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8	UNITED STAT	ES DISTRICT COURT	
9	EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA		
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12	SHIRLEY GARNETT, on behalf of	CIV. NO. 2:14-02851 WBS AC	
13	herself and all others similarly situated,	MEMORANDUM AND ORDER RE: MOTION	
14	Plaintiff,	FOR FINAL APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT	
15	v.		
16	ADT, LLC, and DOES 1-50,		
17	inclusive,		
18	Defendants.		
19			
20			
21	00000		
22	Plaintiff Shirley Garnett brought this putative class		
23	action against defendant ADT, LLC, asserting claims arising out		
24	of defendant's alleged failure to reimburse for work-related		
25	vehicle expenses and failure to provide accurate wage statements		
26	as required by California law. Presently before the court is		
27	plaintiff's motion for final approval of the class action		
28	settlement, (Docket No. 87), and motion for attorney's fees,		
		1	

1 costs, and an incentive award for the named plaintiff, (Docket
2 No. 86).

3 I. Factual and Procedural Background

To avoid repetition, the court will refrain from reciting the factual and procedural background, which remains the same as in its October 6, 2015 Order granting plaintiff's partial motion for summary judgment on plaintiff's itemized wage statement claim and denying defendant's cross-motion for summary judgment. (Oct. 6, 2015 Order (Docket No. 33).)

The court granted preliminary approval of plaintiff's class action settlement on April 18, 2016. (Apr. 18, 2016 Order (Docket No. 85).) Plaintiff now seeks final approval of the class-wide settlement pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23(e). (Pl.'s Mot. for Final Approval ("Pl.'s Mot.") (Docket No. 87-1).) Defendant does not oppose plaintiff's motions.

16 II. <u>Discussion</u>

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17 Rule 23(e) provides that "[t]he claims, issues, or 18 defenses of a certified class may be settled . . . only with the 19 court's approval." Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(e). "Approval under 23(e) 20 involves a two-step process in which the Court first determines 21 whether a proposed class action settlement deserves preliminary 22 approval and then, after notice is given to class members, 23 whether final approval is warranted." Nat'l Rural Telecomms. 24 Coop. v. DIRECTV, Inc., 221 F.R.D. 523, 525 (C.D. Cal. 2004) 25 (citing Manual for Complex Litig., Third, § 30.41 (1995)). 26 The Ninth Circuit has declared a strong judicial policy 27 favoring settlement of class actions. Class Plaintiffs v. City

of Seattle, 955 F.2d 1268, 1276 (9th Cir. 1992). Nevertheless,

where, as here, "the parties reach a settlement agreement prior to class certification, courts must peruse the proposed compromise to ratify both the propriety of the certification and the fairness of the settlement." <u>Staton v. Boeing Co.</u>, 327 F.3d 938, 952 (9th Cir. 2003).

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A. Class Certification

7 A class action will be certified only if it meets the four prerequisites identified in Rule 23(a) and additionally fits 8 9 within one of the three subdivisions of Rule 23(b). See 10 Ontiveros v. Zamora, Civ. No. 2:08-567 WBS DAD, 2014 WL 3057506, 11 at *4 (E.D. Cal. July 7, 2014); Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a)-(b). Although a district court has discretion in determining whether 12 13 the moving party has satisfied each Rule 23 requirement, see 14 Califano v. Yamasaki, 442 U.S. 682, 701 (1979); Montgomery v. 15 Rumsfeld, 572 F.2d 250, 255 (9th Cir. 1978), the court must 16 conduct a rigorous inquiry before certifying a class, see Gen. 17 Tel. Co. of Sw. v. Falcon, 457 U.S. 147, 161 (1982); E. Tex. 18 Motor Freight Sys. v. Rodriguez, 431 U.S. 395, 403-05 (1977). 19 1. Rule 23(a) Requirements 20 Rule 23(a) restricts class actions to cases where: 21

(1) the class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable; (2) there are questions of law or fact common to the class; (3) the claims or defenses of the representative parties are typical of the claims or defenses of the class; and (4) the representative parties will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class.

25 Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a). These requirements are more commonly 26 referred to as numerosity, commonality, typicality, and adequacy 27 of representation.

In its Preliminary Approval Order, the court found that

1 the class satisfied these requirements, (Apr. 18, 2016 Order at 2 3-9), and the court is unaware of any changes that would alter 3 its analysis.

4

2. Rule 23(b)

5 An action that meets all the prerequisites of Rule 23(a) may be certified as a class action only if it also 6 7 satisfies the requirements of one of the three subdivisions of Rule 23(b). Leyva v. Medline Indus. Inc., 716 F.3d 510, 512 (9th 8 Cir. 2013). Plaintiff seeks certification under Rule 23(b)(3), 9 10 which provides that a class action may be maintained only if (1) 11 "the court finds that questions of law or fact common to class members predominate over questions affecting only individual 12 13 members" and (2) "that a class action is superior to other 14 available methods for fairly and efficiently adjudicating the controversy." Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(3). 15

In its Preliminary Approval Order, the court found that both prerequisites were satisfied. (Apr. 18, 2016 Order at 9-18 10.) The court is unaware of any changes that would affect this conclusion. Accordingly, since the settlement class satisfied both Rule 23(a) and 23(b)(3), the court will grant plaintiff's motion for final certification of the settlement class.

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3. Rule 23(c)(2) Notice Requirements

If the court certifies a class under Rule 23(b)(3), it "must direct to class members the best notice that is practicable under the circumstances, including individual notice to all members who can be identified through reasonable effort." Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(2)(B). Rule 23(c)(2) governs both the form and content of a proposed notice. See Ravens v. Iftikar, 174 F.R.D.

651, 658 (N.D. Cal. 1997) (citing <u>Eisen v. Carlisle & Jacquelin</u>,
417 U.S. 156, 172-77 (1974)). Although that notice must be
"reasonably certain to inform the absent members of the plaintiff
class," actual notice is not required. <u>Silber v. Mabon</u>, 18 F.3d
1449, 1454 (9th Cir. 1994) (citation omitted).

In this case, the court-appointed claims administrator, 6 7 ILYM, mailed notice to 1,593 class members on May 9, 2016, after checking the names and addresses against the National Change of 8 9 Address database maintained by the United States Postal Service 10 and updating any changed addresses. (Mullins Decl. $\P\P$ 7-8 11 (Docket No. 87-3).) One hundred sixty notice packets were 12 returned and ILYM located updated addresses and re-mailed the 13 packets. (Id. at ¶ 9.) Only nine notices were deemed 14 undeliverable. (Id.)

15 The notice explained the proceedings; defined the scope of the class; informed the class members of the claim form 16 17 requirement and the binding effect of the class action; described 18 the procedure for opting out and objecting; and provided the time 19 and date of the final fairness hearing. (Id. Ex. A, Notice.) In 20 addition, the parties modified the text box on page two of the 21 notice entitled, "YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS AND OPTIONS IN THIS LAWSUIT," 22 to make it clear that class members must submit a claim form in 23 order to receive a settlement check, pursuant to this court's 24 instructions at the preliminary approval hearing. (Id. at 2; 25 Workman Decl. in Support of Pl.'s Mot. for Final Approval ¶ 7 26 (Docket No. 87-2).)

Accordingly, the court finds that the content of the notice was reasonably certain to inform the class members of the

1	terms of the settlement agreement and the method used was the	
2	best form of notice available under the circumstances. <u>See</u> Fed.	
3	R. Civ. P. 23(c)(2)(B); see also Churchill Vill., L.L.C. v. Gen.	
4	<u>Elec.</u> , 361 F.3d 566, 575 (9th Cir. 2004) ("Notice is satisfactory	
5	if it `generally describes the terms of the settlement in	
6	sufficient detail to alert those with adverse viewpoints to	
7	investigate and to come forward and be heard.'" (citation	
8	omitted)).	
9	B. Rule 23(e): Fairness, Adequacy, and Reasonableness of	
10	Proposed Settlement	
11	Having determined class treatment to be warranted, the	
12	court must now determine whether the terms of the parties'	
13	settlement appear fair, adequate, and reasonable. <u>See</u> Fed. R.	
14	Civ. P. 23(e)(2); <u>Hanlon</u> , 150 F.3d at 1026. This process	
15	requires the court to "balance a number of factors," including:	
16	the strength of the plaintiff's case; the risk,	
17	expense, complexity, and likely duration of further litigation; the risk of maintaining class action status	
18	throughout the trial; the amount offered in settlement; the extent of discovery completed and the stage of the	
19	proceedings; the experience and views of counsel; the presence of a governmental participant; and the	
20	reaction of the class members to the proposed settlement.	
21	<u>Hanlon</u> , 150 F.3d at 1026.	
22	1. <u>Strength of Plaintiff's Case</u>	
23	An important consideration is the strength of	
24	plaintiff's case on the merits balanced against the amount	
25	offered in the settlement. <u>DIRECTV</u> , 221 F.R.D. at 526. The	
26	district court, however, is not required to reach any ultimate	
27	conclusions on the merits of the dispute, "for it is the very	
28	uncertainty of outcome in litigation and avoidance of	
	6	

wastefulness and expensive litigation that induce consensual
 settlements." Officers for Justice v. Civil Serv. Comm'n of the
 <u>City & Cnty. of SF</u>, 688 F.2d 615, 625 (9th Cir. 2004).

4 The settlement terms compare favorably to the 5 uncertainties with respect to liability in this case. If the case had not settled, defendant would have opposed any class б 7 certification request and continued to insist that it properly reimbursed class members for all expenses incurred on the job. 8 9 (Pl.'s Mot. at 12.) Defendant also disagreed with this court's 10 October 6, 2015 Order granting plaintiff partial summary judgment 11 on her wage statement claim, as was evidenced by defendant's 12 unsuccessful motion for reconsideration and motion for 13 certification of the Order for interlocutory appeal, (Docket Nos. 14 48-49), and made clear its intention to appeal any final judgment 15 in plaintiff's favor. (Pl.'s Mot. at 12.)

In comparing the strength of plaintiff's case with the proposed settlement, the court finds that the proposed settlement is a fair resolution of the issues in this case.

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2. <u>Risk</u>, Expense, Complexity, and Likely Duration of Further Litigation

Further litigation could greatly delay resolution of this case and increase expenses. Prior to any judgment, the parties would have had to litigate class certification, which would have required additional discovery, time, and expense. (<u>Id.</u> at 13.) In addition, defendant planned to appeal any final judgment in plaintiff's favor. (<u>Id.</u>) This weighs in favor of settlement of the action.

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3. Risk of Maintaining Class Action Status Throughout

1 Trial If the case proceeded to trial, plaintiff would have a 2 3 strong chance of certifying the class given the court's 4 certification for the purposes of settlement. Plaintiff, 5 however, acknowledges a risk that defendant would have defeated class certification on the reimbursement claim. (Id. at 12-13.) 6 7 Accordingly, this factor also favors approval of the settlement. 8 4. Amount Offered in Settlement 9 In assessing the amount offered in settlement, "[i]t is 10 the complete package taken as a whole, rather than the individual 11 component parts, that must be examined for overall fairness." Officers for Justice, 688 F.2d at 628. "It is well-settled law 12 13 that a cash settlement amounting to only a fraction of the 14 potential recovery will not per se render the settlement 15 inadequate or unfair." Id. 16 The gross settlement amount in this case is \$2.7 million and about \$1.6 million of the total fund will be 17 18 distributed to class members, after the incentive award, 19 attorney's fees, and costs are deducted. (Id. at 14.) Each of the 831 class members who submitted a claim form will receive a 20 21 settlement check based on the number of workweeks he or she was employed by defendant during the class period.¹ (Mullins Decl. \P 22 23 11, Ex. A, Notice.) The average amount class members will 24 receive is \$1,470.68 and the highest award is \$4,280.01. (Id.) 25 Plaintiff's anticipated award is \$1,552.39. (Id.) No money from 26

^{27 &}lt;sup>1</sup> Sixty-nine class members submitted claim forms after the June 8, 2016 deadline but both parties agreed to accept the late claims. (Suppl. Workman Decl. ¶ 2 (Docket No. 88-1).)

the class fund will revert to defendant and, as a result, the claims administrator estimates that there will be \$458,728.15 remaining for distribution after the 831 claims are paid. (<u>Id.</u>; Suppl. Mullins Decl. ¶ 3 (Docket No. 88).) This amount will also be distributed on a workweek basis and the average additional amount each class member will receive is \$552. (Suppl. Mullins Decl. ¶ 3.)

While the \$2.7 million settlement is on the lower end 8 9 of the range of potential recovery for this case--the damage 10 calculation experts hired by plaintiff estimated that the range 11 is between \$2.5 million and \$11.7 million--class members will receive substantial cash awards rather than coupons or nominal 12 13 (Pl.'s Mot. at 14.) Class members will also be able to awards. 14 avoid the significant risks and costs associated with further 15 litigation. Accordingly, the settlement amount is adequate and 16 fair.

17

5. Extent of Discovery and the State of Proceedings

18 A settlement that occurs in an advanced stage of the 19 proceeding indicates the parties carefully investigated the 20 claims before reaching a resolution. Alberto v. GMRI, Inc., Civ. 21 No. 07-1895 WBS DAD, 2008 WL 4891201, at *9 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 12, 22 2008). The parties in this case conducted a significant amount 23 of discovery, took depositions, participated in two full 24 mediations, and fully briefed motions and cross-motions for 25 summary judgment before reaching a settlement. (Pl.'s Mot. at 26 The parties' investigation of the claims through formal 15.) 27 discovery, informal discovery, and mediation weigh in favor of 28 settlement.

6. Experience and Views of Counsel

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2 Plaintiff's counsel has extensive experience litigating 3 class actions, particularly those involving employment law and 4 wage and hour enforcement. (Workman Decl. in Support of Pl.'s 5 Mot. for Final Approval $\P\P$ 13-14.) Based on her experience, б plaintiff's counsel believes the proposed settlement is fair, 7 reasonable, and adequate to the class members. (Id. \P 9.) The court gives considerable weight to class counsel's opinions 8 9 regarding the settlement due to counsel's experience and 10 familiarity with the litigation. Alberto, 2008 WL 4891201, at 11 *10. This factor supports approval of the settlement agreement. 12 7. Presence of Government Participant 13 No governmental entity participated in this matter; this factor, therefore, is irrelevant to the court's analysis. 14 15 8. Reaction of the Class Members to the Proposed 16 Settlement 17 Notice of the settlement was sent to 1,593 class 18 members and only seven class members submitted requests for 19 exclusion prior to the June 8, 2016 deadline. (Mullins Decl. ¶ 20 10.) No class members have objected. (Id.) "It is established 21 that the absence of a large number of objections to a proposed 2.2 class action settlement raises a strong presumption that the 23 terms of a proposed class settlement action are favorable to the 24 class members." DIRECTV, 221 F.R.D. at 529. Accordingly, this 25 factor weighs in favor of the court's approval of the settlement. 26 9. Conclusion 27 Having considered the foregoing factors, the court 28 finds the settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable pursuant

1 to Rule 23(e).

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B. Attorney's Fees

3 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23(h) provides, "[i]n a 4 certified class action, the court may award reasonable attorney's 5 fees and nontaxable costs that are authorized by law or by the б parties' agreement." If a negotiated class action settlement 7 includes an award of attorney's fees, that fee award must be evaluated in the overall context of the settlement. 8 Knisley v. 9 Network Assocs., 312 F.3d 1123, 1126 (9th Cir. 2002); Monterrubio 10 v. Best Buy Stores, L.P., 291 F.R.D. 443, 455 (E.D. Cal. 2013) 11 (England, J.). The court "ha[s] an independent obligation to 12 ensure that the award, like the settlement itself, is reasonable, 13 even if the parties have already agreed to an amount." In re 14 Bluetooth Headset Prods. Liab. Litig., 654 F.3d 935, 941 (9th 15 Cir. 2011).

16 Plaintiff's counsel requests \$891,000 in attorney's 17 fees for 1,541.58 hours of attorney and paralegal work on this 18 case. (Pl.'s Mot. for Att'y's Fees at 1 (Docket No. 86-1).) 19 Plaintiff also requests \$87,534.60 in costs. (Id. at 1.) The 20 parties negotiated the agreed-upon attorney's fees and costs 21 after reaching an agreement on the total settlement fund amount. 22 (Id. at 10.) Defendant agreed not to oppose a request for 23 attorney's fees that did not exceed 33% of the settlement and 24 costs that did not exceed \$90,000. (Id.) The attorney's fees 25 requested by plaintiff constitute 33% of the total settlement 26 fund and are slightly above the lodestar figure of \$829,533, 27 which plaintiff calculated based on hourly rates of \$650 for 28 partners, \$350 for associates, and \$150 for paralegals.

1 Plaintiff's counsel submitted detailed time sheets justifying the 2 hours worked on this case. (Workman Decl. to Mot. for Attn'y's 3 Fees Ex. B (Docket No. 86-5).)

4 While such substantial hourly rates might not have been 5 accepted by the court under different circumstances, the court б finds plaintiff's counsel's request for attorney's fees and costs 7 in the agreed-upon amount of \$978,534.60 reasonable given her exceptional handling of this case. Plaintiff's counsel has 8 9 demonstrated exceptional advocacy skills both at the hearing for 10 the cross-motions for summary judgment and the preliminary 11 approval hearing. Furthermore, plaintiff's counsel was able to 12 prevail on a highly contested issue on summary judgment and to 13 resolve the case in a manner that significantly benefits class 14 members. Both because of plaintiff's counsel's able advocacy and 15 the substantial awards the class members will receive in this 16 case, the court will grant the requested fees and costs.

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D. Incentive Payment to Named Plaintiff

18 The court may award "reasonable incentive payments" to named plaintiffs "to compensate class representatives for work 19 20 done on behalf of the class, to make up for financial or 21 reputational risk undertaken in bringing the action, and, 22 sometimes, to recognize their willingness to act as a private 23 attorney general." Davis v. Brown Shoe Co., Inc., Civ. No. 1:13-01211 LJO BAM, 2015 WL 6697929, at *11 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 3, 2015). 24 25 In assessing the reasonableness of incentive payments, the court 26 should consider "the actions the plaintiff has taken to protect 27 the interests of the class, the degree to which the class has 28 benefitted from those actions" and "the amount of time and effort

the plaintiff expended in pursuing the litigation." <u>Staton</u>, 327
F.3d at 977 (citation omitted). The court must balance "the
number of named plaintiffs receiving incentive payments, the
proportion of the payments relative to the settlement amount, and
the size of each payment." <u>Id.</u> In the Ninth Circuit, an
incentive award of \$5,000 is presumptively reasonable. <u>Davis</u>,
2015 WL 6697929, at *11.

The class representative in this case seeks an 8 9 incentive payment of \$7,500. (Pl.'s Mot. for Att'y's Fees at 6.) 10 While the award amount is higher than the \$5,000 award found to 11 be presumptively reasonable in the Ninth Circuit, it is 12 proportionate to the substantial settlement awards the class 13 members stand to receive. As discussed above, unlike in cases in 14 which class members receive nominal settlement awards, discounts, 15 or coupons, the class members in this case will receive an 16 average of \$1,470.68, with a high of 4,280.01. Plaintiff is 17 anticipated to receive an award of \$1,552.39. The requested 18 incentive award of \$7,500 represents only 0.004% of the total \$1.6 million available for distribution to class members. 19

20 In addition, the award fairly compensates plaintiff for 21 the significant time and resources she committed to pursuing this 22 case and representing the class. Plaintiff has dedicated at 23 least forty hours to this case--traveling from Stockton to San 24 Francisco to consult with and assist her attorney; traveling from 25 Stockton to Sacramento for her deposition; assisting in answering 26 document requests, interrogatories, and requests for admissions; 27 searching for documents and requested information; and making 28 herself available to answer any potential questions during the

depositions and mediation sessions. (Garnett Decl. ¶ 10 (Docket 1 2 No. 80-2).) In addition, plaintiff agreed to act as a private 3 attorney general under California Labor Code section 2698 and 4 risked her own reputation and future employment prospects by 5 bringing a suit against her former employer. Lastly, plaintiff б also agreed to a more expansive release of all claims against 7 defendant than the other class members and a covenant not to sue. (Suppl. Workman Decl. Ex. A, Joint Stipulation and Agreement of 8 Compromise and Settlement of Class Action ("Settlement 9 10 Agreement") ¶ 8.2.4 (Docket No. 81).) 11 The court therefore finds that the incentive payment is 12 reasonable and fairly compensates plaintiff for the work done on 13 behalf of the class and the financial and reputational risks 14 undertaken. 15 III. Conclusion 16 Based on the foregoing, the court grants final 17 certification of the settlement class and approves the settlement 18 set forth in the settlement agreement as fair, reasonable, and 19 adequate. Consummation of the settlement agreement is therefore 20 approved. The settlement agreement shall be binding upon all 21 participating class members who did not exclude themselves. 2.2 IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that plaintiff's motions for 23 final approval of the class and class action settlement and for 24 reasonable attorney's fees, expenses, and an incentive award 25 (Docket Nos. 86, 87) be, and the same hereby is, GRANTED. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED THAT: 26 27 (1) solely for the purpose of this settlement, and pursuant 28 to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23, the court hereby 14

1	C	ertifies the following subclasses:
2		- Wage Statement Settlement Class: All employees who
3		worked as sales representatives for defendant from
4		October 1, 2010 to April 18, 2016.
5		- Vehicle Expense Reimbursement Class: All employees
6		who worked as sales representatives for defendant
7		from October 1, 2010 to April 18, 2016 and employees
8		who worked for defendant as sales managers from July
9		1, 2013 to April 18, 2016.
10	Sj	pecifically, the court finds that:
11	((a) the settlement class members are so numerous that
12		joinder of all settlement class members would be
13		<pre>impracticable;</pre>
14	(]	b) there are questions of law and fact common to the
15		settlement class which predominate over any
16		individual questions;
17	((c) claims of the named plaintiff are typical of the
18		claims of the settlement class;
19	((d) the named plaintiff and plaintiff's counsel have
20		fairly and adequately represented and protected the
21		interests of the settlement class; and
22	((e) a class action is superior to other available
23		methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of
24		the controversy.
25	(2) t]	he court appoints the named plaintiff, Shirley Garnett,
26	a	s representative of the class and finds that she meets
27	t]	he requirements of Rule 23;
28	(3) t]	he court appoints Robin Workman and Aviva Roller, 15
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Workman Law Firm, 177 Post Street, Suite 900, San 1 2 Francisco, CA, 94108, as counsel to the settlement class 3 and finds that counsel meet the requirements of Rule 23; the settlement agreement's plan for class notice is the 4 (4) 5 best notice practicable under the circumstances and satisfies the requirements of due process and Rule 23. 6 7 The plan is approved and adopted. The notice to the class complies with Rule 23(c)(2) and Rule 23(e) and is 8 9 approved and adopted;

- 10 (5) having found that the parties and their counsel took 11 appropriate efforts to locate and inform all putative 12 class members of the settlement, and given that no class 13 members filed an objection to the settlement, the court 14 finds and orders that no additional notice to the class 15 is necessary;
- 16 as of the date of the entry of this Order, plaintiff and (6) 17 all class members who have not timely opted out hereby do 18 and shall be deemed to have expressly waived and relinquished all claims, charges, complaints, liens, 19 demands, causes of action, obligations, damages and 20 21 liabilities, that each class member had, now has, or may 22 hereafter claim to have against the released parties, 23 arising at any time during the settlement class period, 24 out of, or relating in any way to, the facts, legal 25 theories, and alleged causes of action in the present 26 case (as defined by paragraph 8.2.3 of the settlement 27 agreement);
- 28

(7) plaintiff's counsel is entitled to fees and costs in the

1		amount of \$978,534.60;
2	(8)	the named plaintiff is entitled to an incentive payment
3		of \$7,500; and
4	(9)	this action is dismissed with prejudice; however, without
5		affecting the finality of this Order, the court shall
6		retain continuing jurisdiction over the interpretation,
7		implementation, and enforcement of the settlement
8		agreement with respect to all parties to this action and
9		their counsel of record.
10	The cle	erk is instructed to enter judgment accordingly.
11	Dated:	June 27, 2016
12		WILLIAM B. SHUBB
13		UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE
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