

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF ALAMEDA

Rene C. Davidson Courthouse

<p>Tschera Echeverria Plaintiff/Petitioner(s) VS. Triton Global Services, Inc. Defendant/Respondent(s)</p>	<p>No. RG20068526</p> <p>Date: 08/18/2023 Time: 9:00 AM Dept: 21 Judge: Evelio Grillo</p> <p>ORDER re: Hearing on Motion to Confirm Settlement filed by Tschera Echeverria (Plaintiff)</p>
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The Motion for Preliminary Approval of Settlement filed by Tschera Echeverria on 05/19/2023 is Granted.

The motion of plaintiffs for preliminary approval of class action settlement and PAGA settlement is GRANTED.

The law was recently clarified in Adolph v. Uber Technologies (2023) 14 Cal.5th 1104. Adolph clarified that in a case such as this there are three types of claims: (1) claims that the named plaintiff asserts on their individual behalf, including “individual PAGA claims”; (2) claims that the named plaintiff asserts as a representative of the absent class members, which are the claims that the absent class members could have asserted on their own individual selves; and (3) claims that the named plaintiff asserts as agent or proxy of the LWDA, which are described as “non-individual PAGA claims.”

The releases in a case with individual, class, and PAGA claims must be consistent with the nature of the three types of claims that the case asserts.

The complaint alleges various Labor Code claims.

The case preliminarily settled for a total of \$200,000.

The settlement agreement states there will be attorneys' fees of up to \$666,666.67 (33%), costs of up to \$30,000, service award of \$7,500 to each plaintiff, settlement administration costs of up to \$14,000, and a PAGA payment of \$20,000 (net of \$15,000). After these expenses, the amount available to be distributed to the Class would be \$66883. Assuming that there are an estimated 1,300 Class Members, the average payment per Class Member would be \$51.

The proposed class notice form and procedure are adequate.

The proposed class is appropriate for class certification.

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The scope of the class release is appropriate. The scope of the class release must be limited to the claims arising out of the claims in the complaint where the named plaintiffs are typical and can adequately represent the class. (Amaro v. Anaheim Arena Management, LLC (2021) 69 Cal.App.5th 521, 537-538.) The release of claims by the class is limited by the "factual predicate rule." (Hesse v. Sprint Corp. (9th Cir. 2010) 598 F.3d 581, 590.) (See also Hendricks v. Starkist Co (N.D. Cal. 2016) 2016 WL 692739 at * 2-4 [Denying motion for final approval of class settlement because scope of release overbroad].) (Agt, para 2.6(a).)

The scope of the PAGA release is appropriate. The agreement releases the claims of the LWDA. The agreement is NOT a release by the "Aggrieved Employees" (aka PAGA Group Members). (Agt, para 2.6(a).)

The scope of the named plaintiff release is appropriate. The agreement for the named plaintiff may include a Civil Code 1542 waiver. (Agt, para 2.6(b).)

The Court notes and approves of the plan to distribute the settlement funds with no claims process.

The unclaimed funds will be distributed to Legal Aid at Work. (Agt, para 2.4(f).) This is consistent with CCP 384. Counsel has provided a declaration in support of the motion that provides the information required by CCP 382.4.

The Court will not approve the amount of attorneys' fees and costs until the final approval hearing. The Court cannot award attorneys' fees without reviewing information about counsel's hourly rate and the time spent on the case. This is the law even if the parties have agreed that Defendants will not oppose the motion for fees. (Robbins v. Alibrandi (2005) 127 Cal. App. 4th 438, 450-451.)

"Because absent class members are not directly involved in the proceedings, oversight to ensure settlements are fair and untainted by conflict is the responsibility of both the class representative and the court." (Mark v. Spencer (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 219, 227.)

"In any class action there is always the temptation for the attorney for the class to recommend settlement on terms less favorable to his clients because a large fee is part of the bargain. ... [T]horough judicial review of fee applications is required in all class action settlements and the fairness of the fees must be assessed independently of determining the fairness of the substantive settlement terms.' ... " 'The evil feared in some settlements-unscrupulous attorneys negotiating large attorney's fees at the expense of an inadequate settlement for the client-can best be met by a careful ... judge, sensitive to the problem, properly evaluating the adequacy of the settlement for the class and determining and setting a reasonable attorney's fee....' " (Consumer Privacy Cases (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 545, 555-556.)

The court sets out its standard analysis below. Counsel may address that analysis in the fee application.

The Ninth Circuit's benchmark is 25%. (Laffitte v. Robert Half Internat. Inc. (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 495.)

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This court's benchmark for fees is 30% of the total fund. (Laffitte v. Robert Half Internat. Inc. (2016) 1 Cal.5th 480, 495; Schulz v. Jeppesen Sanderson, Inc. (2018) 27 Cal.App.5th 1167, 1175; Consumer Privacy Cases (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 545, 557 fn 13; Chavez v. Netflix, Inc. (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 66 fn 11.)

When cross-checking with the lodestar/multiplier, the court will evaluate the lodestar based on reasonable fees that would have been charged at hourly rates and then apply a multiplier. The multiplier includes contingent fee risk and other factors.

When considering risk, the court considers there is less risk in a case with fee shifting statutes because counsel's potential fees are not limited by and coupled to the monetary recovery. "The law does not mandate ... that attorney fees bear a percentage relationship to the ultimate recovery of damages in a civil rights case." (Harman v. City and County of San Francisco (2007) 158 Cal.App.4th 407, 419.) (See also Heritage Pacific Financial, LLC v. Monroy (2013) 215 Cal.App.4th 972, 1006-1007.)

The Court will not decide the amount of any service award until the final approval hearing. Plaintiff must provide evidence regarding the nature of his participation in the action, including a description of his specific actions and the amount of time he committed to the prosecution of the case. (Clark v. American Residential Services LLC (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 785, 804-807.) The court's standard service award is \$7,500.

The Court ORDERS that 10% of any fee award to be kept in the administrator's trust fund until the completion of the distribution process and Court approval of a final accounting.

The Court will set a compliance hearing after the completion of the distribution process and the expiration of the time to cash checks for counsel for plaintiff and the Administrator to comply with CCP 384(b) and to submit a summary accounting how the funds have been distributed to the class members and the status of any unresolved issues. If the distribution is completed, the Court will at that time release any hold-back of attorney fees.

The court will sign the proposed order, which is modified by this order. Plaintiff must reserve a hearing for the motion for final approval.

The Court orders counsel to obtain a copy of this order from the eCourt portal.

Dated: 08/18/2023



Evelio Grillo / Judge