UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA TAMPA DIVISION

KENNETH WALKER, on his own behalf and all similarly situated individuals

PLAINTIFF(S),

v.	CASE NO.:
THE MET, LLC., a Florida Limited Liability Company, and GEOFFREY MICHEL, Individually	
DEFENDANTS.	

COMPLAINT AND DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff, KENNETH WALKER ("Plaintiff), on behalf of himself and other current employees and former employees similarly situated, by and through undersigned counsel, files this Complaint against Defendants, THE MET, LLC. ("MET"), a Florida Limited Liability Company, and GEOFFREY MICHEL ("MICHEL") individually, (collectively, "Defendants") and states as follows:

JURISDICTION

- 1. Jurisdiction in this Court is proper as the claims are brought pursuant to the Fair Labor Standards Act, as amended (29 U.S.C. §201, et seq., hereinafter called the "FLSA") to recover unpaid overtime wages, minimum wages, an additional equal amount as liquidated damages, obtain declaratory relief, and reasonable attorney's fees and costs.
- 2. The jurisdiction of the Court over this controversy is based upon 29 U.S.C. §216(b).

PARTIES

- 3. At all times material hereto, Plaintiff was, and continues to be a resident of Sarasota County, Florida.
- 4. At all times material hereto MET was a Florida Limited Liability Company. Further, at all times material hereto, MET was engaged in business in Florida, with a principle place of business in Sarasota, Florida.
- 5. At all times relevant to this action, MICHEL was an individual resident of the State of Florida, who owned, managed, and operated MET.
- 6. At all times relevant to this action, MICHEL regularly exercised the authority to set policy, determine exempt or non-exempt status of employees under the FLSA, and to hire and fire employees of MET.

- 7. At all times relevant to this action, MICHEL had authority to determine the terms and conditions of employment for employees working at MET,
- 8. At all times relevant to this action, MICHEL controlled the finances and operations of MET.
- 9. At all times relevant to this action, MICHEL was an employer as defined by 29 U.S.C. 201 et. seq.
- 10. At all times material hereto, MET was, and continues to be, a successful business that exceeds the \$500,000.00 annual sales requirement of the FLSA.
- 11. At all times material hereto, Plaintiff was an "employee" of Defendants within the meaning of that terms as found in the FLSA.
- 12. At all times material hereto, Defendants were "employers" within the meaning of FLSA.
- 13. Defendants were, and continue to be, "employers" within the meaning of FLSA.
- 14. At all times material hereto, Defendants were, and continue to be, an "enterprise engaged in commerce" within the meaning of FLSA.
- 15. The additional persons who may become plaintiffs in this action are/were improperly classified, non-exempt employees of Defendants, who held similar positions to Plaintiff and who worked in excess of forty (40) hours during one or more work weeks during the relevant time periods but who did not receive pay at one and one-half times their regular rate for their hours worked in excess of forty (40) hours and/or who worked for Defendants in one or more work weeks.
- 16. At all times material hereto, the work performed by the Plaintiff was directly essential to the business performed by Defendants.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

- 17. On or about July 3rd, 2015 Defendants hired Plaintiff to work as a "Stylist Assistant."
- 18. At various material times hereto, Plaintiff worked for Defendants in excess of forty (40) hours within a work week.
- 19. From at least July 3rd, 2015 and continuing through March 2017, Defendants failed to compensate Plaintiff at rate of one and one-half times Plaintiff's regular rate for all hours worked in excess of forty (40) hours in a single work week. As a non-exempt employee, Plaintiff should be compensated at the rate of one and one-half times Plaintiff's regular rate for those hours that Plaintiff worked in excess of forty (40) hours per week as required by the FLSA.
- 20. Plaintiff's paychecks show a summary of his hours worked over a two-week work week period instead of providing the hours in each work week Plaintiff worked; such is a violation of the accurate recordkeeping provisions of the FLSA.
- 21. Defendants have violated Title 29 U.S.C. §206 and 207 from at least July 3rd, 2015, and continuing through March of 2017 in that:

- a. Plaintiff worked in excess of forty (40) hours per week for the period of employment with Defendants;
- b. No payments, and provisions for payment, have been made by Defendants to properly compensate Plaintiff at the statutory rate of one and one-half times Plaintiff's regular rate for those hours worked in excess of forty (40) hours per work week as provided by the FLSA;
- c. Defendants have failed to maintain proper time records as mandated by the FLSA.
- 22. Plaintiff has retained the law firm of Hultman Sensenig + Joshi to represent Plaintiff in the litigation in order to enforce his rights under the FLSA, and has agreed to pay the firm a reasonable fee for its services.

COUNT I RECOVERY OF OVERTIME COMPENSATION AGAINST ALL DEFENDANTS

- 23. Plaintiff re-alleges and re-avers paragraphs 1 through 22 of the Complaint as if fully set forth herein.
- 24. From at least July 3rd, 2015, and continuing through March of 2017, Plaintiff worked in excess of the forty (40) hours per week for which Plaintiff was not compensated at the statutory rate of one and one-half times Plaintiff's regular rate of pay.
- 25. Plaintiff was, and is entitled to be paid at the statutory rate of one and one-half times Plaintiff's regular rate of pay for those hours worked in excess of forty (40) hours per week.
- 26. At all times material hereto, Defendants failed to maintain proper time records as mandated by the FLSA, instead opting to pay non-exempt employees straight time of the regular rate assigned to the employee by MET and not one and one-half times the regular rate.
- 27. Defendants' actions were willful and demonstrate contempt for the law as Plaintiff Informed Defendants on several occasions that he was not being paid the proper overtime rate, including:
 - a. On or about February 2017 (the latest of several occasions), Plaintiff informed Rachel Gilmore, who then managed Defendants' Human Resources Department, that Plaintiff was not being paid the proper overtime rate. According to Plaintiff, Ms. Gilmore informed Plaintiff he was not the first employee to approach her with this issue:
 - b. On or about February 2017 (the latest of several occasions), Plaintiff informed Spa Manager Monika Kosz a/k/a Monika Holmquist that Plaintiff was not being paid proper overtime. According to Plaintiff, Ms. Kosz/Holmquist informed Plaintiff that MICHEL personally informed her that Plaintiff was an exempt employee, and thus not entitled to overtime. Based upon Ms. Kosz/Holmquist's statements to Plaintiff, MICHEL was not only aware of, but actively participated in improperly classifying Plaintiff and other non-exempt employees to deprive them of overtime compensation.

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- c. According to Plaintiff, on the date of Plaintiff's termination, Plaintiff was warned by MICHEL not to "come after him," or "it's going to get ugly;" According to Plaintiff, MICHEL went on to say that he would "dig, and dig hard;" if Plaintiff were to take action after his termination. According to Plaintiff, the only thing Plaintiff had ever "come after" MICHEL for was his unpaid overtime wages, thus Plaintiff believes MICHEL's statement to Plaintiff was MICHEL threatening Plaintiff not to attempt to recover his due and owing overtime wages.
- d. Defendants were repeatedly made aware of their failure to pay Plaintiff the proper overtime rate, as required under the FLSA, through Plaintiff's complaints to Human Resources and to the Spa Manager.
- e. Defendants continued their illegal pay practices despite these repeated, explicit complaints by Plaintiff and others similarly situated.
- f. Defendants were made aware of complaints about improper pay practices, and yet persisted in failing to pay non-exempt employees one and one-half times their regular rate.
- g. Defendants' conduct in failing to pay Plaintiff and other non-exempt employees one and one-half times their regular rate was willful under the FLSA.
- 28. Defendants have failed to properly disclose or apprise Plaintiff's rights under the FLSA.
 - a. Defendants explicitly and repeatedly falsely informed Plaintiff he was an exempt employee.
 - b. Although Defendant was employed at "Retail and Service Establishment", Plaintiff does not qualify for the exemption to overtime under Section 7(i) of the FLSA.
 - c. Section 7(i) has three criteria:
 - i. the employee must be employed by a retail or service establishment, and,
 - ii. the employee's regular rate of pay must exceed one and one-half times the applicable minimum wage for every hour worked in a workweek in which overtime hours are worked, and,
 - must consist of commissions. The representative period for determining if enough commissions have been paid may be as short as one month, but must not be greater than one year. The employer must select a representative period in order to determine if this condition has been met.

[emphasis supplied].

d. Defendants knew or should have known that the 7(i) exemption was at all times material hereto inapplicable to Plaintiff, because exemption under 7(i) requires, among other things, that: "more than half the employee's total earnings in a representative period must consist of commissions."

- e. There is no "representative period" during which Plaintiff satisfied this requirement.
- f. All criteria for exemption under 7(i) must be met for the exemption to be applicable; it is an elemental test, not a weighted factor test. The plain language between each elements is "and," not "or." Thus, Defendants' failure to meet this criteria for exemption voids the exemption with no further information or analysis required.
- g. Defendants at all times relevant hereto knew or should have known what percentage of Plaintiff's wages consisted of commissions, and that such percentage was insufficient for exemption under 7(i) of the FLSA.
- 29. Due to the intentional, willful, and unlawful acts of Defendants, Plaintiff suffered damages and lost compensation for time worked over forty (40) hours per week, plus liquidated damages.
- 30. Plaintiff is entitled to an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §216(b).
- 31. At all times material hereto, Defendants failed to comply with Title 29 and United States Department of Labor Regulations, 29 C.F.R. §§516.2 and 516.4, with respect to those similarly situated to the named Plaintiff by virtue of the management policy(ies), plan(s) or decision that intentionally provided for improper exemption classification and inadequate overtime compensation of such employees at a rate less than time and a half of the employee's regular rate for Plaintiff and for similarly situated employees.
- 32. Based upon information and belief, the employees and former employees of Defendants similarly situated to Plaintiff were improperly classified as exempt in bad-faith, and not paid the appropriate overtime rate of time and one-half of each employee's regular rate for all hours worked. Defendants have systematically failed to properly pay Plaintiff, and those similarly situated to Plaintiff, proper overtime wages at time and a half their regular rate of pay for such hours, as is required by law.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that judgment be entered in Plaintiff's favor against Defendants:

- a. Declaring, pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §§2201 and 2202, that the acts and practices complained of herein are in violation of the overtime provisions of the FLSA, without which Defendants would surely continue their illegal pay practices;
- b. Awarding Plaintiff overtime compensation in the amount due to him for Plaintiff's time worked in excess of forty (40) hours per work week;
- c. Awarding Plaintiff liquidated damages in an amount equal to the overtime award;
- d. Awarding Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs and expenses of the litigation pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §216(b);
- e. Awarding Plaintiff pre-judgment interest;
- f. Ordering any other further relief the Court deems just and proper.

compensation, an additional and equal amount of liquidated damages, pre and post-judgment interest at the highest allowable rate, reasonable attorneys' fees and costs incurred in this action, and any and all further relief that this Court determines to be just and appropriate.

COUNT II RECOVERY OF OVERTIME – COLLECTIVE ACTION AGAINST ALL DEFENDANTS

- 33. Plaintiff reincorporates and readopts all allegations contained within Paragraphs 1-32, above.
- 34. Plaintiff brings this action individually and on behalf of all other similarly situated pursuant to the FLSA 29 U.S.C. §216(b).
- 35. Plaintiff asserts that Plaintiff's claims are typical of others similarly situated in regard to being non-exempt under the FLSA but being subjected to Defendants' illegal pay practices of not being paid time and one-half their regular rate.
- 36. At all times material, Defendants employed numerous other non-exempt employees who worked a substantial number of hours in excess of forty (40) per week.
- 37. Throughout their employment, individuals similarly situated to Plaintiff were subject to the same unlawful pay practices.
- 38. Defendants failed to pay those individuals, who are similarly situated to Plaintiff, one and one-half times their regular hourly rate, for all hours worked in excess of forty (40) in each week, in violation of the FLSA.
- 39. Plaintiff is an appropriate class representative due to his not having been paid overtime and one and one-half his regular rate, his situation being very similar to other non-exempt employees at MET, his knowledge of complaints by other employees, which complaints were shared with similarly situated employees during and after Plaintiff's employment, and Plaintiff is aware of when and to whom those complaints were directed.
- 40. Defendants' failure to pay such similarly situated individuals the required overtime rate was willful and in reckless disregard of the FLSA.
- 41. As a direct and legal consequence of Defendants unlawful acts, individuals similarly situated to Plaintiff have suffered damages and have incurred, or will incur, costs and attorneys' fees in the prosecution of this matter.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that judgment be entered in Plaintiff's favor against Defendants:

- a. Declaring, pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §§2201 and 2202, that the acts and practices complained of herein are in violation of the overtime provisions of the FLSA, without which Defendants would surely continue their illegal pay practices;
- b. Awarding Plaintiff overtime compensation in the amount due to him for Plaintiff's time worked in excess of forty (40) hours per work week;
- c. Awarding Plaintiff liquidated damages in an amount equal to the overtime award;

- d. Awarding Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs and expenses of the litigation pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §216(b);
- e. Awarding Plaintiff pre-judgment interest;
- f. Granting Plaintiff an Order, on an expedited basis, allowing Plaintiff to send Notice of this action, pursuant to 216(b), to those similarly situated to Plaintiff; and
- g. Ordering any other further relief the Court deems just and proper.

COUNT III RETALIATION AGAINST ALL DEFENDANTS

- 42. Plaintiff re-alleges and re-avers paragraphs 1 through 32 of the Complaint as if fully set forth herein.
- 43. On or about March 2017, Plaintiff was called into MICHEL's office at MET.
- 44. According to Plaintiff, MICHEL informed Plaintiff that Plaintiff was being terminated for kicking another employee's handbag in the employee breakroom.
- 45. According to Plaintiff, Plaintiff asked MICHEL why MICHEL believed Plaintiff had been engaged in kicking a co-worker's handbag.
- 46. According to Plaintiff, MICHEL informed Plaintiff that Defendants or its agents had been video-recording the employee break room, without disclosing such to Plaintiff, and upon information and belief, without disclosing this video-recording to any of Defendants' other employees.
- 47. Florida is a dual-consent state and Plaintiff was unaware that he was being recorded in the breakroom; Plaintiff further believes he and his co-workers had a reasonable expectation of privacy at MET in the employee breakroom.
- 48. According to Plaintiff, before MICHEL permitted Plaintiff to depart the termination meeting in March of 2017, MICHEL warned Plaintiff not to "come after him," or "it's going to get ugly;" According to Plaintiff, MICHEL went on to say to Plaintiff that he would "dig, and dig hard;" the only situation Plaintiff had ever "come after" MICHEL for was his unpaid overtime wages, thus Plaintiff believes MICHEL's statement was a threat that Plaintiff should not purse his due and owing overtime wages.
- 49. Defendants' purported basis for terminating Plaintiff due to his kicking a handbag was pretextual.
- 50. Plaintiff was terminated in retaliation for repeatedly informing Defendants, and Defendants' employees and agents, of Defendants' obligation to pay Plaintiff and similarly-situated coworkers the appropriate statutorily required overtime rate of one and one-half times the regular rate.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that judgment be entered in Plaintiff's favor against Defendants:

- a. Declaring, pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §§2201 and 2202, that the acts and practices complained of herein are in violation of the overtime provisions of the FLSA, without which Defendants would surely continue their illegal pay practices;
- b. Awarding Plaintiff overtime compensation in the amount due to him for Plaintiff's time worked in excess of forty (40) hours per work week;
- c. Awarding Plaintiff liquidated damages in an amount equal to the overtime award;
- d. Awarding Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs and expenses of the litigation pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §216(b);
- e. Awarding Plaintiff pre-judgment interest;
- f. Granting Plaintiff an Order, on an expedited basis, allowing Plaintiff to send Notice of this action, pursuant to 216(b), to those similarly situated to Plaintiff; and
- g. Ordering any other further relief the Court deems just and proper.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff demands trial by jury on all issues so triable as a matter of right by jury.

Respectfully Submitted August 9, 2017.

CHRISTINE R. SENSENIG, ESQ.

TRIAL COUNSEL

Hultman Sensenig + Joshi, P.A.

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E-mail: <u>csensenig@hsjlawfirm.com</u> Attorney for Plaintiff Kenneth Walker

JS 44 (Rev. 11 15) Case 8:17-cv-01901-SDM-AEP, Document 1-1, Filed 08/10/17 Page 1 of 1 PageID 9

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the

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								(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number) Hultman Sensenig + Joshi, Christine R. Sensenig, Esquire 2055 Wood St, Set 208, Sarasota, FL 34237 (941) 953-2828
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☐ 220 Foreclosure ☐ 230 Foreclosure ☐ 230 Rem Lease & Ejectment ☐ 240 Torts to Land ☐ 245 Tort Product Liability ☐ 290 All Other Real Property	☐ 442 Employment ☐ 443 Housing Accommodations ☐ 445 Amer w Disabilities - 5 Employment	Habeas Corpus: 3 463 Alien Detannee 3 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence 3 530 General 1 535 Death Penalty Other:	□ 46	IMMIGRATION 2 Naturalization Application	□ 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant) □ 871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609		■ 896 Arbitration ■ 899 Administrative Procedure Act Review or Appeal of Agency Decision ■ 950 Constitutionality of State Statutes	
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