

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Christine McEvoy and Leng Sam v. Henry Industries, Inc.

McEvoy v. Henry Industries · No. 2:22-cv-01678-DJC-SCR · Decided April 24, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California denied without prejudice Plaintiffs’ motion for preliminary approval of a \$300,000 class, FLSA collective, and PAGA settlement with Henry Industries, Inc. The Court identified insufficient information concerning FLSA collective certification, the adequacy and valuation of the settlement, the existence of a bona fide FLSA dispute, submission of the settlement to the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, and the experience of proposed class counsel and representatives. The parties were ordered to supplement their motion within thirty days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Daniel J. Calabretta
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	April 24, 2025
DOCKET	2:22-cv-01678-DJC-SCR
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs moved for preliminary approval of a proposed Rule 23 class, FLSA collective, and PAGA settlement. The court denied the motion without prejudice and directed the parties to supplement it.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	For preliminary approval, the court must determine whether it will likely be able to certify the proposed Rule 23 class and approve the settlement under Rule 23(e)(2); determine whether proposed FLSA collective members are similarly situated and whether the settlement fairly and reasonably resolves a bona fide dispute; and assess whether the PAGA settlement is fundamentally fair, reasonable, and adequate.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court order denying preliminary settlement approval without prejudice.
PARTIES	Christine McEvoy, Leng Sam v. Henry Industries, Inc.

TOPICS

class actions flsa wage and hour civil procedure remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure employment law wage and hour class actions FLSA litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the proposed settlement could receive preliminary approval without an adequate showing that the proposed FLSA collective was similarly situated and properly defined and certified.
2. Whether the proposed settlement amount and allocation were adequately supported by a valuation of the maximum exposure on the asserted claims.
3. Whether the record established a bona fide dispute over FLSA liability sufficient to support an FLSA settlement and release.
4. Whether the parties had submitted the proposed PAGA settlement to the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency as required.
5. Whether the record adequately supported appointment of proposed class counsel, designation of class representatives, and proposed incentive awards.

HOLDINGS

1. A court may not preliminarily approve a settlement involving Rule 23 class and FLSA collective claims without addressing conditional certification of both the class and collective and determining whether the settlement falls within the range of possible approval.
2. A proposed class settlement cannot receive preliminary approval when the record does not adequately explain the valuation of the asserted claims and the defendants' maximum potential exposure.
3. The court must have sufficient information to determine that a bona fide dispute exists concerning the existence or extent of FLSA liability before approving an FLSA settlement or release.
4. A proposed PAGA settlement must be submitted to the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency at the same time it is submitted to the court before the court can determine whether the statutory requirement has been satisfied.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To grant a preliminary approval of a settlement involving class and collective claims, courts must both conditionally certify the Rule 23 class and FLSA collective and find that the settlement terms fall within the range of possible approval.” (at 1)

“A court will not approve a settlement of an action in which there is a certainty that the FLSA entitles plaintiffs to the compensation they seek, because it would shield employers from the full cost of complying with the statute.” (at 1)

“The Motion is problematic because nowhere does Plaintiff explicitly request certification of an FLSA collective action.” (at 1)

“The Court has not been provided sufficient information to determine if it is uncertain that Plaintiffs could succeed on their FLSA claims.” (at 1)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs sought approval of a \$300,000 settlement involving approximately 80 California courier and delivery drivers employed by Henry Industries, Inc. between 2018 and 2022. Plaintiffs alleged that the drivers were misclassified as independent contractors and consequently were denied minimum wages, overtime, wage statements, expense reimbursement, and related statutory protections under California law, the FLSA, and PAGA. The settlement allocated funds to PAGA claims, attorneys' fees, administration costs, incentive payments, a Rule 23 fund, and an FLSA fund.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The action concerns alleged wage-and-hour violations arising from Defendant's classification of California delivery drivers as independent contractors. The parties exchanged initial disclosures, participated in mediation, continued settlement negotiations, and agreed to a proposed \$300,000 settlement. Plaintiffs then moved for preliminary settlement approval; the matter was submitted without a hearing. The court denied the motion without prejudice because the record did not adequately address FLSA collective certification, settlement valuation, the existence of a bona fide FLSA dispute, submission to the LWDA, and counsel and representative adequacy.

DISPOSITION

other

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The parties must supplement the motion within thirty days with information addressing FLSA collective certification and definition, the maximum exposure on the asserted claims, the existence of a bona fide FLSA dispute, submission of the proposed settlement to the LWDA, and the experience and adequacy of proposed class counsel and class representatives, including time spent in the litigation.

CASES CITED

- *Alcazar v. OEI Holdings, LLC*, No. 2:19-cv-01209-KJM-AC, 2023 WL 2876833, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Apr. 10, 2023)
- *Campbell v. City of Los Angeles*, 903 F.3d 1090, 1109 (9th Cir. 2018)
- *Kerzich v. County of Tuolumne*, 335 F. Supp. 3d 1179, 1184 (E.D. Cal. 2018)
- *Kim v. Reins International California, Inc.*, 9 Cal. 5th 73, 87 (2020)
- *Canela v. Costco Wholesale Corp.*, 971 F.3d 845, 856 (9th Cir. 2020)
- *Hamilton v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 39 F.4th 575, 583 (9th Cir. 2022)

- Haralson v. U.S. Aviation Services Corp., 383 F. Supp. 3d 959, 967-972 (N.D. Cal. 2019)
- Adams v. Inter-Con Security Systems, 242 F.R.D. 530, 539 (N.D. Cal. 2007)
- Hoffmann-La Roche, Inc. v. Sperling, 493 U.S. 165, 170 (1989)
- Thompson v. Costco Wholesale Corp., No. 3:14-cv-02778-CAB-WVG, 2017 WL 697895, at *8 (S.D. Cal. Feb. 22, 2017)
- Schmidt v. Vision Service Plan, No. 2:20-cv-2400-KJN, 2023 WL 5613103, at *3 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 30, 2023)
- Sakkab v. Luxottica Retail North America, Inc., 803 F.3d 425, 436 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Uribe v. Crown Building Maintenance Co., 70 Cal. App. 5th 986, 1001 (2021)
- Nen Thio v. Genji, LLC, 14 F. Supp. 3d 1324, 1340 (N.D. Cal. 2014)
- Brewer v. General Nutrition Corp., No. 4:11-cv-03587-YGR, 2013 WL 100195, at *3 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 7, 2013)
- Sharobiem v. CVS Pharmacy, Inc., No. 2:13-cv-09426-GHK-FFM, 2015 WL 10791914, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Sept. 2, 2015)
- Botonis v. Bimbo Bakeries USA, Inc., No. 2:22-cv-01453-DJC-SCR, 2024 WL 100545, at *9-*10 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 9, 2024)
- Selk v. Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District, 159 F. Supp. 3d 1164, 1172 (S.D. Cal. 2016)
- Maciel v. Bar 20 Dairy, LLC, No. 1:17-cv-00902-DAD-SKO, 2018 WL 5291969, at *4 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 23, 2018)
- Morel v. HNTB Corp., No. 3:22-cv-00408-AJB-AHG, 2025 WL 242084, at *18 (S.D. Cal. Jan. 17, 2025)
- Almanzar v. Home Depot U.S.A., Inc., No. 2:20-cv-00699-KJN, 2022 WL 2817435, at *15 n.11 (E.D. Cal. July 19, 2022)
- Martinez v. Sunnova Energy Corp., No. 2:24-cv-06346, 2025 WL 732350, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 7, 2025)
- Ellis v. Costco Wholesale Corp., 657 F.3d 970, 985 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Cavazos v. Salas Concrete Inc., No. 1:19-cv-00062-DAD-EPG, 2022 WL 506005, at *10 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 18, 2022)
- Rodriguez v. West Publishing Corp., 563 F.3d 948, 958 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Staton v. Boeing Co., 327 F.3d 938, 977 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Radcliffe v. Experian Information Solutions, Inc., 715 F.3d 1157, 1164 (9th Cir. 2013)

OPINION

Sarte v. Henry Industries, Inc.

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

9 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10

11 CHRISTINE MCEVOY AND LENG SAM, No. 2:22-cv-01678-DJC-SCR

individually and on behalf of all others 12 similarly situated, 13 Plaintiffs, ORDER 14 v. 15

HENRY INDUSTRIES, INC.,

16 Defendant. 17

18 19 Plaintiffs Christine McEvoy and Leng Sam move for preliminary approval of their 20 class, FLSA collective, and PAGA settlement. In particular, Plaintiffs seek: 21 (1) preliminary approval of the settlement agreement between Defendant and 22 Plaintiffs; (2) certification of the proposed settlement class for settlement purposes 23 only; (3) approval of the form and content of the proposed class notice; 24 (4) appointment of Harold Lichten and Matthew W. Thomson of Lichten & Liss- 25 Riordan, P.C., Adam Rose of Law Office of Robert Starr, and Jeff Vollmer of Goodwin & 26 Goodwin, LLP as class counsel; (5) appointment of the Phoenix Group as the 27 settlement administrator; and (6) scheduling final approval of the settlement. The 28 1 Plaintiffs also seek to designate Christine McEvoy and Leng Sam as named 2 representatives of the class. 3 Having considered Plaintiffs' Motion, the Court has concerns regarding the 4 adequacy of the class settlement, the certification of the FLSA collective, the existence 5 of a bona fide dispute, and the appointment of the class counsel. Before the Court 6 can properly consider preliminary approval of the settlement, the Plaintiffs should 7 address these issues. Thus, for the reasons set forth below, Plaintiffs' Motion is 8 DENIED without prejudice.

9 BACKGROUND

10 I. Factual and Procedural Background 11 Plaintiffs seek approval of their \$300,000 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure Rule 12 23 ("Rule 23") Class, Fair Labor Standards Act ("FLSA") Collective, and Private Attorney 13 General Act ("PAGA") settlement on behalf of themselves and approximately 80 14 drivers who were employed by Defendant Henry Industries, Inc. to provide courier or 15 delivery services in California between August 19, 2018, and June 17, 2022. (Mot. 16 (ECF No. 57) at 1; Second Am. Compl. ("SAC") (ECF No. 49) ¶¶ 1,4.) Plaintiffs allege 17 that Defendant committed various violations of California and Federal law, including 18 (1) minimum wage violations under Cal. Lab. Code §§ 1197, 1194 and Wage Order

19 No. 9, (2) overtime violations under Cal. Lab. Code §§ 1194, 1198, 510 and 554 and 20 Wage Order No. 9, (3) failure to pay minimum wages under 29 U.S.C. § 201 et seq., (4) 21 failure to pay overtime under 29 U.S.C. §§ 206(a)(1)(C) and § 207(a), (5) wage 22 statement violations under Cal. Lab. Code § 226(a), (6) unlawful business acts of 23 practices under Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17200 et seq., (7) misclassification as an 24 independent contractor under Cal. Lab. Code § 2802, and (8) PAGA penalties. (SAC 25 ¶ 1.) Plaintiffs' claims are based on Defendant's classification of the drivers as non- 26 employee independent contractors when they were, in fact, employees entitled to the 27 protections of California and Federal law. (Mot. at 2.) 28 //// 1 The Parties exchanged initial disclosures and participated in a mediation with 2 ADR Neutral Monique Ngo-Bonnici. (Id.) The mediation was initially unsuccessful, but 3 the Parties continued negotiations afterward and eventually agreed to settle their 4 claims. (Id.) The Parties agreed to dismiss the FLSA claims asserted on behalf of a 5 national collective without prejudice, and to resolve the California state law claims on 6 behalf of the proposed class of California

drivers. (Mot. at 2.) Plaintiffs now move for preliminary approval of their Settlement.¹ 8 II. Proposed Settlement Terms 9 The proposed class comprises all persons who executed an agreement with 10 Defendant and provided courier or delivery services on behalf of Defendant in 11 California between August 18, 2019, through June 17, 2022 (“Class”). (Settlement 12 (ECF No. 58-1) § I.C.) The Parties also propose a PAGA subclass consisting of all 13 persons who provided courier or delivery services on behalf of Defendant in California 14 from April 11, 2021, through June 17, 2022 (“PAGA Class”). (Id. § I.AA.) The 15 Settlement does not explicitly define the FLSA collective. 16 The Parties have agreed to settle their claims for \$300,000 total, with no part of 17 the Settlement reverting to Defendants. (Mot. at 2.) The Settlement proposes several 18 deductions from the total before it is distributed to the Class: (1) \$10,000 to PAGA 19 claims, (2) \$85,675 in attorneys’ fees, (3) \$5,000 to the settlement administrator, and 20 (4) \$5,000 in service payments to the class representatives (\$2,500 for each class 21 representative). (Id. at 2–3.) 22 Overall, the Settlement provides a net recovery of approximately \$194,325 for 23 the Class. (Mot. at 2.) The net amount will be split into a designated Rule 23 24 settlement fund related to the release of state law claims, and an FLSA release fund for 25 release of the FLSA claims. (Id. at 3.) Ninety percent of the fund constitutes the Rule 26 27 1 The Court notes that the Plaintiffs submitted a Motion for Conditional Class Certification (ECF No. 22), which the Court now DENIES without prejudice for mootness given that the parties now seek to settle 28 the matter. 1 23 fund and ten percent constitutes the FLSA fund. (Id.) The Rule 23 class payment 2 will be calculated based on the Class Member’s pay periods worked during the class 3 period relative to the total number of pay periods worked by the Rule 23 Class. 4 (Settlement § III.D.1.) The FLSA consideration check will be based on the individual’s 5 pay periods worked during the applicable statutory period relative to the total 6 number of pay periods of all individuals who submit an opt-in claim form. (Id.

7 § III.D.2.)

8 Membership in the Rule 23 Class is automatic, although members will be given 9 an opportunity to opt-out (or object) before the final hearing. Membership in the 10 PAGA Class is automatic under California Law. *Alcazar v. OEI Holdings, LLC*, No. 2:19- 11 cv-01209-KJM-AC, 2023 WL 2876833, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Apr. 10, 2023). Membership in 12 the FLSA collective is not automatic, but Class Members can opt-in by submitting an 13 “FLSA Opt-In Form.” Additionally, as a material term of the Settlement, the Plaintiffs 14 filed a Second Amended Complaint adding the now-named Plaintiffs and clarifying 15 that the FLSA claims here are asserted on behalf of those individuals who are defined 16 as Class Members. 17 The Parties agree to certification of the Class for purposes of this Settlement 18 only; if the Settlement does not become effective, then the Defendant reserves the 19 right to contest certification of any class and all available defenses to the claims in the 20 action. (Id. § II.H.) 21 Plaintiffs moved the Court to preliminarily approve the Settlement on

22 September 3, 2024. The Motion is unopposed. The Court submitted the matter

23 without a hearing.

24 LEGAL STANDARDS

25 I. Conditional Certification of Class and Collective and Settlement Approval 26 To grant a preliminary approval of a settlement involving class and collective 27 claims, courts must both conditionally certify the Rule 23 class and FLSA collective and 28 find that the settlement terms fall within the range of possible approval. Under Rule 1 23, a court must determine if it “will likely be able to” both “certify the class for 2 purposes of the judgment on proposal” under Rule 23(a) and Rule 23(b), and 3 “approve the proposal under Rule 23(e)(2).” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(e)(1) (B). Under the 4 FLSA, a court must ask if the members of the collective action are “similarly situated” 5 to the original plaintiffs, see *Campbell v. City of Los Angeles*, 903 F.3d 1090, 1109 (9th

6 Cir. 2018), and whether the settlement is “a fair and reasonable resolution of a bona 7 fide dispute” over FLSA provisions, *Kerzich v. County of Tuolumne*, 335 F. Supp. 3d 8 1179, 1184 (E.D. Cal. 2018). 9 PAGA claims are distinct from class claims. “Plaintiffs may bring a PAGA claim 10 only as to the state’s designated proxy, suing on behalf of all affected employees.” 11 *Kim v. Reins Int’l Cal., Inc.*, 9 Cal. 5th 73, 87 (2020) (emphasis removed). Since a PAGA 12 claim is not “a collection of individual claims for relief” like a class action, *Canela v. 13 Costco Wholesale Corp.*, 971 F.3d 845, 856 (9th Cir. 2020), PAGA claims “need not 14 satisfy Rule 23 class certification requirements,” *Hamilton v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 39 15 F.4th 575, 583 (9th Cir. 2022). However, like class action settlements, PAGA 16 settlements must be approved by the court. See Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(s)(2). Courts 17 in this circuit apply “a Rule 23-like standard,” asking whether the settlement of the 18 PAGA claim is “fundamentally fair, reasonable, and adequate.” *Haralson v. U.S. 19 Aviation Servs. Corp.*, 383 F. Supp. 3d 959, 971–72 (N.D. Cal. 2019). 20 II. Notice Requirements 21 If conditional certification of the class and collective is warranted and the 22 settlement terms are adequate, courts must also consider if the proposed class and 23 collective notice meet the requirements of both Rule 23 and the FLSA. For classes 24 likely to be certified under Rule 23(b)(3), “the court must direct to class members the 25 best notice that is practicable under the circumstances,” imposing specific 26 requirements on the contents of the notice. Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(2)(B). The FLSA 27 provides that the court must “provide potential plaintiffs ‘accurate and timely notice 28 concerning the pendency of the collective action, so that they can make informed 1 decisions about whether or not to participate.’” *Adams v. Inter-Con. Sec. Sys.*, 242 2 F.R.D. 530, 539 (N.D. Cal. 2007) (quoting *Hoffmann-La Roche, Inc., v. Sperling*, 493 3 U.S. 165, 170 (1989)). In hybrid Rule 23 and FLSA actions, the notice forms must 4 indicate (1) the hybrid nature of the action; (2) the claims involved in the action; (3) the 5 options that are available to class members in connection with the settlement, 6 including how to participate or not participate in the Rule 23 class action and the FLSA 7 collective action aspects of the settlement; and (4) the consequences of opting-in to 8 the FLSA collective action, opting-out of the Rule 23 class action, or doing nothing. 9 *Thompson v. Costco*

Wholesale Corp., No. 3:14-cv-02778-CAB-WVG, 2017 WL 10 697895, at *8 (S.D. Cal. Feb. 22, 2017). 11 Finally, where parties seek settlement of PAGA claims and class claims in one 12 action, courts “have required the class notice to clearly articulate that even those who 13 do not opt out of a settlement will release PAGA claims and will receive a portion of 14 the PAGA payment.” Schmidt v. Vision Service Plan, No. 2:20-cv-2400-KJN, 2023 WL 15 5613103, at *3 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 30, 2023) (citation omitted); see also Sakkab v. Luxottica 16 Retail N. Am., Inc., 803 F.3d 425, 436 (9th Cir. 2015) (“Unlike Rule 23(c)(2), PAGA has 17 no notice requirements for unnamed aggrieved employees, nor may such employees 18 opt out of a PAGA action.”); Uribe v. Crown Bldg. Maint. Co., 70 Cal. App. 5th 986, 19 1001 (2021), as modified on denial of reh’g (Oct. 26, 2021) (explaining that a defining 20 feature of the class action procedure is that a class member may opt out of the class if 21 he or she does not wish to be bound by the result of the suit which PAGA actions do 22 not allow).

23 DISCUSSION

24 I. Certification of the FLSA Collective 25 Plaintiffs seeking conditional certification of a collective action under the FLSA 26 have the burden of showing that they are “similarly situated” to other class members. 27 Nen Thio v. Genji, LLC, 14 F. Supp. 3d 1324, 1340 (N.D. Cal. 2014). Plaintiffs can show 28 they are similarly situated by making “substantial allegations, supported by 1 declarations or discovery, that ‘the putative class members were together the victims 2 of a single decision, policy, or plan.’” Id. (quoting Brewer v. Gen. Nutrition Corp., No. 3 4:11-cv-03587-YGR, 2013 WL 100195 at *3 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 7, 2023). “This 4 determination is made based on a fairly lenient standard, and typically results in a 5 conditional certification.” Id. 6 The Motion for Preliminary Approval explains that Class Members who submit 7 an opt-in form will be deemed to release claims under the FLSA without prejudice.2 8 (Mot. at 2-3.) Additionally, the Settlement fund is split to afford \$19,432.50 to the 9 FLSA fund. However, there is no independent analysis discussing the certification of 10 the FLSA Collective in the Motion. See Haralson, 383 F. Supp. 3d at 968–69 11 (explaining that court have rejected settlements that attempted to skip collective 12 action certification); Sharobiem v. CVS Pharmacy, Inc., No. 2:13-cv-09426-GHK-FFM, 13 2015 WL 10791914, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Sept. 2, 2015) (“The Motion is problematic 14 because nowhere does Plaintiff explicitly request certification of an FLSA collective 15 action.”). Thus, the Parties here are directed to “move for preliminary certification of 16 both a class and a collective action properly supported by the relevant declarations 17 and an analysis of the factors we must consider in certifying both.” Sharobiem, 2015 18 WL 10791914, at *2. The Court notes that the Settlement includes, as a material term, 19 the filing of the Second Amended Complaint, which clarifies that the FLSA claims are 20 asserted on behalf of those who are defined as Class Members within the Settlement 21 Agreement. (Settlement § III.A.) However, the Motion does not discuss certification of 22 the FLSA Collective, nor does the Settlement explicitly define the FLSA Collective. 23 Given the lenient FLSA standard, and the apparent similarity between the individuals 24 25 2 The Court also notes that the settlement release provisions that go “beyond the

scope of the present 26 litigation” are disfavored. Haralson, 383 F. Supp. 3d at 967–68 (citation omitted). Further, courts have “routinely rejected proposed class action settlement agreements that try to release all claims in a wage- 27 and-hour case relating to compensation as overbroad and improper.” Id. (citation omitted). To the extent that the Settlement purports to “release Defendants “from any and all FLSA claims,” (Settlement 28 § III.G.2,) the Parties are directed to address this concern in any subsequent briefing. 1 here, the Court would be prepared to certify the Collective once the Parties address 2 the issue of certification directly. 3 II. Proposed Settlement 4 A. Adequacy of the Settlement Amount 5 Under Rule 23(e), a class action may be settled only with the court’s approval, 6 and the court may provide such approval “only on finding that it is fair, reasonable, 7 and adequate” after considering whether, among other things, “the relief provided for 8 the class is adequate.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(e)(2). 9 The Court does not have sufficient information at this juncture to determine if 10 the relief provided to the Class is adequate. Particularly, the proposed Settlement 11 fails to justify the valuation of all of Plaintiffs’ claims. Based on data regarding the 12 amount of work performed by the putative Class and relevant pay records, Plaintiffs’ 13 counsel estimated approximately \$1,400,000 in unreimbursed employee expenses 14 under California Labor Code § 2802. However, there is no information about the 15 maximum theoretical recovery under all the claims. Rather, the Plaintiffs state that the 16 FLSA claim, and the section 2802 claim were the “main claims” here. Although courts, 17 including this Court, have approved preliminary settlement agreements where only 18 some of the claims are afforded consideration, a more thorough explanation about 19 the valuation of claims is needed. Compare *Botonis v. Bimbo Bakeries USA, Inc.*, No. 20 2:22-cv-01453-DJC-SCR, 2024 WL 100545, at *9–10 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 9, 2024) 21 (explaining that the parties addressed difficulties in proving certain claims such that 22 the Court’s focus on the section 2802 claims alone was appropriate). The Parties are 23 thus directed to include a more thorough discussion as to the maximum exposure of 24 Defendants as to the claims in this action. 25 B. FLSA Bona Fide Dispute 26 Returning to the FLSA Component of the Settlement, the Court addresses the 27 existence of a bona fide dispute. FLSA settlements must comprise “a fair and 28 reasonable resolution of a bona fide dispute.” See e.g., *Kerzich*, 355 F. Supp. 3d at 1 1184. A dispute is “bona fide” if there are “legitimate questions” about the existence 2 and extent of a defendant’s FLSA liability. Id; see *Selk v. Pioneers Mem’l Healthcare* 3 Dist., 159 F. Supp. 3d 1164, 1172 (S.D. Cal. 2016). “A court will not approve a 4 settlement of an action in which there is a certainty that the FLSA entitles plaintiffs to 5 the compensation they seek, because it would shield employers from the full cost of 6 complying with the statute.” *Kerzich*, 355 F. Supp. 3d at 1184 (citation omitted). 7 However, if a bona fide dispute between the parties exists, courts often consider many 8 of the same factors that guide preliminary certification of Rule 23 class actions in 9 evaluating the fairness of the FLSA settlement. See *Maciel v. Bar 20 Dairy, LLC*, No. 10 1:17-cv-00902-DAD-SKO, 2018 WL 5291969, at *4 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 23, 2018). 11 The instant Motion does not clearly explain whether a bona fide dispute exists. 12 Compare *Brown v. Tetra Tech, Inc.*, No. 2:20-cv-01133-DJC-DMC, 2024 WL 1462764,

13 at *10 (E.D. Cal. Apr. 4, 2024) (explaining uncertainties surrounding Plaintiffs' abilities 14 to prove their FLSA claims). This is not to say that one does not exist. However, at this 15 stage, the Court has not been provided sufficient information to determine if it is 16 uncertain that Plaintiffs could succeed on their FLSA claims. See *Selk*, 159 F. Supp. 3d 17 at 1172 (explaining that a court will not approve a settlement of an action in which 18 there is a certainty that the FLSA entitles plaintiffs to the compensation they seek, 19 because doing so would shield employers from the full costs of complying with the 20 statute). Although there may be an issue as to Plaintiffs' ability to recover on their 21 FLSA claims given Defendant's financial situation, (Mot. at 1,) that is separate from 22 whether Plaintiff would be successful on its FLSA claims. Thus, the Court requires 23 more information regarding the dispute before deciding whether the FLSA release is 24 proper. 25

C. PAGA Component 26 Under PAGA's scheme, civil penalties are distributed between the aggrieved 27 employees, 25%, and the LWDA, 75%. Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(i) (2022) (amended July 28 1 1, 2024).³ The proposed settlement must be sent to the LWDA at the same time it is 2 submitted to the Court. Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(s)(2). Finally, aggrieved employees 3 are prohibited from opting out of the settlement. See *Morel v. HNTB Corp.*, 3:22-cv- 4 00408-AJB-AHG, 2025 WL 242084, at *18 (S.D. Cal. Jan. 17, 2025) (citation omitted). 5 As an initial matter, the Parties submit that the Plaintiffs complied with the 6 notice requirement of Labor Code § 2699.3 and mailed written notice to the California 7 LWDA. (SAC ¶ 46.) Defendants also submitted a notice to the LWDA. (Id.) However, 8 there is no indication that the Parties submitted the proposed Settlement to the LWDA 9 for comment as required under the Labor Code. Cal. Lab. Code § 2699(s)(2); see 10 *Almanzar v. Home Depot U.S.A., Inc.*, No. 2:20-cv-00699-KJN, 2022 WL 2817435, at 11 *15 n. 11 (E.D. Cal. Jul. 19, 2022) (noting that the parties had attached a confirmation 12 message from LWDA confirming that the proposed settlement was sent to the LWDA 13 at the same time it was submitted to the court). Thus, the Court cannot determine if 14 this requirement has been met yet. 15

III. Appointment of Class Counsel and Class Representatives 16 Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23(a)(4), the named plaintiffs and their 17 counsel must "fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class." Fed. R. Civ. P. 18 23(a)(4). Courts consider both whether "(1) [] the named plaintiffs and their counsel 19 have any conflicts of interest with other class members and (2) [] the named plaintiff 20 and their counsel [will] prosecute the action vigorously on behalf of the class." *Ellis v. 21 Costco Wholesale Corp.*, 657 F.3d 970, 985 (9th Cir. 2011). 22 Currently, Plaintiffs seek to appoint Harold Lichten and Matthew W. Thompson 23 of Lichten & Liss-Riordan, P.C., Adam Rose of the Law Office of Robert Starr, and Jeff 24 Volmer of Goodwin & Goodwin, LLP as class counsel. Although the Court has no 25 reason to doubt the adequacy of Proposed Counsels' representation in this matter, 26 27 3 The Court notes that PAGA has since been amended such that for civil actions brought on or before June 19, 2024, the division provides 35% to the aggrieved members and 65% to the LWDA. See 28 *Martinez v. Sunnova Energy Corp.*, No. 2:24-cv-06346, 2025 WL 732350, at *3 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 7, 2025). 1 the instant Motion includes minimal information about Class

Counsels' experience. As it stands, the instant Motion explains that during negotiations, counsel was "informed by her prior experience in similar cases" and counsel was "familiar with the applicable law, class action litigation, and facts" of the case. (Mot. at 10 (emphasis added).) Further, negotiations took place with a sense of strengths and weaknesses of litigation based on information regarding Defendant's financial status. (Id.) The Court would like clarification as to whether the same attorneys who conducted the negotiations are the ones the Plaintiffs seek to have as class counsel. Further, the Court would like more information as to counsels' prior experience with class actions, including how many prior cases they have handled and any notable areas of expertise. See *Cavazos v. Salas Concrete Inc.*, No. 1:19-cv-00062-DAD-EPG, 2022 WL 506005, at *10 (E.D. Cal.

Feb. 18, 2022) (discussing class counsels' experience in class and representative action litigation). Additionally, Plaintiffs seek to designate Christine McEvoy and Leng Sam as Class Representatives. The named Plaintiffs were added to the litigation following the passing of Mr. Sarte. (Mot. at 2.) Each Plaintiff would receive an incentive award of \$2,500. Incentive awards for class representatives typical in class action cases. See *Rodriguez v. W. Publi'g Corp.*, 563 F.3d 989, 958 (9th Cir. 2009). Nevertheless, the Court still considers the propriety of the incentive awards based on the actions of the Plaintiffs in protecting the class's interests, the benefit the class has received from those actions, and the time expended by Plaintiffs in pursuing litigation. *Staton v. Boeing Co.*, 327 F. 3d 938, 977 (9th Cir. 2003); see *Radcliffe v. Experian Info. Solutions, Inc.*, 715 F. 3d 1157, 1164 (9th Cir. 2013) ("[D]istrict courts must be vigilant in scrutinizing all incentive awards to determine whether they destroy the adequacy of the class representatives."). The proposed incentive award of \$2,500 for each Plaintiff does not appear to be unreasonable. While it is noted that the named plaintiffs have "placed their names in the public eye as part of this high-profile litigation," the Court would like more information, specifically regarding the time spent involved in the litigation, ahead of designating Plaintiffs as class representatives and approving the incentive award. IV. Conclusion For the above stated reasons, the Court DENIES the Motion for Preliminary Approval of Settlement (ECF No. 57) without prejudice. IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Parties supplement the Motion with the information discussed above within thirty days. Dated: April 24, 2025 "Daniel A CoD brett

THE HONOR DANIEL J. CALABRETTA

UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

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