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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

JAZMINE MIXON, an individual, on behalf of herself, and on behalf of all persons similarly situated, Plaintiff, v. CHRISTINA, JENNIFER, & JESSICA ENTERPRISES, INC., a California corporation; MANGIONE, INC., a California corporation; and DOES 1-50, Inclusive, Defendants.	Case No. 22STCV29924 **MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF MOTION FOR FINAL APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION AND PAGA SETTLEMENT** Date: June 28, 2024 Time: 10:30 a.m. Judge: Hon. Stuart M. Rice Dept.: 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

/ / /

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

CASES

/ / /

RULES, CODES, AND STATUTES

SECONDARY SOURCES

I. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Plaintiff JAZMINE MIXON (hereinafter "Plaintiff") seeks final approval of the Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement and Class Notice ("Agreement")[1], which if approved, would provide valuable monetary relief for 685 Settlement Class Members employed by Defendants CHRISTINA, JENNIFER, & JESSICA ENTERPRISES, INC.[2] (hereinafter "Defendants") during the Class Period.

In an order dated January 16, 2024, this Court preliminarily approved the Agreement and preliminarily certified the Class. Declaration of Shani O. Zakay ("SOZ Dec."), ¶ 6. On February 8, 2024, the Court-approved Class Notice was mailed to each Class Member via U.S. First Class Mail. Declaration of Madely Nava ("Apex Dec."), ¶ 8. ***As of the filing of this motion, the Class greeted news of the Settlement with unanimous approval as <u>100%</u> of Class Members have chosen to participate in the Settlement.*** There are zero opt-outs and zero objections to the Settlement. Apex Dec., ¶¶ 11-13. The high approval by the Settlement Class evidences the clear fairness and reasonableness of the Settlement. SOZ Dec., ¶ 8.

An objective evaluation of the proposed settlement of Eight Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars and Zero Cents ($825,000.00) ("Gross Settlement Amount") confirms that the relief negotiated on behalf of the Settlement Class is fair, reasonable, and valuable. The Settlement is a product of informed, adversarial, and non-collusive negotiations, between experienced counsel, and presided over by Hon. Brian C. Walsh (Ret.) a highly regarded judge and mediator. After deducting any Court-approved attorneys' fees and litigation costs, class representative incentive payments, settlement administration fees, and the payment to the Labor & Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA"), the net settlement fund shall be distributed to the Settlement Class based on the number of Workweeks they worked while employed by Defendants during the Class Period. SOZ Dec., ¶ 8.

This Settlement provides substantial recovery to Settlement Class Members. Plaintiff estimates

[1] The Agreement is attached as Ex "1" to the Declaration of Shani O. Zakay ("SOZ Dec.") at ¶ 3. All citations to the Agreement incorporate by this reference a citation to the SOZ Dec. Further, unless indicated otherwise, capitalized terms used herein have the same meaning as those defined by the Agreement.

[2] Plaintiff's complaint alleges that Defendant Christina, Jennifer & Jessica Enterprises and Defendant Mangione, Inc. were the joint employers of Plaintiff and the Class Members. See Complaint at ¶ 3. However, Defendants vigorously disputed Plaintiff's joint employer allegations and asserted that Defendant Christina, Jennifer & Jessica Enterprises, Inc. was the only employer of Plaintiff and the Class Members and, by the same token, that Defendant Mangione, Inc. was not a joint employer. Defendants' assertions have merit and, therefore, the Class is only defined as all hourly/non-exempt employees who worked for Defendant Christina, Jennifer & Jessica Enterprises, Inc. during the Class Period.

that the Settlement, if approved, would result in a Net Settlement Amount of approximately **$471,450.00**. This will result in an average Individual Class Payment of **$688.25,** and a high payment of **$3,932.01**. Apex Dec. at ¶ 15. Aggrieved Employees will receive an average Individual PAGA Payment of **$34.45** and a high payment of **$71.31.** SOZ Dec., ¶ 9; Apex Dec. at ¶ 17.

The relief offered by the Settlement is immediate and is particularly impressive when viewed against the difficulties encountered by plaintiffs pursuing similar wage and hour cases (*see infra).* Indeed, by settling now rather than proceeding to trial, the Settlement Class will not have to wait (possibly years) for relief, nor will they have to bear the risks associated with prolonged and uncertain litigation. SOZ Dec., ¶ 10.

As discussed below, the proposed Settlement satisfies all criteria for final settlement approval under California law and falls well within the range of reasonableness. Accordingly, the Class Representative and Class Counsel respectfully request this Court grant final approval of the Agreement and entry of the proposed Final Approval Order and Judgment. SOZ Dec., ¶ 11.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE LITIGATION

Defendants operate McDonald's franchised restaurants in California, including Los Angeles County where Plaintiff worked. Plaintiff worked for Defendants as a non-exempt employee in California from 2017 to May of 2021. At all times during her employment, Plaintiff earned an hourly wage and was entitled to legally complaint meal and/or rest periods, minimum, regular, and overtime wages. Throughout her employment, Plaintiff was subject to Defendants' written policies and procedures. SOZ Dec., ¶ 12; Declaration of Jazmine Mixon ("JM Dec."), ¶¶ 2-4.

Defendants forcefully deny liability for each of Plaintiff's claims. Further, Defendants assert that they fully complied with all applicable employment laws and raised several other significant defenses to Plaintiff's claims, including but not limited to, facially compliant meal and rest period policies, compliant wage statements, reimbursement for all required business expenses, and payment of all wages upon separation. SOZ Dec., ¶ 13.

On September 14, 2022, Plaintiff filed a class action complaint in the Los Angeles Superior Court, Case Number 21STCV20624 (the "Action"). The Action alleged eight causes of action against

Defendants for: (1) Unfair Competition in Violation of California Business and Professions Code §§ 17200 *et seq*; (2) Failure to Pay Minimum Wages in Violation of Cal. Lab. Code §§ 1194, 1197, 1197.1; (3) Failure to Pay Overtime Wages in Violation of Cal. Lab. Code §§ 510 *et seq*.; (4) Failure to Provide Required Meal Periods in Violation of Cal. Lab. Code §§ 226.7 and 512; (5) Failure to Provide Required Rest Periods in Violation of Cal. Lab. Code §§ 226.7 and 512; (6) Failure to Reimburse Employees for Required Expenses in Violation of Cal. Lab. Code § 2802; (7) Failure to Provide Wages When Due in Violation of Cal. Lab. Code §§ 201, 202, and 203; and (8) Failure to Provide Accurate Itemized Wage Statements in Violation of Cal. Lab. Code § 226. On September 29, 2023, Plaintiff filed the operative First Amended Complaint, adding a ninth cause of action for Violations of the Private Attorney General Act at Labor Code Sections 2698, et seq. ("PAGA"). SOZ Dec., ¶ 14.

As part of the Settlement, on July 18, 2023, Plaintiff served Defendants and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") with a Notice of Violations ("PAGA Notice"). Plaintiff's PAGA Notice set forth the facts and theories supporting Defendants' alleged violations of various provisions of the California Labor Code and applicable Industrial Welfare Commissions ("IWC") Wage Order and of her intent to pursue claims under California Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act, Cal. Lab. Code sections 2698 *et seq* ("PAGA"). On September 29, 2023, Plaintiff filed the operative First Amended Complaint, adding a ninth cause of action for PAGA. SOZ Dec., ¶ 15.

Prior to mediation, the Parties engaged in investigation and the exchange of documents and information in connection with the Action. As part of this process, Defendants provided a significant sample of time and payroll records, as well as other documents and information, to Class Counsel to review and analyze. As discussed *infra,* Plaintiff's counsel retained the forensic consultants at Berger Consulting Group ("BCG") to analyze Defendants' time and payroll data. SOZ Dec., ¶ 16.

On April 19, 2023, the Parties participated in a full day mediation with Hon. Brian C. Walsh (Ret.), a highly regarded judge and mediator of wage and hour class actions. At the conclusion of the full-day mediation, the Parties reached a settlement based on Judge Walsh's recommendation and executed a binding Memorandum of Understanding. Thereafter, the Parties documented the agreement in the form of a Settlement Agreement, which is the subject of the instant motion. SOZ Dec., ¶ 17.

On January 16, 2024, this Court granted preliminary approval of the Settlement. SOZ Dec., ¶ 4. On February 8, 2024, the Settlement Administrator mailed the Notice Packets to all 685 Settlement Class Members. Apex Dec., ¶ 7. The mailing of the Notice Packets triggered a forty-five (45) day Response Deadline for the Settlement Class to submit requests for exclusion or objections to the Settlement. The response from the Settlement Class to the Settlement is outstanding – 100% of the Class Members are participating in the Settlement. Apex Dec., ¶¶ 11-13.

III. THE SETTLEMENT BEFORE THE COURT

The Court preliminarily approved an initial Gross Settlement Amount of Eight Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars and Zero Cents ($825,000.00) based on a total of an estimated 28,197 Workweeks worked by the Class during the Class Period. SOZ Dec., ¶ 18.

The Gross Settlement Amount shall be used: (1) to satisfy Individual Class Payments; (2) to satisfy the Class Representative Service Payment; (3) to satisfy the Class Counsel Fees and Litigation Expenses Payment; (4) to satisfy the PAGA Penalties; and (5) to satisfy the Administration Expenses incurred in this action. SOZ Dec., ¶ 19.

Defendants will fund the Settlement by transferring the Gross Settlement Amount into a Qualified Settlement Fund within thirty (30) calendar days after the Effective Date. Agreement, § 4.3. The Settlement Administrator shall mail the Individual Class Payments and Individual PAGA Payments to the Settlement Class Members and/or Aggrieved Employees no later than fourteen (14) calendar days after Defendants fund the Gross Settlement Amount. Agreement, § 4.4. The Settlement Administrator will calculate Individual Class Payments by dividing the Net Settlement Amount by the total number of Workweeks worked by all Settlement Class Members during the Class Period and multiplying the result by each Settlement Class Member's Workweeks. Agreement, § 3.2.4. The estimated average Individual Class Payment is approximately **$688.25**. SOZ Dec., ¶ 20; Apex Dec., ¶ 15.

In exchange for the valuable consideration, as of the funding of the Gross Settlement Amount, the Participating Class Members will release the Defendants from the Released Class Claims that accrued during the Class Period. The Aggrieved Employees, the LWDA, and the State of California will release the Defendants from the Released PAGA Claims for the PAGA Period. Agreement at § 5.

Apex Class Action LLC was appointed as the Settlement Administrator for the Class. The Administration Expenses Payment include those expenses of effectuating and administering the Settlement, i.e., the costs incurred to the Settlement Administrator, the costs of giving notice to the Class, the costs of administering and disbursing the Individual Settlement Payments, and the fees of the Settlement Administrator approved for reimbursement by the court. The Settlement Administrator expenses are $11,300.00. Apex Dec., ¶ 18. These expenses shall be paid from the Gross Settlement Amount. Agreement, § 3.2.3.

Subject to Court approval, Class Counsel shall seek payment of Class Counsel's Fees and Litigation Expenses in the amount of $297,250.00, comprised of attorneys' fees equal to one-third of the Gross Settlement Amount estimated to be at least $272,250.00 and up to $25,000.00 for actually incurred litigation expenses. Plaintiff's counsel is to split the fees equally between the SOZ Law Firm, APC and Zakay Law Group, APLC. The Agreement also provides for an Class Representative Service Payment in the amount of $10,000.00 for Plaintiff, in consideration of her time, risk, and efforts as the Class Representative on behalf of the Settlement Class. Agreement, § 3.2.1.

As explained in further detail below, the Settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable to the class and should be granted final approval. This is evidenced by the unanimous approval of the Settlement by the Settlement Class, the absence of any objections to the Settlement and the average Individual Class Payment of **$688.25**. APEX Dec., ¶¶ 11-13, 15; SOZ Dec., ¶ 20.

IV. GENERAL STANDARDS APPLICABLE TO JUDICIAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENTS

Settlements of disputed claims are favored by the courts. *Huens v. Tatum* (1997) 52 Cal.App.4th 259, 265. In evaluating settlements, the courts have long recognized that compromise is particularly appropriate since such litigation is difficult and notoriously uncertain. *7-Eleven Owners for Fair Fran. v. Southland Corp.* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 1135, 1151 ("voluntary conciliation and settlement are the preferred means of dispute resolution. This is especially true in complex class action litigation").

"[T]o prevent fraud, collusion or unfairness to the class, the settlement or dismissal of a class action requires court approval." *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.* (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1801 *citing*

Malibu Outrigger Bd. Of Governors v. Superior Court (1980) 103 Cal.App.3d 573, 578-579. The court must decide whether the proposed settlement falls within the range of reasonable settlements, considering that settlements are compromises between the parties reflecting subjective, unquantifiable judgments concerning the risks and possible outcomes of litigation. *See also Wershba v. Apple Computer* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 246 (The proposed settlement is not to be judged against a hypothetical or speculative measure of what might have been achieved had plaintiffs prevailed at trial."). In *Wershba*, appellants argued that the settlement was too low given the "clear" liability, however, the Court rejected this argument and held that "the merits of the underlying class claims are not a basis for upsetting the settlement of a class action." *Wershba*, *supra*, at 246; *see also 7-Eleven*, *supra*, at 1150.

In these cases, Courts have repeatedly emphasized that there is a strong initial presumption that the compromise is fair and reasonable. *Wershba*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 245. Courts should not substitute their judgment for that of the parties who negotiated the settlement. *Id.* At 246. The presumption of fairness exists where: (1) investigation and discovery are sufficient to allow counsel and the court to act intelligently; (2) the settlement is reached through arm's-length bargaining; (3) counsel is experienced in similar litigation; and (4) the percentage of objectors is small. *Dunk*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1801, citing Newberg & Conte, *Newberg on Class Actions*, (3d ed. 1992) §11.41, pp. 11-91. Here, all of these factors support a presumption of fairness.

The essential evaluation is whether, given the risks of litigation and the range of probable results, the settlement, taken as a whole, is fair, reasonable, and adequate to all concerned. Here, the facts and circumstances compel the conclusion that the proposed settlement satisfies that standard.

V. <u>THE SETTLEMENT IS FAIR, REASONABLE, AND ADEQUATE</u>

The court must determine whether the settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable. *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.* (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1801; *see also Officers for Justice v. Civil Service Com'n* (9th Cir. 1982) 688 F. 2d 615, 625. The purpose of the requirement is "the protection of those class members, including the named plaintiffs, whose rights may not have been given due regard by the negotiating parties." *Dunk*, *supra*, at 1801.

The trial court has broad discretion to determine whether the settlement is fair. *Rebney v. Wells*

Fargo Bank (1990) 220 Cal.App.3d 1117, 1138. "The well-recognized factors that the trial court should consider in evaluating the reasonableness of a class action settlement agreement include 'the strength of plaintiffs' case, the risk, expense, complexity and likely duration of further litigation, the risk of maintaining class action status through trial, the amount offered in settlement, the extent of discovery completed and the stage of the proceedings, the experience and views of counsel, the presence of a governmental participant, and the reaction of the class members to the proposed settlement.' [Citations.]" *Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc.* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 116, 128; see also *Munoz v. BCI Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Los Angeles* (2010) 186 Cal.App.4th 399, 408.

The list of factors is not exhaustive and should be tailored to each case. *Dunk*, *supra*, at 1801. Due regard should be given to what is otherwise a private consensual agreement between the parties. *Id.* The inquiry "must be limited to the extent necessary to reach a reasoned judgment that the agreement is not the product of fraud or overreaching by, or collusion between, the negotiating parties, and that the settlement, taken as a whole, is fair, reasonable and adequate to all concerned." *Id.* "Ultimately, the [trial] court's determination is nothing more than 'an amalgam of delicate balancing, gross approximations and rough justice.' [Citation omitted.]" *Id.*

These factors are analyzed seriatim below and all support final approval of the class action settlement before this Court.

A. <u>Class Counsel Conducted a Thorough Investigation.</u>

As detailed in the motion for preliminary approval, Class Counsel thoroughly investigated the proposed Class Members' claims, applicable law, and potential defenses. Specifically, Class Counsel assessed the value of the class claims using data and documents provided by Defendants through informal discovery. Class Counsel obtained time, payroll, and policy records, as well as data regarding the number of Class Members, workweeks, and average rate of pay to assess damages before mediation. Class Counsel retained Berger Consulting Group ("BCG") to analyze Defendants' time and payroll data to formulate damage models estimating Defendants' liability exposure. Class Counsel's investigation, research, experience, and damage models informed and guided the mediated negotiations that resulted in this settlement. Accordingly, Plaintiff's Counsel fully understood the strengths and weaknesses of the class claims before the parties reached a settlement. SOZ Dec., ¶ 21-26.

B. <u>The Parties Settled At Mediation</u>.

On April 19, 2023, the Parties conducted a full-day mediation with Hon. Brian C. Walsh (Ret.), a highly regarded judge and mediator. Judge Walsh helped to manage the Parties' expectations and provided a useful, neutral analysis of the issues and risks to both sides. The Parties made substantial progress with Judge Walsh's assistance. Namely, the Parties exchanged information regarding their respective claims and defenses, including their respective evaluations of the damages. After a full day of arm's length and adversarial negotiations, the mediation concluded with a settlement. The amount of the service award and many other terms were not negotiated until after the parties agreed to the Gross Settlement Amount. No action would likely have been taken by Class Members individually, and no compensation would have been recovered for them, but for Plaintiff's service on behalf of the Class. SOZ Dec., ¶ 27.

C. <u>Class Counsel is Experienced in Similar Litigation.</u>

Class Counsel in this matter has extensive class action experience in multiple fields and has represented tens-of-thousands of persons in class actions. Counsel has previously litigated similar wage and hour class actions involving similar claims. Class Counsel has been approved as class counsel in similar wage and hour class actions throughout the State of California. As such, courts throughout the California have deemed Class Counsel experienced and knowledgeable in this area of law. Class Counsel has participated in every aspect of the settlement discussions and has concluded the settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable and in the best interests of the Class. SOZ Dec., ¶ 28; Declaration of Jean-Claude Lapuyade ("JCL Dec."), ¶¶ 2-10.

D. <u>The Settlement Class Responded Positively to the Settlement.</u>

The reaction of the Settlement Class unequivocally supports approval of the Settlement. Significantly, after dissemination of the notice to the Settlement Class, which provided each class member with the terms of the Settlement, including the specific estimated Individual Class Payments, ***<u>zero</u>*** of the 685 members of the Class opted-out of the Settlement. Moreover, there are ***<u>zero</u>*** objections. Stated differently, **<u>100%</u>** of the Class have chosen to participate in the Settlement. SOZ Dec., ¶ 8; Apex

Dec., ¶¶ 11-13.

The high approval by the Settlement Class strongly supports a finding that the Settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate. *See In re Austrian & German Bank Holocaust Litigation* (S.D.N.Y. 2000)80 F.Supp.2d 164, 175 ("If only a small number of objections are received, that fact can be viewed as indicative of the adequacy of the settlement."); *Stoetzner v. U.S. Steel Corp.* (3d. Cir. 1990) 897 F.2d 115, 118-119 (29 objections out of 281 member class "strongly favors settlement"); *Laskey v. Int'l Union* (6th Cir. 1981) 638 F.2d 954 (The fact that 7 out of 109 class members objected to the proposed settlement should be considered when determining fairness of settlement.). Consequently, Class Counsel respectfully request the Court to follow the high approval of the Settlement Class and grant final approval of the Settlement.

E. <u>The Gross Settlement Amount is Fair and Reasonable.</u>

The Gross Settlement Amount of Eight Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars and Zero Cents ($825,000.00) in this case is fair and well within the range of recognized reasonableness. The *Kullar* court acknowledged that "as the court does when it approves a settlement as in good faith under Code of Civil Procedure section 877.6, the court must at least satisfy itself that the class settlement is within the 'ballpark' of reasonableness." *Kullar*, *supra,* at 129; *See Tech-Bilt, Inc. v. Woodward-Clyde & Associates*, 38 Cal.3d 488, 499-500 (1985).)

Here, the Settlement is clearly within the "ballpark" of reasonableness because the Settlement provides a sizeable recovery to the Settlement Class and need not necessarily obtain 100 percent of the damages sought to be fair, reasonable, and ultimately, meaningful. *Wershba*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 250. While the Gross Settlement Amount of Eight Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars and Zero Cents ($825,000.00) represents a discount on Defendants' potential exposure if Plaintiff established liability on all claims and was awarded the full amount of the estimated damages at trial, this compromise is reasonable because (1) the formidable defenses raised by Defendants presented a risk that could award significantly less in damages than Plaintiff's estimate and (2) any theoretical post-trial recovery may require many more years of litigation, resulting in added fees and costs without any guarantee of recovery for the Class. SOZ Dec., ¶ 29.

As detailed at the time of preliminary approval, the Gross Settlement Amount is fair and reasonable considering the nature and magnitude of the claims being settled and the various potential impediments to recovery. Class Counsel developed an economic damages model measuring Defendants' liability exposure while accounting for the uncertainties of continued litigation. The economic damage model was informed by Class Counsel's investigation, including the analysis of a significant sample of time and payroll data. As detailed in greater depth during the preliminary approval process, Class Counsel projected a range of Defendants; liability exposure for the claims asserted on behalf of the Settlement Class. The Gross Settlement Amount represents approximately 34.5% of Defendants' *class-wide* liability exposure as estimated by Class Counsel at the time of mediation. SOZ Dec., ¶ 30.

In *Stovall-Gusman v. W.W. Granger, Inc.,* 2015 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 78671, at * 4, the District Court for the Northern District of California granted final approval in a wage and hour misclassification action and found that the Gross Settlement Amount representing 10% of the estimated trial award was within the "range of reasonableness." In *Dunleavy v. Nadler (In re Mego Fin. Corp. Sec. Litig.)* (9th Cir. 2000) 213 F.3d 454, 459, the Ninth Circuit approved a settlement representing "roughly one-sixth of the potential recovery." Given the amount of the settlement here as compared to potential value of the claims, particularly the strength of Plaintiff's action, the settlement is clearly fair and reasonable[3].

The calculation methodology used to compensate the Settlement Class for the alleged damages was negotiated at the time of the Settlement. The methodology is fair, objective, and impartial, and is based on the number of Workweeks each Settlement Class Member worked for Defendants during the Class Period. The number of Workweeks for the Settlement Class Members is established through Defendants' data and documented compensation records. The Settlement Administrator is responsible for calculating the Individual Class Payments by dividing the Net Settlement Amount by the total number of Workweeks worked by all Settlement Class Members during the Class Period and multiplying

[3] *See also Viceral v. Mistras Grp., Inc.* (N.D. Cal. Oct. 11, 2016, No. 15-CV-02198) 2016 WL 5907869, at *3, 7 (approving a California wage and hour settlement where the class received 11.6% of the estimated total liability, or approximately $29 per work week); *Leverage v. Traeger Pellet Grills, LLC* (N.D. Cal. June 28, 2017, No. 16-CV-00784) 2017 WL 2797811, at *7 (Approving a California wage and hour settlement where the class received 18% of the estimated total liability); *see also In re Newbridge Networks Sec. Litig.* (D.D.C. Oct. 23, 1998) 1998 WL 765724, at *2 ("Courts have not identified a precise numerical range within which a settlement must fall in order to be deemed reasonable; but an agreement that secures roughly six to twelve percent of a potential trial recovery, while preventing further expenditures and delays and eliminating the risk that no recovery at all will be won, seems to be within the targeted range of reasonableness.").

the result by each Settlement Class Member's Workweeks. This process establishes an objectively fair and reasonable procedure to compensate the Settlement Class. Agreement, § 3.2.4.

The settlement also provides significant relief to the Participating Class Members. After deductions for the Class Counsel's Attorneys' Fees and Litigation Expenses, Administration Expenses, the PAGA Penalties, and the Class Representative Service Award, the Net Settlement Amount is currently estimated to be $471,450.00. Apex Dec., ¶ 14. The average settlement payment is approximately **$688.25**, and the highest is approximately $**3,932.01**. Apex Dec., ¶ 15. This average net recovery is on par with many wage and hour class action settlements approved by California state and federal courts. *See, e.g., Palencia v. 99 Cents Only Stores,* No. 34-2010-00079619 (Sacramento County Super. Ct) (average net recovery of approximately $80); *Fukuchi v. Pizza Hut,* Case No. BC302589 (LA. County Super. Ct.) (average net recovery of approximately $120); *Contreras v. United Food Group, LLC,* Case No. BC389253 (L.A. County Super. Ct.) (average net recovery of approximately $120); *Ressler v. Federated Department Stores, Inc.,* Case No. BC335018 (L.A. County Super. Ct.) (average net recovery of approximately $90); *Doty v. Costco Wholesale Corp.,* Case No. CV05-3241 FMC-JWJx (C.D. Cal. May 14, 2007) (average net recovery of approximately $65); *Sorenson v. PetSmart, Inc.,* Case No. 2:06-CV-02674-JAM-DAD (ED. Cal.) (average net recovery of approximately $60); *Lim v. Victoria's Secret Stores, Inc.,* Case No. 04CC00213 (Orange County Super. Ct.) (average net recovery of approximately $35); and *Gomez v. Amadeus Salon, Inc.,* Case No. BC392297 (L.A. Super. Ct.) (average net recovery of approximately $20). Additionally, Defendants must separately fund their share of any employer side payroll taxes. Agreement, § 3.1.

Clearly the goal of this litigation to obtain redress for the class has been met by this Settlement. Given the amount of the Settlement, the risks of litigation and the arm's length negotiations between experienced counsel, the settlement is fair and reasonable, and is therefore entitled to final approval. SOZ Dec., ¶ 31.

F. <u>The Strength of Plaintiff's Case and Risks of Continued Litigation</u>

Although Class Counsel believes strongly in Plaintiff's claims, it would be misguided to ignore the asserted defenses. If successful on any one of its defenses, Defendants could defend the action or, at least, drastically undercut Plaintiff's claims. SOZ Dec., ¶ 32. As the federal court in *Glass v. UBS Fin. Servs.*, 2007 WL221862 held, where the parties faced uncertainties similar to those in this litigation:

> ***In light of the above-referenced uncertainty in the law, the risk, expense, complexity, and likely duration of further litigation likewise favors the settlement.*** Regardless of how this Court might have ruled on the merits of the legal issues, the losing party likely would have appealed, and the parties would have faced the expense and uncertainty of litigating an appeal. The expense and possible duration of the litigation should be considered in evaluating the reasonableness of [a] settlement.

With respect to the most immediate challenge, i.e., class certification, the risks attendant to the certification of similar wage and hour claims are demonstrated by *Magadia v. Wal-Mart Associates, Inc.* (9th Cir. 2021) 999 F.3d 668. There, the Ninth Circuit, vacated reversed and remanded a $110 million judgement against an employer for, *inter alia*, inaccurately paying overtime, and directed the trial court to enter judgement in favor of the employer. *See also O'Conner v. Uber Technologies, Inc.* (9th Cir. 2018) 904 F.3d 1087 (decertification of wage and hour misclassification action); *see also Duran v. U.S. Bank National Association* (2014) 59 Cal.4th 1, 31 (reversing a trial verdict in favor plaintiffs in a wage and hour class action)); *Tien v. Tenet Healthcare Corp.* (2012) 209 Cal.App.4th 1077, 1088 ("[T]he reason, if any, that employees might not take their breaks were predominantly individualized questions of fact not susceptible to class treatment."); *Ali v. U.S.A. Cab Ltd.* (2009) 176 Cal.App.4th 1333, 1341 (affirming denial of certification because employees' declarations attesting to having taken meal and rest breaks demonstrated that individualized inquiries were required to show harm); *Campbell v. Best Buy Stores, L.P.*, (C.D. Cal. 2013) 2013 WL 5302217 at *11-13 (following *Brinker* and denying certification of proposed off-the-clock and rest and meal break classes due to lack of uniform policy); *Brown v. Fed Express Corp.* (C.D. Cal. 2008) 249 F.R.D. 580, 587-88 (denying certification of driver meal and rest period claims based on the predominance of individual issues). Collectively, the examples cited above illustrate the uncertain nature of class litigation. Consequently, the uncertainty of obtaining certification through a contested motion is a significant risk factor favoring settlement. SOZ Dec., ¶ 33.

The fast-changing landscape of wage and hour litigation can also drastically affect the value of Plaintiff's claims and, in fact, already has. SOZ Dec., ¶ 34.

In a similar wage and hour case, the federal district court in *Hopson v. Hanesbrands Inc.*, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 33900 at * 19-20 (N.D. Cal. 2009), granted approval of an overtime class action settlement and explained:

> **Plaintiffs may have a strong case, but the risks inherent in continued litigation are great**. Defendants strongly deny liability for Plaintiffs' principal claim that full-time Service Associates were misclassified as exempt. In addition to the uncertainties raised by Defendants at the preliminary stage regarding Plaintiffs' chance of success in this case, Defendants notes that the question of an employer's duty to provide rest and meal periods is an open one, signaling even less certainty for Plaintiffs.....[**T]he Total Settlement amount and the Class Members' expected net recovery, after fees and other costs are deducted, appear to be a reasonable compromise, in light of the risks of litigation**.

See also Browning v. Yahoo!, Inc., 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 86266, at *30 (N.D. Cal. 2007) ("In considering the strength of Plaintiffs' case, legal uncertainties at the time of settlement - particularly those which go to fundamental legal issues - favor approval.").

As recognized in a federal decision approving settlement of an overtime wage class action:

> **The potential complexity and possible duration of trial also weigh in favor of granting final approval**. Plaintiffs acknowledge the difficulties of proving damages, recognize the uncertainty of outcome, and believe defendant would appeal in the event of adverse judgment. A post-judgment appeal would require many years to resolve and delay payment to class members. Plaintiffs believe the benefits of a guaranteed recovery today outweigh an uncertain future result. Accordingly, plaintiffs argue, and the Court agrees, the actual recovery confers substantial benefits on the class that outweigh the potential recovery through full adjudication.

Barcia v. Contain-A-Way, Inc., 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 17118, *9 (S.D. Cal. 2009); see also *Louie v. Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc*., 2008 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 78314, *14 (S.D. Cal. 2008).

In sum, while other cases have approved class certification in wage and hour claims, class certification in this action would have been hotly disputed and was by no means a foregone conclusion. Where both sides face significant uncertainty, as here, the attendant risks favor settlement. *Hanlon v. Chrysler Corp.* (9th Cir. 1998) 150 F.3d 1011, 1026.)

As demonstrated by the decisions in *Magadia, supra,* 999 F.3d 668, *O'Conner v. Uber Technologies* (N.D. Cal. 2018) 82 F.Supp.3d 1133 and *Duran v. U.S. Bank National Assn.* (2014) 59

Cal.4th 1, the complexities and duration of further litigation cannot be overstated. There is little doubt that if Defendants faced a large adverse judgement, Defendants undoubtedly have the resources to post a bond and appeal. A post-judgment appeal by Defendants would have required many more years to resolve, assuming the judgment was affirmed. If the judgment was not affirmed in total, then the case could have dragged on for years after the appeal. The benefits of a guaranteed recovery today outweigh an uncertain result three or more years in the future. SOZ Dec., ¶ 35.

The Class Representative and Class Counsel recognize the expense and length of a trial against Defendants through possible appeals which could take another three years. In arriving at their informed belief that the present settlement is fair and adequate, Class Counsel accounted for the uncertain outcome and risk inherent in complex actions such as this one. Class Counsel is also mindful of and recognize the inherent problems of proof under, and alleged defenses to, the claims asserted in the litigation. Moreover, post-trial motions and appeals would have been inevitable. Costs would have mounted, and recovery would have been delayed if not denied, thereby reducing the benefits of an ultimate victory. Class Representative and Class Counsel believe that the Settlement confers substantial monetary and non-monetary benefits upon the Class. Based upon their evaluation, Class Representative and Class Counsel have determined that the Settlement set forth in the Agreement is in the best interest of the Class, is fair, reasonable, and adequate, and should be granted final approval. SOZ Dec., ¶ 36.

VI. THE PENALTIES UNDER THE PRIVATE ATTORNEY GENERAL ACT OF 2004 ARE REASONABLE

Where settlements "negotiate a good faith amount" for PAGA settlements and "there is no indication that this amount was the result of self-interest at the expense of class members," such amounts are generally considered reasonable. *Hopson v. Hanesbrands Inc.,* No. CV-08-0844 EDL, 2009 WL 928133, at *9 (N.D. Cal. Apr. 3, 2009). Courts routinely approve of amounts for PAGA settlements in the range of zero to two percent of the settlement. *See id.* at *1, 9 (approving a PAGA payment of 0.3%); *Jack v. Hartford Fire Ins. Co.*, No. 09cv1683 MMA (JMA), 2011 WL 4899942, at *6 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 13, 2011) (approving a PAGA payment of 0.25%); *McKenzie v. Fed. Express Corp.*, No. CV 10-02420 GAF (PLAx), 2012 WL 12882124, at *5 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 23, 2012) (acknowledging that courts approve PAGA claim settlements in the range of zero to two percent of the total settlement).

Here, Plaintiff and Defendants negotiated a good faith PAGA Payment in the amount of $35,000.00 which is 4.24% of the Gross Settlement Amount. As illustrated above, this amount falls well within the range of approved PAGA Settlements. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the PAGA Payment ($26,250.00) will be paid to the LWDA ("LWDA Payment") with the remaining twenty-five percent (25%) to be distributed to the Aggrieved Employees, which is within the range of PAGA Payment approved by courts and should be approved. SOZ Dec., ¶ 37.

Class Counsel gave the LWDA notice of this Settlement and proposed allocation by filing a copy of the Settlement, the Motion for Preliminary Approval, and this motion seeking final approval with the LWDA. SOZ Dec., ¶¶ 5-6, 38. By not registering an objection with either Class Counsel or the Court, the LWDA has accepted and approved of the proposed PAGA Payment.

VII. CONCLUSION

Plaintiff respectfully submits that the proposed settlement satisfies the standard of fairness established in California law and should therefore be finally approved as fair, reasonable, and adequate and requests entry of the Final Approval Order and Judgment submitted herewith.

Dated: June 4, 2024

ZAKAY LAW GROUP, APLC

By: ______________________
Shani O. Zakay, Esq.

Attorney for Plaintiff