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November 19, 2024

LWDA

Attn. PAGA Administrator
1515 Clay Street, Ste. 801
Oakland, CA 94612
(Via Online Submission)

Summerwinds Garden Centers of California, Inc.
2460 S. Winchester Blvd
Campbell, CA 95008
(Via Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested)
#9489 0090 0027 6637 70968 78

Summerwinds Garden Centers of California, Inc.
c/o Agent for Service of Process
CSC - LAWYERS INCORPORATING SERVICE
2710 Gateway Oaks Drive
Suite 150N
Sacramento, CA 95833
(Via Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested)
#9489 0090 0027 6637 70968 85

Re: *Christina Lucas v. Summerwinds Garden Centers of California, Inc.*
Notice of California Labor Code Violations and PAGA Penalties

To Whom It May Concern:

Please be advised that my office has been retained by Christina Lucas to pursue a California Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA") representative action (Cal. Lab. Code, §§ 2699, *et seq.*) against Ms. Lucas's former employer, Summerwinds Garden Centers of California, Inc. ("Summerwinds"). The purpose of this letter is to comply with PAGA and set forth the facts and theories of California Labor Code violations which Summerwinds is alleged to have engaged in with respect to Ms. Lucas and all other persons who worked for Summerwinds in California as a non-exempt or hourly-paid employee at any time within the applicable statutory period (the "Aggrieved Employees").

Ms. Lucas wishes to pursue this action as an aggrieved employee, on behalf of the State of California, as well as on behalf of all other Aggrieved Employees.

Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees suffered the California Labor Code violations described

below.

Ms. Lucas's Employment with Summerwinds

Summerwinds owns or owned and operates or operated an industry, business, and establishment within the State of California. Thus, and based upon all the facts and circumstances incident to Summerwinds's business in California, Summerwinds is subject to the California Labor Code, Wage Orders issued by the Industrial Welfare Commission ("IWC"), and the California Business and Professions Code.

Ms. Lucas worked for Summerwinds in California as an hourly-paid, non-exempt employee from November 14, 2022 to the present. During Ms. Lucas's employment for Summerwinds, Summerwinds paid Ms. Lucas an hourly wage and classified Ms. Lucas as non-exempt from overtime. Summerwinds typically scheduled Ms. Lucas to work at least five days in a workweek and at least eight hours per day, but Ms. Lucas regularly worked more than eight hours in a workday and/or more than 40 hours in a workweek.

Throughout Ms. Lucas's employment, Summerwinds: (1) failed to pay for all hours worked (including minimum, straight time, and overtime wages); (2) failed to provide Ms. Lucas with legally compliant meal periods (and pay corresponding meal period premium wages at the correct rate of pay); (3) failed to authorize and permit Ms. Lucas to take rest periods; (4) failed to include all non-discretionary remuneration when calculating overtime pay, sick pay, and meal and rest period premium pay; (5) failed to timely pay all final wages to Ms. Lucas when Summerwinds terminated Ms. Lucas's employment; (6) failed to furnish accurate wage statements to Ms. Lucas; and (7) failed to indemnify Ms. Lucas for expenditures. As discussed below, Ms. Lucas's experience working for Summerwinds was typical and illustrative.

Summerwinds Failed to Pay for All Hours Worked, Including Minimum, Straight Time, and Overtime Wages

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

In addition, California Labor Code section 510 provides that employees in California shall not be employed more than eight hours in any workday or 40 hours in a workweek unless they receive additional compensation beyond their regular wages in amounts specified by law.

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

Throughout the statutory period, Summerwinds maintained a policy and practice of not paying Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for all hours worked, including minimum, straight time,

and overtime wages. Summerwinds required Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees to work “off-the-clock,” uncompensated, by, for example, requiring Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees to perform work prior to clocking in for the workday, during unpaid meal periods, and after clocking out for the workday. Some of this unpaid work should have been paid at the overtime rate. In failing to pay for all hours worked, Summerwinds also failed to maintain accurate records of the hours Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees worked.

The failure to pay for all hours worked also includes a system of time rounding and/or synthetic timekeeping that resulted in unpaid compensation for time worked pre-shift, post-shift, and when meal periods were supposedly recorded. If proven to be implemented by Summerwinds, this system resulted, over a period of time, in failing to compensate Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees properly for all the time they have actually worked even though the realities of Summerwinds’s operations are such that it is possible, practical, and feasible to count and pay for work time to the minute. Accordingly, this system frequently paid Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees less than all their work time. Some of this unpaid work also should have been paid at the overtime rate. In failing to pay for all hours worked, again Summerwinds may have also failed to maintain accurate records of the hours Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees worked.

As a result, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code sections 210, 1197.1, and 2699, subdivision (f)(2) for failing to pay for all hours worked, including minimum, straight time, and overtime wages.

Failure to Provide Meal Periods

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

Despite these legal requirements, Summerwinds wrongfully failed to provide Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees with legally compliant meal periods. Summerwinds regularly, but not always, required Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees to work in excess of five consecutive hours a day without providing a 30-minute, uninterrupted, and duty-free meal period for every five hours of work, or without compensating Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for meal periods that were not provided by the end of the fifth hour of work or tenth hour of work. Instead, Summerwinds continued to assert control over Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees by requiring, pressuring, or encouraging them to perform work tasks which could not be completed without working in lieu of taking mandatory meal periods, or by denying Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees permission to take a meal period. Summerwinds also never informed Ms. Lucas of the right to, nor permitted Ms. Lucas to take, a second meal period when Ms. Lucas worked at least 10 hours in a workday. Accordingly, Summerwinds’s policy and practice was not to provide meal periods to Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees in compliance with California law.

Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees are thus entitled to be paid one hour of additional wages for each workday they were not provided with all required meal periods. Summerwinds, however, regularly failed to pay Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees the additional wages to which they were entitled for meal periods and that were not provided.

As a result, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code sections 210 and 2699, subdivision (f)(2) for failing to provide meal periods and pay meal period premium wages.

Failure to Authorize and Permit Rest Periods

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

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

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

As a result, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code sections 210 and 2699, subdivision (f)(2) for failing to authorize and permit rest periods and pay rest period premium wages.

Failure to Accurately Calculate Overtime Pay, Sick Pay, and Meal Period Premium Pay When Issuing Non-Discretionary Remuneration

Federal law defining and interpreting “regular rate” under the Fair Labor Standards Act (“FLSA”) governs this case. (*Alonzo v. Maximus, Inc.* (C.D. Cal. 2011) 832 F.Supp.2d 1122, 1129.) This “construction is supported by California case law and the DLSE Manual, each of which looks to FLSA standards to interpret the ‘regular rate of pay’ under California law.” (*Ibid.*) “Under the FLSA, the ‘regular rate’ of pay ‘at which an employee is employed shall be deemed to include all remuneration for employment paid to, or on behalf of, the employee,’ subject to certain enumerated exceptions.” (*Id.* at pp. 1129–30, quoting 29 U.S.C. § 207, subd. (e)(3).) “The burden is on Summerwinds to establish that its bonus payments fall within one of the exceptions in § 207(e).” (*Ibid.*)

The Department of Labor has interpreted section 207 to permit an employer to exclude a “discretionary bonus,” but not a “promised bonus” from the “regular rate” of pay:

Bonuses which are announced to employees to induce them to work more steadily or more rapidly or more efficiently or to remain with the firm are regarded as part of the regular rate of pay. Attendance bonuses, individual or group production bonuses, bonuses for quality and accuracy of work, bonuses contingent upon the employee’s continuing in employment until the time the payment is to be made and the like are in this category. They must be included in the regular rate of pay.

(29 C.F.R. § 778.211 (2011)); *see also* DLSE Manual § 49.1.2.4, subd. (3), incorporating 29 C.F.R. § 778.211.)

Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees received various forms of bonuses/commissions/incentive payments during pay periods where overtime was worked, but Summerwinds failed to *accurately* factor in the non-discretionary remuneration into their regular rate of pay.

As outlined by the California Supreme Court in *Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 858, 878, for purposes of paying sick pay and premiums, “the term ‘regular rate of compensation’ in section 226.7(c) has the same meaning as ‘regular rate of pay’ in section 510(a) and encompasses not only hourly wages but all nondiscretionary payments for work performed by the employee.”

Summerwinds should have included all non-discretionary remuneration when calculating overtime pay, sick pay, and meal period premium pay. Because it did not, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code sections 210 and 2699, subdivision (f)(2).

Failure to Pay All Earned Wages Twice Per Month

Based on its failure to pay Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for all wages as discussed above, Summerwinds also violated California Labor Code section 204.

Section 204 requires employers to pay employees all earned wages two times per month. Throughout the statute of limitations period applicable to this cause of action, employees were

entitled to be paid twice a month at their regular rates, including all meal period premium wages owed, rest period premium wages owed, and wages owed for overtime hours worked. However, during all such times, Summerwinds systematically failed and refused to pay the employees all wages due, and failed to pay those wages twice a month, in that employees were not paid all wages for all meal periods not provided by Summerwinds, all wages for all rest periods not authorized and permitted by Summerwinds, and all wages for all hours worked. As a result, Summerwinds owes employees the legally required wages for unpaid wages, and Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees suffered damages in those amounts.

Moreover, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code section 210 for failing to pay all earned wages twice per month.

Failure to Maintain Accurate Records of Hours Worked and Meal Periods

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

Summerwinds, however, failed to maintain accurate records of hours worked and all meal periods taken or missed by Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees.

Summerwinds's failure to provide and maintain records required by the California Labor Code and the applicable IWC Wage Orders deprived Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees the ability to know, understand and question the accuracy and frequency of meal periods, and the accuracy of their hours worked stated in Summerwinds's records. Therefore, Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees had no way to dispute the resulting failure to pay wages, all of which resulted in an unjustified economic enrichment to Summerwinds. As a direct result, Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees have suffered and continue to suffer, substantial losses related to the use and enjoyment of such wages, lost interest on such wages and expenses and attorney's fees in seeking to compel Summerwinds to fully perform its obligation under state law, all to their respective damage in amounts according to proof at trial. As a result of Summerwinds's knowing failure to comply with the California Labor Code and applicable IWC Wage Orders, Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees have also suffered an injury in that they were prevented from knowing, understanding, and disputing the wage payments paid to them.

Failure to Timely Pay All Wages at Termination

California Labor Code sections 201 and 202 provide that if an employer discharges an employee, the wages earned and unpaid at the time of discharge are due and payable immediately, and that if an employee voluntarily leaves his or her employment, his or her wages shall become due and payable not later than 72 hours thereafter, unless the employee has given 72 hours previous notice of his or her intention to quit, in which case the employee is entitled to his or her wages at the time

of quitting.

Within the applicable statute of limitations, the employment of Ms. Lucas and many other Aggrieved Employees ended, i.e., was terminated by quitting or being discharged, and the employment of others will be terminated. However, during the relevant time period, Summerwinds failed, and continues to fail to pay Ms. Lucas and terminated Aggrieved Employees, without abatement, all wages required to be paid by California Labor Code sections 201 and 202 either at the time of discharge, or within 72 hours of their leaving Summerwinds's employment. These unpaid wages include wages for unpaid work time (including minimum, straight time, and overtime wages), missed meal period premium wages, and missed rest period premium wages.

Summerwinds's conduct violates California Labor Code sections 201 and 202. California Labor Code section 203 provides that if an employer willfully fails to pay wages owed, in accordance with sections 201 and 202, then the wages of the employee shall continue as a penalty wage from the due date, and at the same rate until paid or until an action is commenced; but the wages shall not continue for more than 30 days.

Accordingly, Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover from Summerwinds their additionally accruing wages for each day they were not paid, at their regular hourly rate of pay, up to 30 days maximum pursuant to California Labor Code section 203.

Moreover, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code section 2699, subdivision (f)(2) for failing to timely pay all wages at termination.

Failure to Furnish Accurate Itemized Wage Statements

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

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

Throughout the statutory period, Summerwinds failed to furnish Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees with accurate, itemized wage statements showing all applicable hourly rates, and all gross and net wages earned (including correct hours worked, correct wages for meal periods that were not provided in accordance with California law, and correct wages for rest periods that were not authorized and permitted to take in accordance with California law). Whether unpaid premiums for missed meal periods must be reported as “wages earned” and credited as “hours worked” in wage statements has been a settled issue since at least 2022.

Because Summerwinds violated California Labor Code section 226, Ms. Lucas and similarly Aggrieved Employees suffered injury and damage to their statutorily protected rights. Accordingly, Ms. Lucas and similarly Aggrieved Employees are entitled to recover from Summerwinds the greater of their actual damages caused by Summerwinds’s failure to comply with California Labor Code section 226, subdivision (a), or an aggregate penalty not exceeding \$4,000 per employee.

Moreover, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code section 226.3 for failing to furnish accurate itemized wage statements.

Failure to Indemnify for Necessary Expenditures

California Labor Code section 2802, subdivision (a) provides that employers shall indemnify his or her employees for all necessary business expenditures or losses that have been incurred by the employees in direct discharge of his or her duties. Throughout the statute of limitations period applicable to this cause of action, Summerwinds wrongfully required Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees to pay expenses that they incurred in direct discharge of their duties for Summerwinds. Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees paid out-of-pocket for necessary employment-related expenses (which is defined as including, without limitation, work attire, work equipment, personal protective equipment, use of personal cell phones, and/or use of personal vehicles). Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees incurred substantial expenses as a direct result of performing their job duties for Summerwinds, but Summerwinds failed to indemnify Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees for these employment-related expenses.

As a result, Summerwinds is liable to Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees for the civil penalties provided for in California Labor Code sections 2802 and 2699, subdivisions (f)(2) for failing to indemnify Ms. Lucas and/or the Aggrieved Employees for necessary business expenditures.

Action for Civil Penalties Under PAGA

In light of the above, Ms. Lucas alleges that Summerwinds violated the following provisions of the California Labor Code with respect to the Aggrieved Employees:

1. California Labor Code sections 204, 510, 1194, 1197, and 1198 by failing to pay for all hours worked, including minimum wages, straight time wages, and overtime wages;

2. California Labor Code section 226.7 and applicable Wage Orders by failing to provide meal periods;
3. California Labor Code section 226.7 and applicable Wage Orders by failing to authorize and permit rest periods;
4. California Labor Code sections 226.7, 246, 510, and applicable Wage Orders by failing to include all non-discretionary remuneration when calculating overtime pay, sick pay, and meal period premium pay;
5. California Labor Code section 204 by failing to pay all earned wages two times per month;
6. California Labor Code section 1174.5 and applicable Wage Orders by failing to maintain accurate records of hours worked and meal periods taken or missed;
7. California Labor Code sections 201 to 203 by willfully failing to pay all wages owed at termination;
8. California Labor Code section 226 by failing to provide accurate itemized wage statements; and
9. California Labor Code section 2802 by failing to indemnify for necessary expenditures.

Therefore, on behalf of all Aggrieved Employees, Ms. Lucas seeks applicable penalties related to the violations alleged above pursuant to PAGA. These include, but are not limited to, penalties under California Labor Code sections 210, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1, and 2699, subdivision (f)(2).

Ms. Lucas has placed Summerwinds on notice by mailing a certified copy of this correspondence, as indicated on the first page. Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Jesenia Martinez

jesenia.martinez@wilshirelawfirm.com

Wilshire Law Firm, PLC