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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON  
AT TACOMA

CHAO CHEN,

Plaintiff,

v.

THE GEO GROUP, INC.,

Defendant.

CASE NO. 3:17-cv-05769-RJB

ORDER ON DEFENDANT THE  
GEO GROUP, INC.'S MOTION TO  
DISMISS CLASS ACTION  
COMPLAINT FOR DAMAGES

THIS MATTER comes before the Court on Defendant The GEO Group, Inc.'s Motion to Dismiss Class Action Complaint for Damages. Dkt. 8. The Court has considered Defendant's motion, Plaintiff Chao Chen's Response, Defendant's Reply, the Complaint, and the remainder of the file herein. Dkts. 1, 15, 16. The Court also considered oral argument held in open court on November 20, 2017.

Mr. Chen was a detainee at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, a facility that GEO operates under a contract with United States Immigration and Customs

1 Enforcement (ICE), a division of the Department of Homeland Security. GEO uses detainees,  
2 including Mr. Chen, to assist in operating the facility under a Voluntary Work Program. In  
3 exchange for their work, GEO compensates detainees \$1 per day.

4 The Complaint alleges that Mr. Chen is entitled to compensation of \$11 per hour because  
5 he is an “employee” as defined by the Washington State Minimum Wage Act. Defendant’s  
6 motion seeks dismissal under Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) under two theories: (1) State law is  
7 preempted, and (2) the Complaint fails to state a claim that detainees, including Mr. Chen, are  
8 “employees” deserving State minimum wage protections.

9 **I. BACKGROUND**

10 A. Facts.

11 1. *The Complaint.*

12 The following facts alleged in the Complaint are taken as true for purposes of  
13 Defendant’s Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) motion.

14 GEO, a private corporation, has owned and operated the Northwest Detention Center, a  
15 1,500 bed ICE facility, since 2005. Dkt. 1 at ¶4.2. Northwest Detention Center detainees include  
16 Mr. Chen, who was detained pending immigration proceedings from October 2014 until  
17 February 2016. *Id.* at ¶3.1. Mr. Chen is a citizen of the People’s Republic of China, but has been  
18 a lawful permanent resident of the United States since the 1980s. *Id.* at ¶3.1. GEO relies upon  
19 detainees for its grounds maintenance, cooking, laundry, cleaning, and other services. *Id.* at  
20 ¶¶4.4, 4.5. GEO has compensated detainees, including Mr. Chen, at \$1 per day. *Id.* at ¶¶4.7, 4.8.  
21 GEO has in some cases alternatively compensated detainees with more and better food. *Id.*

22 Washington’s minimum wage is \$11 an hour. Dkt. 1 at ¶4.11. The Complaint alleges that  
23 Mr. Chen is entitled to compensation at that rate. *Id.* at ¶4.11.

1 The Complaint seeks damages for lost wages, fees, and costs<sup>1</sup> on behalf of a proposed  
2 class, including Mr. Chen and others similarly situated. Dkt. 1 at ¶6.4.

3 2. *Extra-pleadings.*

4 The Contract and Voluntary Work Program.

5 According to Defendant, GEO operates the Northwest Detention Center by “a complex  
6 statutory, regulatory, and contractual relationship” with ICE. Dkt. 8 at 8. *See* Dkt. 1-1 at ¶4.3.  
7 The contract central to the GEO-ICE relationship (“the Contract”<sup>2</sup>) sets out terms for a ten-year  
8 operation of the facility. Dkt. 19 at 47. The Contract requires of GEO, *inter alia*, that “[d]etainee  
9 labor shall be used in accordance with the detainee work plan developed by the Contractor, and  
10 will adhere to the ICE PBNDS [Performance-Based National Detention Standards] on Voluntary  
11 Work Program.” *Id.* at 86. *See also, id.* at 49. Further, “the detainee work program shall not  
12 conflict with any other requirements of the contract and must comply with all applicable laws  
13 and regulations.” *Id.*

14 The Voluntary Work Program articulates standards, *inter alia*, prohibiting discrimination,  
15 accommodating disabilities, limiting work to “8 hours daily, 40 hours weekly,” and  
16 compensating detainees. 2011 Performance-Based National Detention Standards, Section 5.8,  
17 Voluntary Work Program, available online at <http://www.ice.gov/detention-standards/2011/> (last  
18 accessed Nov. 30, 2017). The detainee compensation provision of the Voluntary Work Program  
19 states:

20 Detainees shall receive monetary compensation for work completed in accordance with  
21 the facility’s standard policy. The compensation is at least \$1.00 (USD) per day. The

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22 <sup>1</sup> Compare to the companion case, *State of Washington v. The GEO Group Inc.*, Cause No. 3:17-cv-05806-RJB, Dkt.  
1-1 at 7 (seeking injunctive and declaratory relief and an award for unjust enrichment).

23 <sup>2</sup> Only a redacted version of the Contract has been considered, because the full contract, which redacts pricing  
24 information, is not part of the record. *See* Dkt. 19. Whether the Contract should be sealed, redacted, or produced in  
full is the subject of a pending motion. Dkt. 20.

1 facility shall have an established system that ensures detainees receive the pay owed them  
2 before being transferred or released.

3 *Id.*

4 Irrelevant information.

5 Defendant highlights facts surrounding the criminal conviction forming the basis for  
6 removal proceedings against Mr. Chen. Dkt. 8 at 9. These details are not relevant to resolving  
7 Defendant's motion.

8 B. Defendant's Motion to Dismiss.

9 Defendant seeks dismissal under Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) on two grounds, preemption  
10 and failure to state a claim. Concerning preemption, Defendant argues that the State's minimum  
11 wage provision is preempted by (1) express preemption, through 8 U.S.C. §1324a(h)(2), a  
12 provision of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), (2) field preemption, because  
13 Congress has occupied the field of immigration detention, which includes regulating detainee  
14 pay, and (3) conflict/obstacle preemption, because requiring GEO to follow the State's minimum  
15 wage creates a clear conflict between state and federal law and frustrates ICE purposes and  
16 objectives. Dkt. 8 at 15-22. Defendant argues, in the alternative, that the Complaint fails to state  
17 a claim that detainees, including Mr. Chen, are "employees" deserving State minimum wage  
18 protections. *Id.* at 23-29.

19 **II. STANDARD UNDER FED. R. CIV. P. 12(B)(6)**

20 Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b) motions to dismiss may be based on either the lack of a cognizable  
21 legal theory or the absence of sufficient facts alleged under a cognizable legal theory. *Balistreri*  
22 *v. Pacifica Police Department*, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1990). Material allegations are taken  
23 as admitted and the complaint is construed in the plaintiff's favor. *Keniston v. Roberts*, 717 F.2d  
24 1295 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1983). "While a complaint attacked by a Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss does not

1 need detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff's obligation to provide the grounds of his entitlement  
2 to relief requires more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of  
3 a cause of action will not do.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 554-55 (2007)  
4 (internal citations omitted). “Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above  
5 the speculative level, on the assumption that all the allegations in the complaint are true (even if  
6 doubtful in fact).” *Id.* at 555. The complaint must allege “enough facts to state a claim to relief  
7 that is plausible on its face.” *Id.* at 547.

8           Where a state law claim is preempted by federal law, dismissal may be granted under  
9 Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6). *E.g.*, *Cleghorn v. Blue Shield of Cal.*, 408 F.3d 1222, 1225 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir.  
10 2005) (affirming dismissal of state law claims preempted by ERISA).

### 11 **III. PREEMPTION**

#### 12 A. Preemption generally.

13           The Supremacy Clause provides that the laws of the United States “shall be the supreme  
14 Law of the Land[,] . . . anything in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary  
15 notwithstanding.” U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 2. Federal law can preempt state law in three ways: (1)  
16 express preemption, (2) field preemption, or (3) obstacle/conflict preemption. *Nat'l Fed'n of the*  
17 *Blind v. United Airlines Inc.*, 813 F.3d 718, 724 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2016). “Regardless of the type of  
18 preemption involved—express, field or conflict—the purpose of Congress is the ultimate  
19 touchstone of pre-emption analysis.” *Id.*

20           Analysis “starts with the basic assumption that Congress did not intend to displace state  
21 law.” *Maryland v. Louisiana*, 451 U.S. 725, 746 (1981). This presumption applies in “all pre-  
22 emption cases, and particularly in those in which Congress has legislated . . . in a field which the  
23 States have traditionally occupied.” *Medtronic, Inc. v. Lohr*, 518 U.S. 470, 485 (1996) (internal  
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1 quotations and citations omitted). “[L]abor standards fall[] within the traditional police power of  
2 the State.” *Fort Halifax Packing Co. v. Coyne*, 482 U.S. 1, 21 (1987). *See also*, RCW  
3 49.46.005(a). The party seeking to set aside state law bears the burden to show preemption.  
4 *PLIVA, Inc. v. Mensing*, 564 U.S. 604, 634 (2011).

5 B. Express preemption.

6 Express preemption applies where Congress explicitly states its intent to preempt state  
7 law in the language of a statute. *Cipollone v. Liggett Group, Inc.*, 505 U.S. 504, 516 (1992).  
8 Where Congress has expressed an intent to preempt state law, the scope of the preemption is  
9 determined by examining congressional intent, beginning with the legislative text, “which  
10 necessarily contains the best evidence of Congress' preemptive intent.” *CSX Transp., Inc. v.*  
11 *Easterwood*, 507 U.S. 658, 664 (1993). Courts also consider the “statutory framework,” as well  
12 as the “structure and purpose of the statute as a whole.” *Lohr*, 518 U.S. at 486 (1996). “[W]hen  
13 the text of a pre-emption clause is susceptible of more than one plausible reading, courts  
14 ordinarily accept the reading that disfavors pre-emption. *Altria Group, Inc. v. Good*, 555 U.S. 70,  
15 77 (2008) (internal quotations and citations omitted).

16 Defendant points to §1324a(h)(2) of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) as  
17 expressly preempting the State minimum wage provision. Dkt. 8 at 16; Dkt. 16 at 7-9. Through  
18 IRCA, Congress created “a comprehensive scheme prohibiting the employment of illegal aliens  
19 in the United States.” *Hoffman Plastic Compounds, Inc. v. NLRB*, 535 U.S. 137, 147 (2002);  
20 §1324a(a). The sole preemption provision under IRCA, §1342a(h)(2), prevents state and local  
21 governments from “imposing civil or criminal sanctions (other than through licensing and similar  
22 laws) upon those who employ . . . unauthorized aliens.” §1324a(h)(2).

1 At issue is how broadly to define the term “sanction” under §1324a(h)(2). According to  
2 Defendant, the term should be broadly construed to include lost wages, attorneys fees, and costs  
3 for minimum wage violations. Dkt. 8 at 16; Dkt. 16 at 8, citing to RCW 49.46.20, RCW  
4 49.46.090, and RCW 49.46.100. Plaintiff acknowledges that the term is undefined and argues  
5 that the term refers to a “penalty or coercive measure,” whereas the Washington Minimum Wage  
6 Act only provides a remedy of monetary damages for back pay and related costs. Dkt. 15 at 11,  
7 12. Plaintiff also argues that because employing unauthorized aliens is the act that IRCA  
8 “sanctions,” only state laws imposing sanctions for that conduct fall within IRCA’s express  
9 preemption clause. *Id.*

10 Both parties agree that §1324a(h)(2) is an express preemption statute. There are no other  
11 express preemption provisions under IRCA, so the key question is what Congress intended for  
12 §1324a(h)(2) to preempt. Section 1324a(h)(2) prohibits states from imposing civil or criminal  
13 sanctions “upon those who employ . . . unauthorized aliens[.]” Put differently, states cannot  
14 penalize employers for employing unauthorized aliens. Even if, as Defendant argues, the  
15 provisions of the Washington Minimum Wage Act are construed as “sanctions,” they would not  
16 be imposed on account of employers hiring unauthorized aliens, but rather because of the failure  
17 to pay the prevailing minimum wage. *See* RCW 49.46.020. Indeed, the Washington Minimum  
18 Wage Act nowhere mentions immigration status, aliens, or any related term. *See* RCW 49.46 *et*  
19 *seq.* Section 1324a(h)(2) does not preempt the State minimum wage provision.

20 In defense of its view that the term sanction should interpreted broadly to include lost  
21 wages, attorneys fees, and costs, Defendant relies on *Chamber of Commerce of U.S. v.*  
22 *Edmondson*, 594 F.3d 742, 765 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2010). Dkt. 18 at FN 41. In *Edmondson*, the court  
23 analyzed an Oklahoma statutory scheme (now-repealed) that “subject[ed] employers to cease and  
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1 desist orders, reinstatement, back pay, costs, and attorneys’ fees” for hiring unauthorized aliens,  
2 concluding that “[s]uch impositions . . . fall within the meaning of §1324a(h)(2) sanctions.” *Id.*  
3 (emphasis added). *Edmondson* is inapposite. Even if *Edmondson* was binding precedent, analysis  
4 of the term “sanction” was done in the context of a preliminary injunction, with focus on the  
5 likelihood—and not the actual merits—of whether the Oklahoma law would be preempted. More  
6 importantly, the mention of back pay was dicta and had no bearing on the holding of the case.  
7 The court focused on the attempt by the Oklahoma legislature to create a work authorization  
8 program that excluded unauthorized aliens from employment, which falls squarely within what  
9 §1324a(h)(2) precludes states from doing.

10 Defendant has not shown that the State minimum wage provision is expressly preempted.

11 C. Field preemption.

12 “States are precluded from regulating conduct in a field that Congress, acting within its  
13 proper authority, has determined must be regulated by its exclusive governance.” *Arizona v.*  
14 *U.S.*, 567 U.S. 387, 399 (2012). Congressional intent to displace state law can be inferred from  
15 either “a federal interest . . . so dominant that the federal system will be assumed to preclude  
16 enforcement of state laws,” or where “a framework of regulation [is] so pervasive . . . that  
17 Congress left no room for the States to supplement it[.]” *Id.*, citing to *Rice v. Santa Fe Elevator*  
18 *Corp.*, 331 U.S. 218, 230 (1947)(internal quotations omitted). “The question whether the  
19 regulation of an entire field has been reserved by the Federal Government is, essentially, a  
20 question of ascertaining the intent underlying the federal scheme.” *Hillsborough Cty, Fla. v.*  
21 *Automated Med. Labs., Inc.*, 471 U.S. 707, 714 (1985). “Pre-emption should not be inferred,  
22 however, simply because the agency’s regulations are comprehensive,” but rather, courts  
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1 consider “evidence [of] a desire to occupy a field completely.” *R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. v.*  
2 *Durham Cnty.*, 479 U.S. 130, 149 (1986).

3 Defendant does not cogently articulate a dominant federal interest that would preclude  
4 enforcement of State minimum wage laws, *see* Dkt. 8 at 17-19; Dkt. 16 at 9-11, so analysis  
5 should focus on ascertaining congressional intent within a framework of regulation. Recent  
6 Ninth Circuit precedent has emphasized “the importance of delineating the pertinent area of  
7 regulation with specificity before proceeding with the field preemption inquiry.” *Nat’l Fed’n of*  
8 *the Blind*, 813 F.3d at 734. Here, the pertinent area of regulation is detainee wages.

9 Defendant has assembled a hodgepodge of federal statutes and argues that Congress  
10 intends to regulate the field of immigration detention generally, including detainee wages. *See*  
11 Dkt. 16 at FN16, citing 8 U.S.C. §§1103, 1225, 1226, 1226a, 1231, 1324a, 1555(d). Surveying  
12 the authority from Defendant, it cannot be said, with any degree of clarity, that Congress intends  
13 to occupy the field of detainee wages. At best, Defendant has highlighted general sources of  
14 authority for ICE agency action, but as discussed below, ICE has not created a regulatory scheme  
15 preempting state law through its policies, including the Voluntary Work Program. These statutes  
16 do not together show that Congress intends detainee wages to be part of IRCA’s “harmonious  
17 whole.” *Arizona*, 567 U.S. at 401.

18 The most to be gleaned about congressional intent to occupy the field of detainee wages  
19 can be found in 8 U.S.C. §1555(d). Section 1555(d) authorizes congressional appropriations for  
20 “payment of allowances [to detainees] . . . for work performed,” but payment is limited to “such  
21 rate as may be specified from time to time in the appropriation Act involved.” §1555(d)  
22 (emphasis added). Under this section, Congress arguably speaks to detainee wages when  
23 Congress appropriates payment of allowances to detainees for work performed, but although  
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1 §1555(d) is still in effect, Congress has not specified any rate for detainee work since fiscal year  
2 1979. At that time, Congress appropriated funds for “payment of allowances (at a rate not in  
3 excess of \$1 per day) . . . for work performed.” PL 95–431 (HR 12934), PL 95–431, Oct. 10,  
4 1978, 92 Stat 1021 (emphasis added). At least since fiscal year 1979, Congress has abandoned  
5 direct appropriations payment of allowances, despite its awareness of how to do so. *See, e.g.*,  
6 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, PL 114-113, December 18, 2015, 129 Stat 2242, 2497.  
7 From the text of §1555(d), Defendant has not shown that Congress intended to preempt state law  
8 regarding detainee wages.

9 Defendant has offered no satisfactory explanation for the congressional silence since  
10 1979, other than to make general representations about congressional delegation of authority to  
11 ICE<sup>3</sup>. Congress could delegate the authority to create a framework regulating detainee wages to  
12 ICE, but Defendant has not made this showing. The question remains then, where the \$1 per day  
13 detainee wage rate comes from, if not from Congress, and the only answer is the Voluntary Work  
14 Program. However, the Voluntary Work Program is an ICE policy with no preemptive force at  
15 law.

16 If ICE intended for the Voluntary Work Program to preempt state law on the issue of  
17 detainee wages, ICE would need to follow at least two sets of requirements, which it has failed to  
18 do. First, as Plaintiff points out, ICE, like all federal agencies, is subject to Executive Order  
19 13132, which requires agencies to follow specific rules when intending to preempt state law  
20 through agency policy. Dkt. 15 at 16; Federalism, 64 FR 43255, E.O. 13132 (1999). Second, for  
21 agency policy to have the force of law, agency rule-making processes must approach at least the  
22 spirit of Administrative Procedure Act (APA) formalities. *See United States v. Mead*, 533 U.S.

23 \_\_\_\_\_  
24 <sup>3</sup> But Defendant appears to forgo this argument in Reply, *see* Dkt. 16 at 10 ln. 21.

1 218 (2001) and its progeny. Defendant has made no showing that ICE made efforts to observe  
2 either set of requirements when creating the Voluntary Work Program. The policy's transience is  
3 highlighted by defense counsel's oral acknowledgement that ICE could modify the Voluntary  
4 Work Program at any time without notice. The Voluntary Work Program should not be viewed  
5 as a regulatory scheme with the legal force to preempt state law.

6 In summary, Congress has not chosen to occupy the field of detainee wages. There is no  
7 showing that Congress intended for its general appropriations after 1979 to delegate to ICE the  
8 authority to preempt state law as to detainee wages. ICE policy on detainee wages, specifically,  
9 the Voluntary Work Program, does not show a clear agency intent to preempt state law, where  
10 there is no showing that ICE attempted to observe formalities that underlie its authority to do so.

11 Defendant has not shown that the State minimum wage provision is field preempted.

12 D. Conflict/obstacle preemption.

13 Conflict preemption exists "where it is impossible for a private party to comply with both  
14 state and federal requirements," and obstacle preemption exists "where state law stands as an  
15 obstacle to the accomplishment and execution of the full purposes and objectives of Congress."  
16 *English v. General Elec. Co.*, 496 U.S. 72, 79 (1990). Defendant argues that the State's  
17 minimum wage provision is preempted by both conflict and obstacle preemption.

18 On conflict preemption, Defendant argues that IRCA, which prohibits the hiring of  
19 unauthorized aliens, and the State's minimum wage provision, which would require GEO to treat  
20 detainee-workers as "employees" deserving the State minimum wage, are in conflict, making it  
21 impossible for GEO to comply with both. Dkt. 8 at 8; Dkt. 16 at 11. "Hiring virtually any  
22 detainee" would violate IRCA, Defendant opines. *Id.* at 12. Plaintiff contests Defendant's  
23 representation that GEO could not abide by both IRCA and the State's minimum wage

1 provisions and represents that “many” detainees could work lawfully within IRCA’s constraints.  
2 Dkt. 15 at 17-19.

3 Defendant’s conflict preemption argument is premature, because it relies on factual  
4 determinations about the status of detainees. Defendant has challenged the pleadings under Fed.  
5 R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6), which means that the Court must resolve the motion based on allegations in  
6 the Complaint. *See* Dkt. 1.

7 Defendant’s obstacle preemption argument is wandering and opaque, *see* Dkt. 8 at 20-22;  
8 Dkt. 16 at 11-13, but Defendant appears to point to several federal objectives and purposes that  
9 may be obstructed: increased costs to ICE, and, ultimately taxpayers; a “balkanized patchwork”  
10 of state laws; and the undermining of ICE’s authority to care for detainees. *Id.*

11 Defendant’s obstacle preemption argument is also premature, because addressing whether  
12 the federal objectives and purposes will be obstructed would require resolution of factual  
13 determinations far beyond the pleadings.

14 In sum, the conflict/obstacle preemption issues may become ripe at summary judgment or  
15 at trial, but at present factual issues abound that preclude a decision based on the pleadings, and  
16 before discovery. Defendant has not shown that the State minimum wage provision is conflict or  
17 obstacle preempted.

18 Admittedly, at first blush the issue of preemption would seem to favor Defendant, given  
19 the long history of federal legislation and agency action in the area of immigration detention  
20 generally. After peeling back the rhetoric and examining the actual statutes and regulations, on  
21 the issue of detainee wages, an area of traditional state prerogative, the Court cannot find  
22 evidence of congressional intent—either express or implied—sufficient to overcome the  
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1 presumption against preemption. Defendant’s motion to dismiss based on preemption should be  
2 denied.

#### 3 **IV. FAILURE TO STATE A CLAIM**

4 Defendant contends that the Complaint fails to state a claim because detainees are not  
5 “employees” under Washington law. The Washington Minimum Wage Act defines “employee”  
6 generally as “any individual employed by an employer,” subject to an enumerated list of  
7 exceptions. RCW 49.46.010(3). Defendant argues that detainees fall under an exception,  
8 subsection (3)(k), which excepts from the general definition, “Any resident, inmate, or patient of  
9 a state, county, or municipal correctional, detention, treatment or rehabilitative institution[.]”  
10 RCW 49.46.010(3)(k).

11 Beginning with the statute itself, it is plain that the definition excepts residents of “state .  
12 . . . detention” facilities, not federal facilities. *See* RCW 49.46.010(3)(k). The Northwest  
13 Detention Center is a federal detention facility and thus does not fall under the exception. This  
14 conclusion is reinforced by Washington law narrowly construing exceptions in favor of the  
15 employee. *See Anfinson v. FedEx Ground Package Sys., Inc.*, 174 Wn.2d 851, 870 (2012).

16 Anticipating this result, Defendant urges an expansive interpretation of the exception to  
17 federal detainees. (This is an ironic request, because elsewhere Defendant argues that the State  
18 deliberately omitted federal detainees from the statutory exception because it would be  
19 “outlandish” for the State to include them.) Defendant urges this Court to follow *Menocal v.*  
20 *GEO Grp., Inc.*, 113 F. Supp. 3d 1125, 1129 (D. Colo. 2015) and *Whyte v. Suffolk Cty. Sheriff’s*  
21 *Dep’t*, 91 Mass.App.Ct. 1124, 2017 WL 2274618 (Mass. App. Ct. May 24, 2017). *Menocal* and  
22 *Whyte* considered the application of state minimum wage laws of Colorado and Massachusetts,  
23 respectively, to federal detainees. Both cases rely on *Alvarado Guevara v. Immigration &*  
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1 *Naturalization Serv.*, 902 F.2d 394 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1990), which considered whether the Fair Labor  
2 Standards Act (FLSA) applies to federal detainees. *But see Hale v State of Ariz.*, 967 F.2d 1356,  
3 1362-63 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1992), *on reh’g*, 993 F.2d 1387 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1993) (leaving open the possibility that  
4 the FLSA could apply to incarcerated inmates).

5 Neither *Menocal*, *Whyte*, nor *Alvarado* is binding precedent, and in this Court’s view,  
6 extending the logic of *Alvarado* to interpret this State’s statutory exception to include federal  
7 detainees moves beyond interpretation to legislation. In the absence of binding authority, the  
8 undersigned should respectfully decline the invitation to add to the statute.

9 In conclusion, Defendant’s motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim boils down to the  
10 argument that the legislature intended to do something it did not do, or that it should have done  
11 something that it did not do. This Court should not re-write legislation. At least based on the  
12 pleadings, it is plausible that the Plaintiff, arguably, comes within the State definition of  
13 “employee,” and is not subject to any existing statutory exception.

14 **V. CONCLUSION**

15 Defendant has not overcome the presumption against preemption by showing  
16 congressional intent to displace state law as to detainee wages. The Complaint states a claim  
17 upon which relief can be granted, because it is plausible that Plaintiff is an “employee” under  
18 Washington law.

19 THEREFORE, Defendant The GEO Group, Inc.’s Motion to Dismiss Class Action  
20 Complaint for Damages (Dkt. 8) is HEREBY DENIED.

21 IT IS SO ORDERED.

22 The Clerk is directed to send uncertified copies of this Order to all counsel of record and  
23 to any party appearing pro se at said party’s last known address.

1 Dated this 6<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2017.

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4 ROBERT J. BRYAN  
United States District Judge

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