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LOS ANGELES SUPERIOR COURT
AUG 2 5 2021

SHERRI R. CARTER EXECUTIVE OFFICERICLERK

Deputy

NANCY NAVARRO

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

EMMA ALYCE WEBER, as an individual and on behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

VS.

KACE ENTERTAINMENT, INC., a California corporation, dba VOX DJS, INC.; and DOES 1 through 100,

Defendants.

Case No.: 19STCV40561

ORDER GRANTING MOTION FOR FINAL APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT

Date: August 25, 2021

Time: 9:00 a.m. Dept.: SSC-17

I. BACKGROUND

This is a wage and hour action. Kace Entertainment Inc., dba VOX DJS, Inc. (VOX) provides entertainment services, including disc jockeys ("DJ"), emcees, photo booths, lighting and audio-visual, and live music for weddings, corporate events, and other live events throughout Southern California and Arizona.

On November 12, 2019 Plaintiff filed a class action lawsuit against VOX. On January 22, 2020, Plaintiff filed the operative First Amended Class and Representative Action Complaint alleging the following causes of action: (i) failure to pay all overtime wages (Labor Code §§ 204, 5110, 1194, 1198); (ii) minimum wage violations (Labor Code §§ 1182,12, 1194, 1194.2, 1197); (iii) rest period violations (Labor Code §§ 226.7, 516, 558); (iv) meal period violations (Labor Code §§ 226.7, 512, 558); (v) failure to reimburse all necessary business expenditures (Labor Code §§ 2802, 2804); (vi) wage statement violations (Labor Code §§ 226, 226.2); (vii) waiting time penalties (Labor Code §§ 201-203); (viii) Unfair Competition as a result of the aforementioned violations (Bus. & Prof. Code § 17200 et seq.); and (ix) civil penalties pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 ("PAGA"), California Labor Code § 2698 et seq.

After discovery, the parties attended a full-day mediation on May 18, 2019 with Francis J. Ortman, Esq., and were ultimately able to come to a Memorandum of Understanding. During the months that followed, the parties finalized the terms of the Settlement and executed the long-form Settlement Agreement, as signed copy of which is attached as Exhibit 1 to the Declaration of Paul Haines ("Haines Decl.") ISO Preliminary Approval.

On December 1, 2020, the Court issued a checklist of items for the parties to address and continued preliminary approval. In response, on counsel filed supplemental briefing ("Supp. Brief") ISO Preliminary Approval and an Amended Settlement Agreement attached as Exhibit 3 to the Supplemental Declaration of Paul Haines ("Haines Supp. Decl.") ISO Preliminary Approval. All reference in this Order are to the Amended Settlement Agreement.

The proposed settlement payments will be made in installments. Counsel represents that in connection with mediation VOX confidentially provided Counsel's office with financial records, including profit & loss statements from 2018, 2019, and 2020 to date. After reviewing those financial records and considering that VOX is in the live event/entertainment business which has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and related government shutdowns, counsel contends that it became apparent VOX would not be able to sustain a significant settlement unless it was payable in several installments over a period of time. Accordingly, the parties negotiated the payment schedule reflected in the Settlement, under which VOX will make quarterly payments beginning in the first quarter of 2022. (Haines Decl. ISO Preliminary Approval, ¶33.)

Preliminary approval was granted on March 10, 2021. Notice was given to the Class Members as ordered. (See Declaration of Elizabeth Kruckenberg ("Kruckenberg Decl.").

Now before the Court is Plaintiff's motion for final approval of the Settlement Agreement, including for payment of fees, costs, and service awards to the named plaintiffs. For the reasons set forth below, the Court grants final approval of the settlement.

II. THE TERMS OF THE SETTLEMENT

A. SETTLEMENT CLASS AND RELATED DEFINITIONS

Settlement Class means: All current and former non-exempt employees of VOX in the positions of DJ, Roadie for DJ, DJ Roadie, Assistant to DJ, DJ Assistant, and Shadow to DJ ("Covered Position(s)") who worked in California at any time from November 12, 2015 through the date of preliminary approval of the settlement. (Settlement Agreement, ¶1.)

"Class Period" means at any November 12, 2015 through the date of preliminary approval of the settlement. (¶1)

"Waiting Time Period" means November 12, 2016, through the end of the Class Period. (¶4.B.iii)

"PAGA Period" means November 15, 2018 through the end of the Class Period. (¶2.A)

Based on data produced by VOX in connection with mediation, the Parties believe the data reflects that there were approximately 10,050 Work Events worked by Settlement Class members during the Class Period. If the number of Work Events worked by Settlement Class members during the Class Period is more than 10% greater than this figure (i.e., if there are 11,055 events or more), Plaintiff has the option, at her sole discretion, to void the Settlement Agreement. (¶3.H)

There are 182 Class members. (Kruckenberg Decl., ¶6.)

B. THE MONETARY TERMS OF SETTLEMENT

The essential monetary terms are as follows:

The Maximum Settlement Amount ("MSA") is \$1,000,000 (¶3). This includes payment of a PAGA penalty of \$40,000 to be paid 75% to the LWDA (\$30,000) and 25% to the Settlement Class Members (\$10,000) (¶3.E.4);

The Net Settlement Amount ("Net") (\$569,166.67) is the MSA less:

- Up to \$333,333.33 (33 1/3%) for attorney fees (¶5);
 - Fee Split: Haines Law Group, APC will receive 67.5% of any attorneys' fee award and Tojarieh Law, PC will receive 32.5% of any attorneys' fee award. (Haines Decl., ¶32 and Exhibit 2 thereto.)
- O Up to \$40,000 for attorney costs (¶5.);
- Up to \$7,500 for a service award to the proposed class representative (¶6);

- \$40,000 allocated as PAGA Penalties (¶3.E.4); and
- o Estimated \$10,000 for settlement administration costs (¶7).
- VOX's share of payroll taxes as an employer (e.g., FICA, FUTA) on the portion of Settlement Awards designated as "wages" shall be paid by VOX separately from, and in addition to, the Maximum Settlement Amount. (¶3.D)
 - Assuming the Court approves all maximum requested deductions, approximately \$569,166.67 will be available for distribution to participating class members. Therefore, the average settlement share will be approximately \$3,127.01. (\$569,166.67 Net ÷ 182 class members =\$3,127.01.). In addition, each class member will receive a portion of the PAGA penalty, estimated to be \$54.95 per class member. (\$10,000 (25% of \$40,000 PAGA penalty) ÷ 182 class members = \$54.95), assuming all class members worked during the PAGA Period.
- There is no Claim Requirement (¶4).
- The settlement is not reversionary (¶3.E).
- Payments to the Settlement Class: From the Net Settlement Amount, the Settlement Administrator will calculate each Settlement Class member's Individual Settlement Award based on the following formula:
 - o PAGA Amount. As noted above, \$10,000.00 has been designated as the "PAGA Amount." Each participating Settlement Class member (whether or not they opt out) who was employed by VOX in a Covered Position at any time during the PAGA Period shall receive a portion of the PAGA Amount proportionate to the number of pay periods that he or she worked for VOX in a Covered Position in California during the Wage Statement/PAGA Period. This will be calculated by multiplying the PAGA Amount by a fraction, the numerator of which is the participating

Settlement Class member's number of pay periods worked during this period, and the denominator of which is the total number of pay periods worked by all participating Settlement Class members during that time period. (¶4.B.i)

- The remainder of the Net Settlement Amount (i.e., after the PAGA Amount is deducted) shall be distributed as follows:
 - o Payments to all participating Settlement Class members: 80% of the remainder of the Net Settlement Amount will be distributed to all participating Settlement Class members based on each participating Settlement Class member's proportionate number of events worked for VOX in a Covered Position in California during the Class Period ("Work Events"), by multiplying 80% of the remainder of the Net Settlement Amount by a fraction, the numerator of which is the participating Settlement Class member's number of Work Events, and the denominator of which is the total Work Events worked by all participating Settlement Class members.. (¶4.B.ii)
 - O Waiting Time Amount: 15% of the remainder of the Net Settlement Amount shall be designated as the "Waiting Time Amount." Each participating Settlement Class member whose employment with VOX terminated at any time from November 12, 2016, through the end of the Class Period (the "Waiting Time Period") shall receive an equal share of the Waiting Time Amount. In other words, the Waiting Time Amount will be divided equally among all participating Settlement Class Members whose employment with VOX terminated during the Waiting Time Period. (¶4.B.iii)

- Wage Statement Amount: 5% of the remainder of the Net Settlement Amount shall be designated as the "Wage Statement Amount." Each participating Settlement Class member who was employed by VOX in a Covered Position in California at any time from November 12, 2018 to the end of the Class Period, shall receive a portion of the Wage Statement Amount proportionate to the number of pay periods worked for VOX in a Covered Position in California during that time period. This shall be calculated by multiplying 5% of the remainder of the Net Settlement Amount by a fraction, the numerator of which is the Settlement Class member's number of pay periods worked during this period, and the denominator of which is the total number of pay periods worked by all participating Settlement Class members during this period. (¶4.B.iv)
 - Tax Withholdings of Individual Settlement Payments: 20% as wages; 40% as penalties; and 40% as interest. (¶4.D)
- Uncashed Checks: Each member of the Settlement Class who receives a Settlement Award must cash any Settlement Award check within 180 days from the date the Settlement Administrator mails it. Any funds payable to Settlement Class members whose checks were not cashed within 180 days after mailing will escheat to the California State Controller for deposit in the Unclaimed Property Fund in the name of the Settlement Class member. (¶4.E)
- Funding of the Settlement: The Maximum Settlement Amount shall be deposited into an escrow account to be established by the Settlement Administrator in 9 bimonthly installments, as follows:
 - First to Fourth Installments: The first through fourth installments, which
 collectively equal \$360,000.00 of the Maximum Settlement Amount, shall

be deposited in four equal installments of \$90,000.00 each. The first, second, third, and fourth installments of \$90,000.00 each shall be deposited no later than March 31, 2022, May 31, 2022, July 31, 2022, and September 30, 2022, respectively. (¶3.B.1)

- Fifth to Eighth Installments: The fifth through eighth installments, which collectively equal \$480,000.00 of the Maximum Settlement Amount, shall be deposited in four equal installments of \$120,000.00 each. The fifth through eighth installments shall be deposited no later November 30, 2022, January 31, 2023, March 31, 2023, and May 31, 2023, respectively. (¶3.B.2)
- Ninth Installment: VOX shall deposit the ninth and final installment of \$160,000.00 by July 31, 2023. (¶3.B.3)
 - Personal Guaranty. As part of this Settlement Agreement, VOX's Chief Executive Officer, KC Campbell ("Campbell"), has agreed to provide a personal guaranty of the Maximum Settlement Amount. If VOX fails to pay the Maximum Settlement Amount, or any installment thereof, by the date such payment is due under this Settlement Agreement, Campbell will be personally liable to Plaintiff, Settlement Class members, and Class Counsel for any unpaid amount, and Plaintiff and Class Counsel will be entitled to recover any unpaid amount from Campbell, including reasonable attorneys' fees and costs incurred in securing such payment. (¶3.C)

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C. TERMS OF RELEASES

Upon the "Effective Date" and the Settlement being fully funded, Plaintiff and every member of the Settlement Class (except those who opt out) shall release and discharge VOX, its current or former subsidiaries, officers, directors, employees, and agents, successors, and assigns (collectively, the "Released Parties") from all claims, demands, rights, liabilities and causes of action that were pled in the Complaint, or which could have been pled in the Complaint¹ based on the factual allegations therein, that arose during the Class Period, including the following claims: (1) failure to pay all overtime wages; (2) minimum wage violations; (3) rest period violations; (4) meal period violations; (5) failure to reimburse all necessary business expenditures; (6) wage statement violations; (7) waiting time penalties; and (8) all claims for unfair competition that could have been premised on the factual allegations asserted in the Complaint ("Class" Members' Released Claims"). In addition, all Settlement Class members (whether or not they opt out) who were employed by VOX at any time from November 15, 2018 through the end of the Class Period (the "PAGA Period") shall release all claims for civil penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA") that were alleged in Plaintiff's November 15, 2019 letter to the LWDA and asserted in the Complaint, including claims for PAGA civil penalties based on alleged violations of Labor Code §§ 201-203, 204, 226, 226.2, 226.7, 510, 512, 516, 558, 1174, 1182.12, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, and 1198 ("PAGA Released Claims"). The period of the release of Class Members' Released Claims shall extend to the limits of the Class Period. The period of the release of the PAGA Released Claims shall extend to the limits of the PAGA Period. (¶2.A)

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^{1 &}quot;Complaint" is defined as the First Amended Class and Representative Action

- The named Plaintiff will also provide a general release and a waiver of the protections of Cal. Civ. Code §1542. (¶¶2.A-B)
- The releases are effective on the Effective Date and the Settlement being fully funded. (¶2.A)

III. ANALYSIS OF SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

"Before final approval, the court must conduct an inquiry into the fairness of the proposed settlement." Cal. Rules of Court, rule 3.769(g). "If the court approves the settlement agreement after the final approval hearing, the court must make and enter judgment. The judgment must include a provision for the retention of the court's jurisdiction over the parties to enforce the terms of the judgment. The court may not enter an order dismissing the action at the same time as, or after, entry of judgment." Cal. Rules of Court, rule 3.769(h).

As discussed more fully in the Order conditionally approving the settlement, "[i]n a class action lawsuit, the court undertakes the responsibility to assess fairness in order to prevent fraud, collusion or unfairness to the class, the settlement or dismissal of a class action. The purpose of the requirement [of court review] is the protection of those class members, including the named plaintiffs, whose rights may not have been given due regard by the negotiating parties." See *Consumer Advocacy Group, Inc. v. Kintetsu Enterprises of America* (2006) 141 Cal. App.4th 46, 60 [internal quotation marks omitted]; see also *Wershba v. Apple Computer, Inc.* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 245 ("*Wershba*"), disapproved on another ground in *Hernandez v. Restoration Hardware* (2018) 4 Cal.5th 260 [Court needs to "scrutinize the proposed settlement agreement 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."] [internal quotation marks omitted].

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"The burden is on the proponent of the settlement to show that it is fair and reasonable. However, 'a presumption of fairness exists where: (1) the settlement is reached through arm's-length bargaining; (2) investigation and discovery are sufficient to allow counsel and the court to act intelligently; (3) counsel is experienced in similar litigation; and (4) the percentage of objectors is small." See Wershba, supra, 91 Cal.App.4th at pg. 245, citing Dunk v. Ford Motor Co. (1996) 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1802. Notwithstanding an initial presumption of fairness, "the court should not give rubber-stamp approval." See Kullar v. Foot Locker Retail, Inc. (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 116, 130. "Rather, to protect the interests of absent class members, the court must independently and objectively analyze the evidence and circumstances before it in order to determine whether the settlement is in the best interests of those whose claims will be extinguished." *Ibid.*, citing 4 Newberg on Class Actions (4th ed. 2002) § 11:41, p. 90. In that determination, the court should consider factors such as "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 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." Id. at 128. This "list of factors is not exclusive, and the court is free to engage in a balancing and weighing of factors depending on the circumstances of each case." Wershba, supra, 91 Cal.App.4th at pg. 245.)

A. A Presumption of Fairness Exists

The Court preliminarily found in its Order of March 10, 2021, that the presumption of fairness should be applied. No facts have come to the Court's attention

that would alter that preliminary conclusion. Accordingly, the settlement is entitled to a presumption of fairness as set forth in the preliminary approval order.

B. The Settlement Is Fair, Adequate, and Reasonable

The settlement was preliminarily found to be fair, adequate and reasonable

The settlement was preliminarily found to be fair, adequate and reasonable. Notice has now been given to the Class and the LWDA.

The notice process resulted in the following:

Number of class members: 182

Number of notices mailed: 182

Number of undeliverable notices: 1

Number of opt-outs: 0

Number of objections: 0

Number of participating class members: 182

(Kruckenberg Decl. ¶¶3-10.)

The Court finds that the notice was given as directed and conforms to due process requirements. Given the reactions of the Class Members and the LWDA to the proposed settlement and for the reasons set for in the Preliminary Approval order, the settlement is found to be fair, adequate, and reasonable.

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C. CLASS CERTIFICATION IS PROPER

For the reasons set forth in the preliminary approval order certification of the Class for purposes of settlement is appropriate.

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D. ATTORNEY FEES AND COSTS

Class Counsel requests \$333,333.33 (33%) for attorney fees and \$31,286.98 for costs. (Motion ISO Final Approval, 13:5-6; 16:16.)

Courts have an independent responsibility to review an attorney fee provision and award only what it determines is reasonable. *Garabedian v. Los Angeles Cellular Telephone Company* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 123, 128. A percentage calculation is permitted in common fund cases. *Laffitte v. Robert Half Int'l, Inc.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 503.

Plaintiff has agreed to the following fee split: Haines Law Group, APC will receive 67.5% of any attorneys' fee award and Tojarieh Law, PC will receive 32.5% of any attorneys' fee award. (Haines Decl. ISO Preliminary Approval, ¶32 and Exhibit 2 thereto.)

In the instant case, fees are sought pursuant to the percentage method. (Motion ISO Final Approval, 13:5-11.) The \$333,333.33 fee request is 33% of the Gross Settlement Amount.

Although in excess of counsel's stated lodestar, the fee award is reasonable because fees will be paid over time, delaying counsel's payment in this matter. Further, it appears that the lodestar premium is calculated on the whole, rather than the work by Haines Law Group. The total \$333,333.33 fee request represents a reasonable percentage of the total funds paid by Defendant and is consistent with fees awarded in state court in Los Angeles County for these types of claims. Further, the notice expressly advised class members of the fee request, and no one objected. (Kruckenberg Decl., ¶10 and Exhibit A thereto.) Accordingly, the Court awards fees in the amount of \$333,333.33.

Class Counsel requests \$31,286.98 in costs. This is less than the \$40,000 cap provided in the settlement agreement (¶5). The amount was disclosed to Class Members in the Notice, and no objections were received. (Kruckenberg Decl., ¶10 and Exhibit A thereto.) Class Counsel represent that they have incurred actual costs in the amount of \$31,286.98 in actual costs. (Haines Decl. ISO Final Approval, ¶20 and Exhibit B

 thereto.) Costs include, but are not limited to mediation (\$10,000), filing fees/court costs (\$5,150.26), and expert costs (\$15,503). (*Ibid.*)

The costs appear to be reasonable and necessary to the litigation, are reasonable in amount, and were not objected to by the class.

For all of the foregoing reasons, costs of \$31,286.98 are approved.

E. SERVICE AWARD TO CLASS REPRESENTATIVE

A service (or incentive) fee award to a named class representative must be supported by evidence that quantifies the time and effort expended by the individual and a reasoned explanation of financial or other risks undertaken by the class representative. See *Clark v. American Residential Services LLC* (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 785, 806-807; see also *Cellphone Termination Cases* (2010) 186 Cal.App.4th 1380, 1394-1395 ["Criteria courts may consider in determining whether to make an incentive award include: (1) the risk to the class representative in commencing suit, both financial and otherwise; (2) the notoriety and personal difficulties encountered by the class representative; (3) the amount of time and effort spent by the class representative; (4) the duration of the litigation and; (5) the personal benefit (or lack thereof) enjoyed by the class representative as a result of the litigation. (Citations.)"].

Here, the Settlement Agreement provides for an enhancement award of \$7,500. (Settlement Agreement, ¶6.) Plaintiff Weber urges this amount is appropriate because she spent 25 to 30 hours on matters including, but not limited to meeting with counsel on numerous occasions and searching for and providing documents. (Weber Decl., ¶7.) In addition, she notes that she took personal risk in bringing the case, as she could be liable for Vox's costs if she did not prevail. (Id. at ¶6).

Such efforts are standard as to what a class representative would do in bringing her own case. In light of the above-described contributions to this action, and in

acknowledgment of the benefits obtained on behalf of the class, \$5,000 for a service award for the named Plaintiff is reasonable and approved.

F. SETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION COSTS

The Settlement Administrator, Phoenix Settlement Administrators, requests \$9,000 in compensation for its work in administrating this case. (Kruckenberg Decl., ¶13.) At the time of preliminary approval, costs of settlement administration were estimated at \$10,000. (¶7) Class Members were provided with notice of this amount and did not object. (Kruckenberg Decl., ¶10 and Exhibit A thereto.)

Accordingly, claims administration costs are approved in the amount of \$9,000.

IV. CONCLUSION AND ORDER

The Court hereby:

- (1) Grants class certification for purposes of settlement;
- (2) Grants final approval of the settlement as fair, adequate, and reasonable;
- (3) Awards \$333,333.33 in attorney fees to Class Counsel to be distributed 67.5% to
- Haines Law group, APC and 32.5% to Tojarieh Law, PC.
- (4) Awards \$31,286.98 in litigation costs to Haines Law Group, APC;
- (\$) Awards \$5,000 as a Class Representative Service Award;
- (4) Awards \$9,000 in claims administration costs to Phoenix Settlement Administrators;
- Orders class counsel to provide notice to the class members pursuant to California Rules of Court, rule 3.771(b)) and to the LWDA pursuant to Labor Code §2699 (1)(3); and
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(8)	Sets a Non-Appearance Case Review re: Final Report re: Distribution of								,
	Settlement Funds for $\frac{3 2 ^{24}}{}$, at $\frac{8:30}{}$ and Final Report to be filed by								,
	3/14/2024								
I	Dated:	8/25/3	150			- Mu	un 5.	Rul	80~
MAREN E				REN E. 1	. NELSON				
	Judge of the Superior Court						rt		