



April 8, 2005

### **Help Is On The Way: The DLSE Publishes Modified Meal And Rest Period Regulations**

Finally, meal and rest period regulations for California employees are just around the corner. On April 6, 2005, the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement ("DLSE") posted notice of modifications to its proposed meal and rest period regulations and, by way of that notice, commenced the 15 day public comment period on the regulations. The public comment period will be open until April 22, 2005, after which the DLSE will adopt final regulations.

The modified regulations mark the culmination of a heated battle raging between employers, unions, lawyers, the DLSE, and the courts for quite some time now. On December 20, 2004, the DLSE proposed regulations that were designed, among other things, to clarify the Labor Code provisions on meal periods. The DLSE held three public hearings on the proposed regulations in February and March and a written comment period that closed on March 2, 2005.

After holding public hearings and considering the comments it received, the DLSE published *modified* regulations on April 6, 2005. Significantly, the modified regulations retain the provision that the amount owed by an employer to an employee for failing to provide a meal or rest period is a penalty and not a wage. The modified regulations clarify what Labor Code Section 512 means when it says an employer must "provide" employees meal periods. "An employer shall be **deemed** to have provided a meal period to an employee in accordance with Labor Code Section 512 if the employer:

- a. Informs the employee of his/her right to take a meal period and the fact that he/she will suffer no retaliation for exercising this right;
- b. Affords the employee the opportunity to take the meal period; and
- c. Maintains accurate time records for covered employees, as required by Labor Code section 1174(d) and section 7, Records, of the Industrial Welfare Commission wage orders ...or otherwise establishes by a preponderance of evidence that the meal period was in fact actually provided to the employee..." [emphasis added.]

The proposal also provides examples that assist employers in determining when meal periods are due. The entire text of the proposed regulations, along with the original regulations and the history of the rulemaking, can be found at the California Department of Industrial Relations website, [www.dir.ca.gov](http://www.dir.ca.gov).

The foregoing is only a brief overview of some of the significant provisions of the modified proposal. As with any new development of law, employers should review the entire text of the modified regulations and consult an employment attorney with any questions. We would be happy to assist you in this respect and will continue to provide you with updates as this important area of the law develops.

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For more information about this issue, please contact a member of the Labor and Employment Practice Group in one of our offices.

<b>Los Angeles</b>	<b>San Diego</b>	<b>San Francisco</b>
Charles F. Barker (213) 617.4168	David B. Chidlaw (619) 338.6614	Douglas J. Farmer (415) 774.2906
Elicia N. Bernstein (213) 617.5582	John D. Collins (619) 338.6613	Lara V. Hutner (415) 774.2903
Geoffrey D. DeBoskey (213) 617.5547	Julie A. Dunne (619) 338.6510	
David J. Fishman (213) 617.4118	Guy N. Halgren (619) 338.6605	<b>Del Mar Heights</b>
Jason R. Gasper (213) 617.5499	Samantha D. Hardy (619) 338.6640	Richard M. Freeman (858) 720.8909
Adena Hadar (213) 617.4128	Stacey E. James (619) 338.6581	Matthew McConnell (858) 720.8928
Douglas R. Hart (213) 617.5497	Rafael Nendel-Flores (619) 338.6619	Carole M. Ross (858) 720.8925
Derek R. Havel (213) 617.5424	W. David Osborne (619) 338.6589	
Kelly L. Hensley (213) 617.5441	Mary P. Snyder (619) 338.6503	<b>Santa Barbara</b>
Melissa Hughes (213) 616.5464	William V. Whelan (619) 338.6588	Jeffrey Dinkin (805) 879.1828
Tracey A. Kennedy (213) 617.4249	Tara L. Wilcox (619) 338.6608	Deborah Martin (805) 879.1838
Melissa P. Lopez (213) 617.4290		
Richard L. Lotts (213) 617.4119	<b>Orange County</b>	<b>Washington, D.C.</b>
Daniel J. McQueen (213) 617.4270	Heather Clark (714) 424.2820	Mark E. Nagle (202) 218.0014
Kristine A. Moon (213) 617.5523	Greg S. Labate (714) 424.2823	Julia H. Perkins (202) 772.5316
Jocelyn Riedl (213) 617.5592	Mary E. Lynch (714) 424.2826	Mary E. Pivec (202) 772.5310
Richard J. Simmons (213) 617.5518	Ryan D. McCortney (714) 424.2830	
Dianne Baquet Smith (213) 617.4265		
Brandyn Stedfield (213) 617.5514		
Natalie C. Trask (213) 617.4229		
Jennifer B. Zargarof (213) 617.4243		

<b>SHEPPARD, MULLIN, RICHTER &amp; HAMPTON LLP</b>				
<b>LOS ANGELES</b> 213 · 620 · 1780	<b>CENTURY CITY</b> 310 · 228 · 3700	<b>SAN FRANCISCO</b> 415 · 434 · 9100	<b>ORANGE COUNTY</b> 714 · 513 · 5100	
<b>DEL MAR HEIGHTS</b> 858 · 720 · 8900	<b>SAN DIEGO</b> 619 · 338 · 6500	<b>SANTA BARBARA</b> 805 · 568 · 1151	<b>NEW YORK</b> 212 · 332 · 3800	<b>WASHINGTON, D.C.</b> 202 · 218 · 0000
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