.

c. Adequacy: Plaintiff is an adequate class representative; will take all necessary steps to protect the Class Members' interests adequately and fairly; has no interest antagonistic to other Class Members; and is represented by attorneys who have substantial experience prosecuting, defending, resolving, and litigating wage and hour class, collective, and representative actions in California state and federal courts.

d. Superiority: A class action is superior to other means for adjudicating this dispute. Individual joinder is impractical. Class treatment will allow for common issues to be resolved in a single forum, simultaneously, and without duplication of effort and expense.

e. Public Policy Considerations: Certification of this lawsuit as a class action advances the State of California's strong public interest in ensuring its approximately millions of employed residents are properly paid the wages they earned for the hours they worked. Class actions provide a mechanism for enforcement of labor laws and allow for vindication of employee rights by unnamed Class Members.

23. Common questions of law and fact as to the Class Members predominate over questions affecting only individual members. The common questions of law and fact exist as to whether the

employment policies and practices formulated by Defendants and applied to the class members constitute violations of California law.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

24. Plaintiff and Class Members worked for Defendants as non-exempt employees and were compensated on an hourly basis.

25. Defendants repeatedly underpaid Plaintiff and Class Members by not accounting for all hours they worked. Defendants failed to compensate Plaintiff and Class Members for off-the-clock work completed.

26. For example, Defendant employed a timekeeping application that prevented Plaintiff and Class Members from clocking in for work any more than five minutes before an appointment was scheduled. Therefore, when Plaintiff and the class members arrived to work any earlier, any work completed was not accounted for via the timekeeping system. Further, Plaintiff also occasionally would be required to complete off-the-clock work once her shift ended. Sometimes, Plaintiff would clock out and continue to work because of a client's request for further assistance, such as requests to help prepare their dinner or go to the restroom. These off-the-clock tasks could take anywhere from ten to fifteen minutes. On information and belief, other Class Members also completed tasks off-the-clock like those Plaintiff undertook. This practice resulted in unpaid minimum, regular, and overtime wages for Plaintiff and Class Members.

27. Further, Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and Class Members overtime wages at the "regular rate of pay" for overtime hours worked, resulting in unpaid overtime wages. Defendants paid non-discretionary bonuses to Plaintiff and Class Members, however, Defendants did not factor bonuses into the regular rate of pay for purposes of paying overtime. For each overtime hour worked during that period in which Plaintiff and Class Members earned these additional forms of remuneration, Defendants failed to pay overtime "at a rate not less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for an employee" because Defendants failed to account for the additional remuneration. Two illustrative examples of this violation are found on the wage statements Defendant issued to Plaintiff for the pay periods from September 3, 2023 to September 16, 2023 and September 17, 2023 to September 30, 2023. *See Fig. 1 and Fig.2*.

PAY STATEMENT
ID: 0000003130444781
Detach along the perforation and retain for your records

DecisionHR
5801 Postal Road
PO Box 818020
Cleveland, OH 44181

First Meridian Care Services, Inc.
dba Meridian Home Care
4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204
San Diego, CA 92123

Carmina E Torres

PAY PERIOD INFORMATION

Payroll Frequency:	Bi-Weekly
Pay Period:	9/3/2023 - 9/16/2023
Pay Date:	9/22/2023
Work Location:	Main 4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204 San Diego, CA 92123

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

Employee ID:	1572
Employee SSN:	*-4320
Federal:	H TJ:N $0.00 $0.00 $0.00 $0.00
State(s):	CA: H 0/0 $0.00

COMPANY MESSAGE

EARNINGS

Type	Rate	Hrs/U	Current	YTD
Hourly	$21.0000	9.00	$189.00	$22,460.90
Hourly	$20.0000	32.92	$658.40	
Hourly	$19.0000	10.85	$206.15	
Hourly	$18.0000	4.01	$72.18	
Hourly	$17.0000	8.45	$143.65	
Hourly	$16.3000	0.55	$8.97	
Non Discr Bon	$0.0000		$200.00	$200.00
Overtime	$31.5981	0.04	$1.26	$7,168.44
Overtime	$30.5981	4.00	$122.39	
Overtime	$29.5981	13.41	$396.91	
Overtime	$27.5981	4.56	$125.85	
Holiday Worke	$30.5981	3.90	$119.33	$801.62
Holiday Worke	$28.5981	8.14	$232.79	
Phone Stipend	$0.0000		$2.00	$38.00
Mileage Reimb	$0.0000		$14.92	$50.32

DEDUCTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Type	Current	YTD
Employee Deductions		
HCA	$0.00	$35.00

TAXES

Type	Current	YT
Federal Income Tax	$189.15	$1,681.2
EE Social Security	$153.57	$1,899.1
Medicare	$35.92	$444.1
CA Tax	$99.47	$832.1
CA SDI	$22.29	$275.6

Fig. 1, wage statement ending on September 16, 2023.

PAY STATEMENT
ID: 0000003130479350
Detach along the perforation and retain for your records

DecisionHR
5801 Postal Road
PO Box 818020
Cleveland, OH 44181

First Meridian Care Services, Inc.
dba Meridian Home Care
4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204
San Diego, CA 92123

Carmina E Torres

PAY PERIOD INFORMATION

Payroll Frequency:	Bi-Weekly
Pay Period:	9/17/2023 - 9/30/2023
Pay Date:	10/6/2023
Work Location:	Main 4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204 San Diego, CA 92123

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

Employee ID:	1572
Employee SSN:	*-4320
Federal:	H TJ:N $0.00 $0.00 $0.00 $0.00
State(s):	CA: H 0/0 $0.00

COMPANY MESSAGE

EARNINGS

Type	Rate	Hrs/U	Current	YTD
Hourly	$20.0000	17.85	$357.00	$23,979.93
Hourly	$19.0000	52.74	$1,002.06	
Hourly	$17.0000	9.41	$159.97	
Non Discr Bon	$0.0000		$100.00	$300.00
Overtime	$30.0491	25.95	$779.77	$8,176.54
Overtime	$29.0491	7.86	$228.33	
Holiday Worke		0.00	$0.00	$801.62
Phone Stipend	$0.0000		$2.00	$40.00
Mileage Reimb	$0.0000		$0.00	$50.32

DEDUCTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Type	Current	YTD
Employee Deductions		
HCA	$0.00	$35.00

TAXES

Type	Current	YTD
Federal Income Tax	$207.18	$1,888.45
EE Social Security	$162.88	$2,062.00
Medicare	$38.09	$482.24
CA Tax	$112.69	$944.84
CA SDI	$23.64	$299.31

Fig 2, wage statement ending on September 30, 2023.

28. Defendants failed to pay or provide sick leave with all sick leave accrued. On information and belief, Defendants did not include hours worked off the clock or overtime hours when calculating the total accrued sick leave they had earned.

29. Furthermore, Defendants failed to pay sick leave at the correct rate because they failed to factor in bonuses, commissions, and/or other forms of remuneration.

30. With respect to meal periods, Plaintiff and the Class Members routinely experienced missed, late, short, and interrupted meal periods to keep up with the high demands of the job. Specifically, Plaintiff and Class Members frequently worked through their meal periods to fulfill their job duties in a timely manner. Specifically, Plaintiff and class members worked shifts as long as twelve to sixteen hours per day without a meal break. Occasionally, when Plaintiff attempted to take a meal break, she was required to check with her client before doing so, therefore, if the client needed assistance first, she was required to wait to take her meal period. Moreover, when Plaintiff would attempt to take a meal period, it was interrupted by her clients requesting attention or help, thus Plaintiff experienced short and interrupted meal periods.

31. Defendants did not pay Plaintiff or the Class Members any meal period premiums when they experienced missed, late, short, or interrupted meal periods. Further, to the extent meal period premiums were paid, they were underpaid because Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and other aggrieved employees at the "regular rate of compensation."

32. Plaintiff and Class Members routinely worked through rest periods to keep up with the constant demands of the job. Defendants had a policy and practice of not paying rest period premiums to employees who were not authorized to take rest periods. Due to the constant attention required by clients, Plaintiff and the Class Members worked through rest periods daily and did not receive rest period premiums when they were not authorized to take rest periods.

33. Defendants required Plaintiff and the Class Members to incur costs for cell phone charges and travel expenses without full reimbursement. Specifically, Defendants required Plaintiff and the Class Members to use their personal cell phones to communicate with schedulers and to access the WellSky application which they were required to use to clock in and out. Defendants paid Plaintiff and the Class Members a mere two-dollar stipend per pay period for personal cell phone usage. That

amount is insufficient to adequately reimburse Plaintiff and the Class Members for their actual cell phone use.

34. Moreover, Plaintiff and the Class Members were required to travel to multiple locations throughout the day to assist clients. However, Defendants did not reimburse Plaintiff and the Class Members for any of the mileage costs incurred travelling to meet with various clients. Rather, Defendants only reimbursed mileage costs if Plaintiff and the Class Members incurred those costs because the client requested to be driven somewhere. Thus, Plaintiff and the Class Members were not fully reimbursed for costs incurred as a direct consequence of their job duties.

35. First, on each wage statement furnished, Defendants failed to accurately state the "gross wages earned" and "net wages earned" in violation of Labor Code § 226(a)(1) and (5), as Plaintiff and Class Members were underpaid for regular and overtime wages, meal and rest period premiums, and paid sick leave, resulting in an inaccurate and depreciated itemization of gross and net wages earned on those wage statements.

36. Second, Defendants violated Labor Code section 226(a)(2) by failing to list employees' "total hours worked," as Class Members worked off-the-clock to perform the various work-related tasks described above, rendering the total hours listed as an inaccurate reflection of hours worked.

37. Third, in violation of Labor Code section 226(a)(9), the hourly rates and corresponding hours worked at those rates are incorrectly listed on Plaintiff's and Class Members' wage statements. The hourly rates on the wage statement are inaccurate with respect to overtime hours that were not paid at the "regular rate of pay." The hourly rates are also inaccurate with respect to any meal and rest period premiums and paid sick leave hours, if any, as those hours were unpaid and/or paid at the improper base rate and reflected as such on the wage statements of the Class Members.

38. Defendants' wage statement issues described above rendered the wage statements inaccurate and confusing to Plaintiff and Class Members, concealing the underpayments and presenting a false portrayal of accuracy on the wage statements relied upon by Plaintiff and Class Members as the sole documentary evidence of their respective earnings.

39. These violations create derivative liability for failure to pay all wages owed each payday or upon separation of employment.

40. Because of the violations set forth in this Complaint, including Defendants' failure to accurately maintain records of pay for all hours worked at the appropriate lawful rates of pay (i.e., unrecorded off-the-clock hours), Defendants violated Labor Code section 1174 and the IWC Wage Orders by failing to maintain records showing accurate daily hours worked at the corresponding wage rate, and the wages paid to each employee.

41. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and alleges that Defendants' acts and omissions have knowingly and intentionally caused harm to Plaintiff and the Class. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and alleges that Defendants have engaged in systemic violations of the Labor Code and IWC Wage Orders by maintaining practices, policies, and customs that are inconsistent with their obligations under California law.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

MINIMUM WAGE VIOLATIONS

Violation of Labor Code §§ 1194, 1194.2 and 1197

(All Claims Alleged by Plaintiff and Class Members Against All Defendants)

42. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

43. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 1182.12, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1 and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Hours and Days of Work" and "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable orders), which require non-exempt employees be timely paid at least the state or local minimum wage (if higher) for each hour of work, and further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to pay all minimum wages (plus liquidated damages).

44. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to pay Plaintiff and Class Members at least the lawful minimum wage for each hour worked in violation of Labor Code sections 1182.12, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1 and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Hours and Days of Work" and "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable orders), including payment at the lawful local and county minimum wage ordinances in effect. As a result, Defendants are liable for all associated damages, including liquidated damages for the minimum wage violations pursuant to Labor Code § 1194.2.

45. Defendants' unlawful acts and omissions deprived Plaintiff and Class Members of minimum, regular and overtime wages in amounts to be determined at trial. Plaintiff and Class Members are entitled to recover the full amount of the unpaid wages, plus liquidated damages in an amount equal to the wages unlawfully unpaid (and interest thereon), in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code sections 1194 and 1194.2.

<u>SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

FAILURE TO PAY ALL OVERTIME WAGES

Violation of Labor Code §§ 510 and 1194

46. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

47. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 204, 510, 558, 1194, and 1198, which require non-exempt employees be timely paid overtime wages all overtime hours worked, and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to pay all overtime compensation for overtime hours worked.

48. Defendants failed in their affirmative obligation to pay Plaintiff and Class Members no less than one and one-half times their respective "regular rate of pay" for all hours worked in excess of eight hours in one day, 40 hours in one week, or the first eight hours worked on the seventh day of work in any one workweek, and no less than twice their respective "regular rate of pay" for all hours over 12 hours in one day and any work in excess of eight hours on any seventh day of a workweek for such hours worked, in violation of Labor Code sections 204, 510, 558, 1194, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Hours and Days of Work" sections of the applicable orders).

49. Plaintiff and Class Members are entitled to recover the full amount of the unpaid overtime, in addition to interest, statutory and civil penalties, and attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

<u>THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

MEAL PERIOD VIOLATIONS

Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 512

50. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

51. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 226.7, 558 and 512, which require non-exempt employees be provided complaint meal periods (or meal period premiums in lieu thereof), and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to lawfully provide all meal periods and/or pay meal period premiums at the lawful regular rate of compensation.

52. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently provide Plaintiff and Class Members compliant, duty-free meal periods of not less than 30 minutes beginning before the fifth hour of hour for each work period of more than five hours per day and a second duty-free meal period of not less than 30 minutes beginning before the tenth hour of hour of work in violation of Labor Code sections 226.7, 512, 558, 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Meal Periods" sections of the applicable orders).

53. Further, Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently pay Plaintiff and Class Members one additional hour of pay at the respective regular rate of compensation for each workday that a fully compliant meal period was not provided, in violation of Labor Code sections 226.7, 512, 558, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Meal Periods" sections of the applicable orders).

54. Plaintiff and Class Members are entitled to recover the full amount of the meal period premiums owed, in addition to interest, statutory and civil penalties, and attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION

REST PERIOD VIOLATIONS

Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 516

55. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

56. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 516, which require non-exempt employees be authorized to take complaint rest periods (or rest period premiums in lieu thereof), and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to lawfully provide all rest periods and/or pay rest period premiums at the lawful regular rate of compensation.

57. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently authorize and permit Plaintiff and Class Members to receive compliant, duty-free rest periods of not less than ten (10) minutes for every four hours worked (or major fraction thereof) in violation of Labor Code sections 226.7, 516, 558, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Rest Periods" sections of the applicable orders).

58. Further, Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently pay Plaintiff and Class Members one additional hour of pay at the respective regular rate of compensation for each workday that a fully compliant rest period was not provided, in violation of Labor Code sections 226.7, 516, 558, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders.

FIFTH CAUSE OF ACTION

FAILURE TO PAY ALL PAID SICK LEAVE WAGES

Violation of Labor Code §§ 200, 218, 246 *et seq.*

59. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

60. Defendants knowingly and intentionally failed in their affirmative obligation to pay sick leave wages to Plaintiff and a paid sick leave subclass in violation of Labor Code section 246 *et seq*. Paid sick leave earnings constitute wages for purposes of California wage and hour law. (*Murphy v. Kenneth Cole Productions, Inc.* (2007) 40 Cal.4th 1094, 1103 ["Courts have recognized that 'wages' also include those benefits to which an employee is entitled as a part of his or her compensation, including money, room, board, clothing, vacation pay, and sick pay"].)

61. Labor Code section 246(l), in conjunction with Labor Code section 248 *et seq.,* 248.1, 248.2, and 248.6, in addition to the applicable County sick pay ordinances in locales worked by Class Members, govern how Defendants were required to calculate paid sick leave.

62. Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and Class Members their paid sick leave wages at one of the lawful rates set forth in the statute or ordinance because Defendants failed to include in their sick leave calculation the additional remuneration received by Plaintiff and Class Members (i.e., at the regular rate of pay and/or calculated based on total wages earned).

63. Furthermore, to the extent the paid sick leave paid constitutes Covid-related paid sick leave, Defendants knowingly and intentionally failed in their affirmative obligation to pay Covid-19

Supplemental Sick Leave wages to Class Members at the correct accrual rate or hourly pay rate in violation of Labor Code sections 246, 248.1, 248.2, and 248 *et seq.*

64. As a result, Defendants violated the Labor Code and are liable to Plaintiff and Class Members for underpaid sick leave wages, in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs.

<u>SIXTH CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

UNTIMELY PAYMENT OF WAGES

Violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 210, 218

65. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

66. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 204, 204b, and 210 which require non-exempt employees be timely paid all wages owed each pay period, and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to comply with this obligation. Labor Code § 218 authorizes individuals to sue directly for wages and penalties due under these sections, including Labor Code § 210(c)'s statutory late payment penalties.

67. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to timely pay all wages, including paid sick leave and meal and rest premiums, earned by Plaintiff and Class Members twice during each calendar month on days designated in advance by the employer as regular paydays (for employees paid on a non-weekly basis) and on the regularly-scheduled weekly payday for weekly employees, if any, in violation of Labor Code sections 204 and 204b and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable orders).

68. Plaintiff and Class Members are entitled to recover the full amount of the unpaid wages, in addition to a statutory penalty in the amount of $100 for the initial violation for each failure to pay each employee and $200 for all subsequent violations and for all willful or intentional violations for each failure to pay each employee, plus 25 percent of the amount unlawfully withheld under provided in Labor Code § 210, in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

<u>SEVENTH CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

WAGE STATEMENT VIOLATIONS

Violation of Labor Code § 226

69. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

70. This cause of action is brought by a wage statement subclass pursuant to Labor Code § 226(a) which requires non-exempt employees be provided accurate itemized wage statements each pay period, and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to comply with this obligation.

71. Defendants knowingly and intentionally failed in their affirmative obligation to provide accurate itemized wage statements to Plaintiff and Class Members resulting in injury to Plaintiff and Class Members. Specifically, the wage statements issued to Plaintiff and Class Members did not accurately state each pay period all of the information required by Labor Code § 226(a)(1)-(9).

72. Defendants' unlawful acts and omissions deprived Plaintiff and class members of accurate itemized wage statements, causing confusion and concealing wage and premium underpayments.

73. As a result, Plaintiff and Class Members are entitled to recover the statutory penalty of $50 per employee for the initial pay period in which a violation occurred and $100 per employee for each violation in a subsequent pay period, up to an aggregate penalty of $4,000 per employee, in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code section 226(e).

<u>EIGHTH CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

WAITING TIME PENALTIES

Violation of Labor Code §§ 201 *et seq*.

74. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

75. This cause of action is brought by a waiting time subclass pursuant to Labor Code §§ 201 through 203, which require an employer to timely pay all wages earned upon termination of employment, and which further provide a private right of action to recover statutory waiting time

penalties each day an employer fails to comply with this obligation, up to a maximum of 30 days wages.

76. Defendants willfully failed and continue to fail in their affirmative obligation to pay all wages earned and unpaid to Plaintiff and Class Members immediately upon termination of employment or within 72 hours thereafter for employees who did not provide at least 72 hours prior notice of his or her intention to quit, and further failed to pay those sums for 30 days thereafter in violation of Labor Code sections 201 through 203 and the IWC Wage Orders.

77. Plaintiff and Class Members are entitled to recover a waiting time penalty for a period of up to 30 days, in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

NINTH CAUSE OF ACTION

FAILURE TO REIMBURSE BUSINESS EXPENSES

Violation of Labor Code § 2802

78. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

79. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to reimburse Plaintiff and a reimbursement subclass for all necessary expenditures, losses, expenses, and costs incurred by them in direct discharge of the duties of their employment, in violation of Labor Code section 2802.

80. Defendants' unlawful acts and omissions deprived Plaintiff and Class Members of lawful reimbursements for business expenses in amounts to be determined at trial. Plaintiff and Class Members are entitled to recover the amount unreimbursed expenses of Plaintiff and Class Members in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code section 2802.

TENTH CAUSE OF ACTION

UNFAIR COMPETITION

Violation of Business and Professions Code §§ 17200 et seq.

81. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

82. Defendants have engaged and continue to engage in unfair and/or unlawful business practices in the State of California in violation of California Business and Professions Code § 17200 by committing the foregoing wage and hour violations alleged throughout this Complaint.

83. Defendants' dependence on these unfair and/or unlawful business practices deprived Plaintiff and continue to deprive other class members of compensation to which they are legally entitled, constitutes unfair and/or unlawful competition, and provides an unfair advantage to Defendants over competitors who have been and/or are currently employing workers in compliance with California's wage and hour laws. These failures constitute unlawful, deceptive, and unfair business acts and practices in violation of Business and Professions Code section 17200 *et seq.*

84. Plaintiff is a victim of Defendants' unfair and/or unlawful conduct alleged in this Complaint, and Plaintiff, as an individual and on behalf of others similarly situated, seeks full restitution of the moneys as necessary and according to proof to restore all monies withheld, acquired, and/or converted by Defendants pursuant to Business and Professions Code §§ 17203 and 17208.

85. Plaintiff does not have an adequate remedy at law for past or future violations, to the extent the statute of limitations on each of the alleged causes of action do not extend to the four year limitation provided under the UCL or to the extent the underlying Labor Code and IWC Wage Order violations do not provide a private right of action.

86. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to injunctive relief against Defendants, restitution, and other equitable relief to return all funds over which Plaintiff and class members have an ownership interest and to prevent future damage and the public interest under Business and Professions Code § 17200 *et seq.* Plaintiff and class members are further entitled to recover interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5.

ELEVENTH CAUSE OF ACTION

CIVIL PENALTIES UNDER THE PRIVATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL ACT

Violation of Labor Code §§ 2698 *et seq.*

(By Plaintiff on Behalf of the State and the Aggrieved Employees Against All Defendants)

87. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

88. Plaintiff brings this cause of action as a proxy for the State of California on behalf of the following "aggrieved employees" pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA"), codified as Labor Code section 2698 *et seq.*:

a. All current and former non-exempt employees who worked for Defendants in California at any time from one year prior to the postmark date of the initial PAGA notice through date of trial.

89. Plaintiff reserves the right to amend, supplement, or add to this description of the aggrieved employees, according to proof.

90. The State of California, via the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA"), is the real party in interest in this action with respect to this cause of action. (*Kim v. Reins Int'l California, Inc.* (2020) 9 Cal. 5th 73, 81 [The "government entity on whose behalf the plaintiff files suit is always the real party in interest."])

91. Labor Code section 2699(a) provides: "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. "

92. Labor Code section 2699(f) provides: "For all provisions of this code except those for which a civil penalty is specifically provided, there is established a civil penalty for a violation of these provisions, as follows: … (2) If, at the time of the alleged violation, the person employs one or more employees, the civil penalty is one hundred dollars ($100) for each aggrieved employee per pay period for the initial violation and two hundred dollars ($200) for each aggrieved employee per pay period for each subsequent violation."

93. Any allegations regarding violations of the IWC Wage Orders are enforceable as violations of Labor Code section 1198, which states: "[t]he employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the order is unlawful."

94. Labor Code section 2699.3 sets forth the procedure for commencing an action for civil penalties under the PAGA.

95. On or about **September 11, 2024**, Plaintiff paid the requisite PAGA filing fee and provided written notice (by online electronic filing with the LWDA and by certified mail to

Defendants) of Defendants' alleged Labor Code violations, including the facts and theories to support the alleged violations.

96. A true and correct copy of Plaintiff's written PAGA notice, entitled "Notice of Labor Code Violations" is attached hereto as Exhibit 1 and incorporated by reference as though fully set forth herein (the "PAGA notice").

97. To date, neither Plaintiff nor Plaintiff's counsel has received a response to Plaintiff's written PAGA notice from the LWDA.

98. Within 33 calendar days of the postmark date of the notice sent by Plaintiff, neither Plaintiff nor Plaintiff's counsel has received written notice by certified mail from any defendant providing a description of any actions taken to cure the alleged violations.

99. Now that at least 65 days have passed from Plaintiff notifying Defendants of these violations, without notice of cure from Defendants or notice from the LWDA of its intent to investigate the alleged allegations and issue the appropriate citations to Defendants, Plaintiff exhausted all prerequisites and commenced this civil action under Labor Code section 2699 *et seq.*

100. As set forth in the PAGA notice attached as Exhibit 1 and incorporated into this Complaint, Defendants committed the following violations and are liable for all corresponding civil penalties:

a. ***Unpaid Hours Worked/Minimum Wage.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 1194, 1197, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

b. ***Unpaid Overtime***. Violation of Labor Code §§ 510, 1194, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

c. ***Unpaid Paid Sick Leave.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 246 through 248.7.

d. ***Unpaid Meal Period Premium Wages.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 512, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

e. ***Unpaid Rest Period Premium Wages.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 516, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

f. ***Untimely Payment of Wages During Employment.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 204b, 210.

g. ***Untimely Payment of Wages Upon Separation of Employment.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 201, 202, 203, 256.

h. ***Non-Compliant Wage Statements.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 226, 226.3.

i. ***Unreimbursed Employee Expenses.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 2802, 2804.

j. ***Failure to Maintain Accurate Records.*** Violation of Labor Code § 1174; IWC Wage Orders.

101. Plaintiff seeks to collect all recoverable civil penalties for the Labor Code violations alleged in this Complaint and the PAGA notice (including amendments thereto) against Defendants pursuant to Labor Code section 2699(a) and (f), in addition to attorneys' fees, costs, and interest to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code section 2699(g).

PRAYER

Plaintiff prays for judgment as follows:

a. For certification of this action as a class action;

b. For appointment of Plaintiff as the class representative;

c. For appointment of above-captioned counsel for Plaintiff as Class Counsel;

d. For division of Class Members into appropriate classes and/or subclasses according to proof;

e. For recovery of all statutory penalties and liquidated damages;

f. For disgorgement of all amounts wrongfully obtained to the extent permitted by law;

g. For restitution and injunctive relief;

h. For attorneys' fees and costs of suit, including expert fees, to the extent permitted by law, including (without limitation) under Labor Code §§ 218.5, 226, 1194, 2802 and Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5.

i. For recovery of damages in amount according to proof;

j. For all recoverable pre- and post-judgment interest;

k. For this action to be maintained as a representative action under the PAGA;

l. For Plaintiff and counsel of record to be provided with all enforcement capability as if the action were brought by the State of California or the California Division of Labor

Enforcement;

m. For recovery of all civil penalties and other recoverable amounts under the PAGA;

n. For reasonable attorneys' fees and costs of suit, including expert fees, to the extent permitted by law, associated with the PAGA claims pursuant to Labor Code § 2699, and Code of Civil Procedure section 1021.5 and any other applicable sections; and

o. For such other relief the Court deems just and proper.

Dated: November 18, 2024

Ferraro Vega Employment Lawyers, Inc.

Nicholas J. Ferraro

Nicholas J. Ferraro
Attorney for Plaintiff Carmina Torres

EXHIBIT 1

Notice of Labor Code Violations

FERRARO VEGA
SAN DIEGO EMPLOYMENT LAWYERS

Nicholas J. Ferraro
nick@ferrarovega.com
Lauren N. Vega
lauren@ferrarovega.com

ATTORNEYS AT LAW
3333 Camino del Rio South, Suite 300
San Diego, California 92108

619-693-7727
619-350-6855 fax
ferrarovega.com

September 11, 2024

NOTICE OF LABOR CODE VIOLATIONS
CALIFORNIA LABOR CODE SECTIONS 2698 *et seq.*

VIA CERTIFIED U.S. MAIL
- Electronic Return Receipt -

First Meridian Home Care Services, Inc. dba Meridian Home Care LLC
4545 Murphy Canyon Road, Suite 204
San Diego, CA 92123

- PAGA Notice & Filing Fee -
Submitted electronically to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency

Dear LWDA Officer and Company Representatives:

This letter serves as written notice under Labor Code section 2699.3 on behalf of **CARMINA TORRES** ("Plaintiff(s)") and all other "aggrieved employees" of the following "Defendants(s)":

FIRST MERIDIAN HOME CARE SERVICES, INC. DBA MERIDIAN HOME CARE LLC;

Defendants(s) shall mean and include the foregoing in addition to any other related employer entities, individuals under Labor Code sections 558 and 558.1, and all others who may be later added upon further investigation and discovery as liable employers.

This office serves as legal counsel for Plaintiff. If the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") does not investigate the facts, allegations, and violations set forth in this notice within the statutorily prescribed 65-day period under Labor Code section 2699.3, Plaintiff intends to commence a civil action against Defendants as a proxy and agent of the State of California under the Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA"). "PAGA allows an 'aggrieved employee'—a person affected by at least one Labor Code violation committed by an employer—to pursue penalties for all the Labor Code violations committed by that employer." *Huff v. Securitas Security Services USA, Inc.* (2018) 23 Cal. App. 5th 745, 751; *Kim v. Reins International California, Inc.* (2020) 9 Cal. 73, 79. Plaintiff maintains standing to pursue these claims against Defendants as an aggrieved employee.

Through this notice, Plaintiff requests that Defendants complete an internal investigation and audit of the wage and hour and employment practices at issue and make a good faith effort to correct any violations. Plaintiff attempts to identify the non-compliant policies and practices affecting the aggrieved employees so that the parties may resolve the underlying damages and penalties in judgment or settlement approved by the Superior Court of California under Labor Code section 2699(k). Defendants are notified that any attempt to resolve this case should be conducted in coordination with Plaintiff's counsel to protect the interests of Plaintiff, the aggrieved employees, and the State of California via the LWDA. Plaintiff advises Defendants this letter should be also considered a reasonable attempt at settlement of this matter, subject to an exchange of additional documents and information. *Graham v. Daimler Chrysler Corp.* (2004) 24 Cal. 4th 553, 561.

- BACKGROUND -

Defendants employed Plaintiff during the PAGA Period in the position of Home Care Aide from about August 2022 to Present. During their employment Plaintiff and the other aggrieved employees were subject to the wage and hour and employment protections set forth in the California Labor Code and IWC Wage Orders.

Through this notice, Plaintiff informs the LWDA of the Labor Code violations set forth herein. The "aggrieved employees" include Plaintiff and the following individuals:

> All current and former non-exempt employees who worked for Defendants in the State of California during one-year period preceding the date of this notice through the current date and the date of trial in any pending action (the "<u>aggrieved employees</u>" and the "<u>PAGA Period</u>").

Plaintiff reserves the right to expand or narrow the definition of the "aggrieved employees" in the forthcoming civil action. Furthermore, Plaintiff seeks all recoverable civil penalties for Defendants' violations and reserves the right to supplement this notice as further investigation is completed and further facts, witnesses, and violations are uncovered.

- PAGA CLAIMS -

<u>Unpaid Hours Worked/Minimum Wage</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 1194, 1197, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 1194, 1197, and 1198, along with the California Minimum Wage Order, the applicable local minimum wage ordinances, and the "Hours and Days of Work" and "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable IWC Wage Orders with respect to the aggrieved employees.

<u>Labor Code section 1194</u> renders it unlawful for an employee to receive less than the legal minimum wage for hours worked in California. <u>Labor Code section 1197</u> further mandates

that "[t]he minimum wage for employees fixed by the commission is the minimum wage to be paid to employees, and the payment of a lower wage than the minimum so fixed is unlawful." Labor Code section 1198 renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The California Minimum Wage Order and the applicable sections of the IWC Wage Orders further require payment of minimum wages for all hours worked. The "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable IWC Wage Order provide that "[e]very employer shall pay to each employee, on the established payday for the period involved, not less than the applicable minimum wage for all hours worked in the payroll period, whether the remuneration is measured by time, piece, commission, or otherwise." The foregoing California wage laws require payment of "not less than the applicable minimum wage *for all hours worked* in the payroll period" and California law does not allow averaging of pay over the hours worked in the pay period, even if the total pay results in an average above the minimum wage. *Armenta v. Osmose, Inc.* (2005) 135 Cal. App. 3d 314, 324.

Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees at the lawful minimum wage rate for all hours worked, resulting in unpaid minimum wages. Defendants required Plaintiff and aggrieved employees to complete work while off-the-clock without compensation.

Defendants employed a timekeeping application that prevented Plaintiff and aggrieved employees from clocking in for work any more than five minutes before an appointment was scheduled. Therefore, if Plaintiff or the aggrieved employees arrived to work any earlier, any work completed was not accounted for via the timekeeping system, resulting in unpaid, off-the-clock work.

Next, Plaintiff also occasionally completed work off-the-clock once her shift had ended. Sometimes Plaintiff would have clocked out but she would continue working because of a client's request for further assistance, such as requests to help prepare their dinner because they were not ambulatory or needed to go to the restroom. These off-the-clock tasks could take anywhere from ten to fifteen minutes. Upon information and belief, other aggrieved employees also completed tasks off-the-clock like those Plaintiff undertook.

Additionally, upon information and belief, Plaintiff and aggrieved employees regularly worked through their meal and rest periods to keep up with the demands of the job, without receiving corresponding meal or rest period premiums. Thus, Plaintiff and aggrieved employees were not paid all minimum wages for all hours worked.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Unpaid Overtime</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 510, 1194, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 510, 1194, and 1198, along with the "Hours and Days of Work" sections of the applicable IWC Wage Orders with respect to the aggrieved employees.

<u>Labor Code section 510</u> requires "[a]ny work in excess of eight hours in one workday and any work in excess of 40 hours in any one workweek and the first eight hours worked on the seventh day of work in any one workweek shall be compensated at the rate of no less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for an employee;" and "any work in excess of 12 hours in one day shall be compensated at the rate of no less than twice the regular rate of pay for an employee;" and "any work in excess of eight hours on any seventh day of a workweek shall be compensated at the rate of no less than twice the regular rate of pay of an employee." <u>Labor Code section 1194</u> renders it unlawful for an employee to receive less than the legal overtime rate for overtime hours worked in California. <u>Labor Code section 1198</u> renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The <u>IWC Wage Orders</u> further require payment of overtime wages for all overtime hours worked, including the "<u>Hours and Days of Work</u>" sections.

Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees overtime wages and the lawful rate of pay for overtime hours worked, resulting in unpaid overtime wages.

<u>First</u>, as a result of the off-the-clock work, Defendants failed to compensate Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees for all overtime hours worked. As discussed above, Defendants employed a timekeeping system that prevented employees from clocking in to work any earlier than five minutes before the scheduled appointment start time, therefore, any work completed during that time was not accounted for.

<u>Second</u>, Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees overtime wages at the lawful rate of pay for overtime hours worked, resulting in unpaid wages. Plaintiff and aggrieved employees earned other forms of non-discretionary remuneration outside of their base hourly wages. However, when Plaintiff and aggrieved employees earned supplemental remuneration and overtime wages in the same pay periods, Defendants failed to properly factor in the bonuses into the "regular rate of pay" for overtime wages. An example of Defendants' regular rate violations for overtime are below:

PAY STATEMENT

ID: 00000003130444781

Detach along the perforation and retain for your records

DecisionHR
5801 Postal Road
PO Box 818020
Cleveland, OH 44181

First Meridian Care Services, Inc.
dba Meridian Home Care
4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204
San Diego, CA 92123

Carmina E Torres
[redacted]

PAY PERIOD INFORMATION

Payroll Frequency:	Bi-Weekly
Pay Period:	9/3/2023 - 9/16/2023
Pay Date:	9/22/2023
Work Location:	Main 4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204 San Diego, CA 92123

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

Employee ID:	1572
Employee SSN:	*-4320
Federal:	H TJ:N $0.00 $0.00 $0.00 $0.00
State(s):	CA: H 0/0 $0.00

COMPANY MESSAGE

EARNINGS

Type	Rate	Hrs/U	Current	YTD
Hourly	$21.0000	9.00	$189.00	$22,460.90
Hourly	$20.0000	32.92	$658.40	
Hourly	$19.0000	10.85	$206.15	
Hourly	$18.0000	4.01	$72.18	
Hourly	$17.0000	8.45	$143.65	
Hourly	$16.3000	0.55	$8.97	
Non Discr Bon	$0.0000		$200.00	$200.00
Overtime	$31.5981	0.04	$1.26	$7,168.44
Overtime	$30.5981	4.00	$122.39	
Overtime	$29.5981	13.41	$396.91	
Overtime	$27.5981	4.56	$125.85	
Holiday Worke	$30.5981	3.90	$119.33	$801.62
Holiday Worke	$28.5981	8.14	$232.79	
Phone Stipend	$0.0000		$2.00	$38.00
Mileage Reimb	$0.0000		$14.92	$50.32

DEDUCTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Type	Current	YTD
Employee Deductions		
HCA	$0.00	$35.00

TAXES

Type	Current	YTD
Federal Income Tax	$189.15	$1,681.27
EE Social Security	$153.57	$1,899.12
Medicare	$35.92	$444.15
CA Tax	$99.47	$832.15
CA SDI	$22.29	$275.67

Extract of Plaintiff's wage statement for the pay period ending on September 16, 2023, showing she earned a bonus of $200.00 in the same pay period when she worked overtime.

PAY STATEMENT

ID: 00000003130479350

Detach along the perforation and retain for your records

DecisionHR
5801 Postal Road
PO Box 818020
Cleveland, OH 44181

First Meridian Care Services, Inc.
dba Meridian Home Care
4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204
San Diego, CA 92123

Carmina E Torres

PAY PERIOD INFORMATION	
Payroll Frequency:	Bi-Weekly
Pay Period:	9/17/2023 - 9/30/2023
Pay Date:	10/6/2023
Work Location:	Main 4545 Murphy Canyon Rd., Ste 204 San Diego, CA 92123

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION	
Employee ID:	1572
Employee SSN:	*-4320
Federal:	H TJ:N $0.00 $0.00 $0.00 $0.00
State(s):	CA: H 0/0 $0.00

COMPANY MESSAGE

EARNINGS

Type	Rate	Hrs/U	Current	YTD
Hourly	$20.0000	17.85	$357.00	$23,979.93
Hourly	$19.0000	52.74	$1,002.06	
Hourly	$17.0000	9.41	$159.97	
Non Discr Bon	$0.0000		$100.00	$300.00
Overtime	$30.0491	25.95	$779.77	$8,176.54
Overtime	$29.0491	7.86	$228.33	
Holiday Worke		0.00	$0.00	$801.62
Phone Stipend	$0.0000		$2.00	$40.00
Mileage Reimb	$0.0000		$0.00	$50.32

DEDUCTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Type	Current	YTD
Employee Deductions		
HCA	$0.00	$35.00

TAXES

Type	Current	YTD
Federal Income Tax	$207.18	$1,888.45
EE Social Security	$162.88	$2,062.00
Medicare	$38.09	$482.24
CA Tax	$112.69	$944.84
CA SDI	$23.64	$299.31

Extract of Plaintiff's wage statement for the pay period ending on September 30, 2023, showing she earned a bonus of $100.00 in the same pay period when she worked overtime.

For each overtime hour worked during the periods in which Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees earned the additional forms of remuneration, Defendants should have (but failed to) pay overtime "at a rate not les than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for an employee" and "twice the regular rate of pay" for double time hours as required by the plain language of Labor Code section 510(a) and the IWC Wage Orders. While Defendants attempted to pay overtime at the regular rate of pay, they still underpaid the overtime rate.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Unpaid Paid Sick Leave</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 246 through 248.7

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 246 through 248.7 with respect to the aggrieved employees.

<u>Labor Code section 246</u> requires employers to provide paid sick leave to its workforce on the terms set forth in the statute. Employers must comply with the accrual, use, and notice

provisions of Labor Code sections 246, 246.5, 247, and must further ensure that they maintain the paid sick leave records required by Labor Code section 247.5. Employers have the option of providing 24 hours of paid sick leave to employees or to allow employees to accrue paid sick leave each pay period. If an employer chooses the accrual method, employees must accrue sick leave at a rate of one hour for every thirty hours worked in a given pay period as set forth in Labor Code section 246(b)(1). Under the accrual method, employees must begin accruing paid sick leave at the commencement of employment.

Employers must pay sick leave in accordance with one of the three permissible methods provided in Labor Code section 246(l): (1) "the same manner as the regular rate of pay for the workweek;" (2) "by dividing the employee's total wages, not including overtime premium pay, by the employee's total hours worked in the full pay periods of the prior 90 days;" or (3) "for exempt employee … in the same manner as the employer calculates wages for other forms of paid leave time." Labor Code sections 248.6 and 248.7 similarly require paid sick leave to be paid at a regular rate-based calculation in excess of the base hourly rate and at the lawful accrual rate.

Under Labor Code section 246(i), employers must provide employees "with written notice of the amount of paid sick leave available … for use on either the employee's itemized wage statement … or in a separate writing provided on the designated pay date with the employee's payment of wages."

Defendants failed to comply with California's paid sick leave laws with respect to the aggrieved employees. First, upon information and belief, Defendants failed to provide Plaintiff and aggrieved employees with all sick leave accrued. Plaintiff and aggrieved employees worked off the clock, overtime hours that were not accounted for when calculating an employee's accrued paid sick leave. Therefore, Plaintiff and other aggrieved employees were not awarded the total accrued sick leave time they had earned.

Further, upon information and belief, Defendants failed to pay sick leave at the correct rate because they failed to factor in bonuses, commissions, and/or other forms of remuneration, as required by section 246. Instead, Defendants paid sick leave to Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees at their base hourly rate, resulting in inaccurate sick leave accrual.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Unpaid Meal Period Premium Wages
Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 512, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 226.7, 512, and 1198, along with the related sections of the IWC Wage Orders with respect to the aggrieved employees.

Labor Code section 512 and the IWC Wage Orders require that employers provide an uninterrupted 30-minute meal period after no more than five hours of work and a second meal period after no more than 10 hours of work. *See Brinker Restaurant Corp. v. Superior Court* (2012) 53 Cal. 4th 1004, 1049. Labor Code section 226.7 requires that if a meal period is late, missed, short, or interrupted, the employer must pay one additional hour of pay at the employee's "regular rate" of compensation. *Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal. 5th 858, 862 ("We hold that the terms are synonymous: "regular rate of compensation" under section 226.7(c), like "regular rate of pay" under section 510(a), encompasses all nondiscretionary payments, not just hourly wages"). "[T]ime records showing noncompliant meal periods raise a rebuttable presumption of meal period violations, including at the summary judgment stage." *Donohue v. AMN Services, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal. 5th 58, 61. Labor Code section 1198 renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The IWC Wage Orders, including Section 11 (Meal Periods), further require one uninterrupted 30-minute meal period after no more than five hours of work and a second meal period after no more than 10 hours of work and an additional hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of compensation for each workday that a compliant meal period is not provided. Pursuant to Section 11(A) of the IWC Wage Orders, the California Supreme Court has held that the on-duty meal period exception is "exceedingly narrow" and applies only when (1) "the nature of the work prevents the employee from being relieved of all duty" and (2) *both* "the employer and employee have agreed, in writing, to the on-duty meal period." *Augustus v. AMB Security Services, Inc.* (2016) 2 Cal. 5th 257, 266-276 (emphasis added). If these two requirements are not met, then the employer owes the employee one hour of premium pay for each non-compliant meal period taken under the purported on-duty meal arrangement. *Naranjo v. Spectrum Security Services, Inc.* (2019) 40 Cal. 5th 444, 459.

First, Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees routinely experienced missed, late, short, and interrupted meal periods to keep up with the high demands of the job. Plaintiff and aggrieved employees frequently worked through their meal periods to fulfill their job duties in a timely manner. Specifically, Plaintiff worked shifts as long as twelve to sixteen hours per day without a meal break. Occasionally, when Plaintiff attempted to take a meal break she was required to check with her client before doing so, therefore, if the client needed assistance first she was required to wait to take her meal period. Moreover, oftentimes when Plaintiff would attempt to take a meal period, it was often interrupted by her clients requesting her attention or help, thus Plaintiff experienced short meal periods. Upon information and belief, Defendants did not pay Plaintiff or aggrieved employees any meal period premiums when they experienced missed, late, short, and interrupted meal periods.

To the extent Defendants paid meal period premiums, Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the other aggrieved employees a meal period premium at the "regular rate of compensation" because premiums paid did not factor in all forms of remuneration and instead paid aggrieved employees at their base hourly rate.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Unpaid Rest Period Premium Wages</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 516, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 226.7, 516, and 1198, and the related sections of the IWC Wage Orders with respect to Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees.

<u>Labor Code sections 226.7</u> and <u>516</u> and the <u>IWC Wage Orders</u> require that employers authorize and permit an uninterrupted 10-minute rest period for each four-hour period (or major fraction thereof) that an employee works. <u>Labor Code section 226.7</u> requires that if a rest period is non-compliant, the employer must pay one additional hour of pay at the employee's "regular rate" of compensation. *Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal. 5th 858, 862 ("We hold that the terms are synonymous: "regular rate of compensation" under section 226.7(c), like "regular rate of pay" under section 510(a), encompasses all nondiscretionary payments, not just hourly wages"). <u>Labor Code section 1198</u> renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The <u>IWC Wage Orders</u>, including <u>Section 12</u> (<u>Rest Periods</u>), further require one uninterrupted 10-minute rest period for each four-hour period (or major faction thereof) worked and an additional hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of compensation for each workday that a compliant rest period is not authorized or permitted.

Plaintiff and other aggrieved employees routinely experienced missed and non-compliant rest periods to keep up with the high demands of the job. Due to constant attention required by clients, Plaintiff and aggrieved employees were unable to consistently take compliant rest periods. As a result, Plaintiff and aggrieved employees worked through rest periods on a daily basis. On information and belief, Defendants had a policy and practice of not paying rest period premiums to employees who were not authorized to take rest periods.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Untimely Payment of Wages During Employment</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 204b, 210

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 204 and/or 204b and 210, as applicable, with respect to Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees.

Labor Code section 204(a) requires payment of "all wages" for non-exempt employees at least twice each calendar month. Labor Code section 204(d) states all wages due must be paid "not more than seven calendar days following the close of the payroll period." Labor Code section 204b applies to employees paid on a weekly basis and also requires the payment for all labor within the required pay periods. Labor Code section 210 provides "every person who fails to pay the wages of an employee as provided in Section … 204 … shall be subject to a civil penalty" of $100 for an initial violation and $200 plus 25% of the amount unlawfully withheld for a subsequent violation.

Because Defendants failed to pay all wages and premiums in each pay period in which such wages were earned at the lawful rate, Defendants violated Labor Code section 204 and/or 204b (for weekly employees, as applicable). Defendants violated Labor Code sections 204 and 204b by failing to pay all wages and premiums owed on the regular pay days scheduled each pay period within seven calendar days of the close of the payroll period, as a result of the policies and practices set forth in this notice. Indeed, Defendants failed to pay all premiums, overtime, regular, sick leave, and other earnings on time each payday.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Untimely Payment of Wages Upon Separation of Employment
Violation of Labor Code §§ 201, 202, 203, 256

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 201, 202, and 203 with respect to the aggrieved employees by failing to pay all wages and premiums owed upon termination of employment.

Labor Code section 201 requires that if an employer fires an employee, the wages must be paid immediately. Labor Code section 202 requires that if an employee quits without providing 72 hours' notice, his or her wages must be paid no later than 72 hours thereafter. Labor Code section 202 states that if an employee provides 72 hours' notice, the final wages are payable upon his or her final day of employment. Labor Code section 203 requires an employer who fails to comply with Labor Code sections 201 or 202 to pay a waiting time penalty for each employee, up to a period of 30 days additional compensation.

Defendants failed to pay all wages and premiums owed to aggrieved employees during their employment as set forth in this notice, and also failed to timely pay those amounts to departing employees upon separation of employment. Defendants did not pay waiting time penalties for the late payments. As a result, Defendants violated Labor Code sections 201, 202, and 203.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Non-Compliant Wage Statements</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 226, 226.3

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 226(a) and 226.3 with respect to the aggrieved employees by failing to furnish itemized wage statements each pay period that accurately list all information required by Labor Code section 226(a)(1) through (9).

<u>Labor Code section 226(a)</u> requires an employer to furnish wage statements to employees semimonthly or at the time of each payment of wages, "an accurate itemized statement in writing showing:" (1) gross wages earned, (2) total hours worked, (3) the number of piece rate units earned and applicable piece-rate in effect, (4) all deductions, (5) net wages earned, (6) the inclusive dates of the pay period, (7) the name of the employee and last four digits of SSN or an EIN, (8) the name and address of the legal name of the employer, and (9) all applicable hourly rates in effect during the pay period and the number of hours worked at each hourly rate by the employee.

Defendants failed to provide accurate itemized wage statements to the aggrieved employees each pay period as a result of the policies and practices set forth in this notice. Defendants violated Labor Code section 226(a)(1) and (5) by not listing the correct "gross wages earned" or "net wages earned," as the employees earned wages and premiums that were not paid, resulting in an inaccurate reflection, and recording of "gross wages earned" on those wage statements. Likewise, in violation of Labor Code section 226(a)(9), Defendants failed to state on employee wage statements each pay period the applicable hourly rates in effect and the number of hours worked at that rate, as Defendants failed to pay all wages and premiums owed to employees. The amounts stated are instead depreciated and underpaid, resulting in an inaccurate reflection on the pay stub.

Plaintiff and other aggrieved employees cannot promptly and easily determine from the wage statement alone the wages paid or earned without reference to other documents or information. Indeed, these wage statement violations are significant because they sow confusion among Plaintiff and other aggrieved employees with respect to what amounts were owed and paid, at what rates, the number of hours worked, and how those amounts were or should be calculated. The wage statements reflect a false statement of earnings and concealed the underlying problems and underpayments of employee wages.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Unreimbursed Employee Expenses</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 2802, 2804

Defendants violated Labor Code section 2802 with respect to the aggrieved employees by failing to reimburse the aggrieved employees for all necessary expenditures or losses incurred as part of their job duties.

<u>Labor Code section 2802</u> requires an employer to "indemnify his or her employee for all necessary expenditures or losses incurred by the employee in direct consequence of the discharge of his or her duties, or of his or her obedience to the directions of the employer, even though unlawful, unless the employee, at the time of obeying the directions, believed them to be unlawful." *See, e.g., Espinoza v. West Coast Tomato Growers, LLC*, 2016 WL 4468175 at *4, n.2 (S.D. Cal. Aug. 24, 2016, No. 14-CV-2984 W (KSC)).

<u>Labor Code section 2804</u> affirms that "[a]ny contract or agreement, express or implied, made by any employee to waive the benefits of this article or any part thereof, is null and void, and this article shall not deprive any employee or his personal representative of any right or remedy to which he is entitled under the laws of this State."

Defendants required Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees to incur costs for work-related purposes without full reimbursement. In direct consequence of their job duties, Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees unavoidably and necessarily incurred these losses, expenditures, costs, and as a matter of policy and practice. First, Defendants required Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees to use their personal cell phones to communicate with schedulers and to access the WellSky application which they used to clock in and out. Defendants paid Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees a mere two-dollar phone stipend per pay period for personal cell phone usage. That amount is insufficient to adequately reimburse Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees for their actual cell phone use.

Moreover, Plaintiff and aggrieved employees were required to travel to multiple locations throughout the day to assist clients and incur mileage costs. However, Defendants did not reimburse Plaintiff and aggrieved employees for all mileage costs. Rather, Defendants only reimbursed mileage costs if Plaintiff and aggrieved employees incurred those costs because the client requested to be driven somewhere. Thus, upon information and belief, Plaintiff and aggrieved employees were not fully reimbursed for costs incurred as a direct consequence of their job duties.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Failure to Maintain Accurate Records
Violation of Labor Code § 1174; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 1174 and the IWC Wage Orders by failing to maintain accurate employee payroll records with respect to Plaintiff and other aggrieved employees.

Labor Code section 1174 requires that employers maintain accurate "payroll records showing the hours worked daily by and the wages paid to, and the number of piece-rate units earned by and any applicable piece rate paid to, employees employed at the respective plants or establishments." Section 7(A) of the IWC Wage Orders, which may be enforced through Labor Code section 1198, mandates similar recordkeeping obligations.

Because of the policies and practices set forth in this notice, including the failure to accurately account for wages earned or hours worked, Defendants failed to accurately maintain records in accordance with Labor Code section 1174 and the IWC Wage Orders.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Attorneys' Fees and Costs
Labor Code § 2699(g)

Plaintiff has been compelled to retain the services of counsel to protect the interests of other aggrieved employees and the State of California. Plaintiff continues to incur attorneys' fees and costs, which are recoverable under California law, including Labor Code section 2699(g).

- LITIGATION HOLD NOTICE –

This letter imposes a duty upon all Defendants and their respective employees, officers, directors, executives, attorneys, human resource and payroll personnel, accountants, and other agents to preserve all physical and electronic evidence, including electronically stored information and emails, which relate to the employment of Plaintiff and the aggrieved employees specified in this notice. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, Defendants' written employment and payroll policies and handbooks; the aggrieved employees' personnel files and payroll records, such as paystubs, time records, wage statements, compensation reports, as well as the underlying electronically data in Excel or similar format. Memoranda and internal and external correspondence relating to the subject matter of this notice shall also be maintained. Failure to preserve and retain relevant evidence may constitute spoliation of evidence and result in an adverse inference or sanctions.

If you have any questions regarding the scope of your obligations to preserve evidence, please consult your legal counsel and always err on the side of caution. Periodic or regularly scheduled purges or deletions of information covered by this hold must be suspended immediately.

- CONCLUSION -

If the LWDA does not pursue enforcement, Plaintiff intends to bring representative claims on behalf of the State of California and the aggrieved employees seeking civil penalties for violations of the Labor Code and the IWC Wage Orders, along with attorneys' fees, costs, interest, and other appropriate relief.

Please advise if the LWDA intends to investigate any of the factual or legal allegations set forth in this notice. Defendants may contact Plaintiff's counsel with any questions regarding this letter or the forthcoming lawsuit.

Sincerely,

Mariela R. Romo

Cc Plaintiff Carmina Torres

Claire Vergara, claire@1stmeridiancareservices.com