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7 8	and the Putative Class	
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10	SUPERIOR COURT FOR THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA	
11	COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO	
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13	KYLE RODRIGUEZ , on behalf of himself and all others similarly situated,	CASE NO. 34-2021-00296612-CU-BC-GDS
14	Plaintiff,	MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF
15	vs.	PLAINTIFF'S MOTION FOR ORDER
16		GRANTING FINAL APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT
17	RIVER CITY BANK , a California Corporation; and John Does 1-10,	Date: October 26, 2022
18	,	Time: 9:00 a.m. Judge: Christopher Krueger
19	Defendants.	Dept.: 54
20		Complaint filed: March 16, 2021
21		Trial date: none set
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I. INTRODUCTION

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Plaintiff Kyle Rodriguez ("Plaintiff" or "Class Representative") seeks final approval of a Settlement Agreement and Release ("Settlement Agreement" or "SA")1 reached with Defendant River City Bank ("Defendant" or "River City" or "the Bank"). On April 26, 2022, this Court preliminarily approved the Settlement and found that it appeared to be "the product of serious, informed, non-collusive negotiations; that it does not improperly grant preferential treatment to any individual or segment of the Class; and that its terms appear to be fair, reasonable, and adequate." See Revised Order Granting Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement dated April 26, 2022 ("Preliminary Approval Order" or "PA Order"). The \$140,000 settlement is a fair compromise and a good result for the class considering the risks and costs of continued litigation, particularly in view of the Court's order sustaining the Bank's demurrer as to five of Plaintiff's seven causes of action. Each of the 16,340 participating Class Members will receive a \$3.60 payment, which is a better result, on a per class member basis, than many comparable data breach cases. The Bank had also already offered and provided, at its sole expense, two years of credit monitoring and related services to all affected Class Members. After a comprehensive notice program, Settlement Class Members' response has been overwhelmingly positive—only 77 out of the 16.417 Class Members opted out, and only one Settlement Class Member objected.² See Declaration of Bryn Bridley with Respect to Notice Administration ("Bridley Decl."), filed herewith, at ¶¶ 12-13, and Exhibits B and C. The nearly universally positive reaction of the Class demonstrates that the Settlement provides meaningful benefits to the Settlement Class, is fair, reasonable, and adequate, and the Court should grant final approval.

II. SUMMARY OF ACTION

A. Factual and Procedural History

Plaintiff filed this class action on March 16, 2021, bringing claims arising from an incident that occurred on or about September 29, 2020, whereby a Bank employee was alleged to have downloaded Bank customer data to a personal storage drive that was conveyed to a third party. Declaration of Julian Hammond ISO Motion for Preliminary Approval ("Hammond Prelim. Decl."), filed March 17, 2022, ¶ 14. A First Amended Complaint (FAC) was thereafter filed on March 28, 2021. Id. ¶ 15. The FAC alleges seven causes of action against the Bank arising from the alleged data breach incident: (1) negligence; (2)

¹ A copy of the Settlement Agreement is attached as **Exhibit 1** to the Proposed Order, filed herewith.

² The lone objection, which objects to the requested attorneys' fees and administration costs on the grounds that these amounts are not in proportion to Class Member payments, is meritless, as discussed in Plaintiff's Motion for Attorney's Fees and Costs, filed herewith.

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negligence per se; (3) bailment; (4) breach of implied contract; (5) violation of the Unfair Competition Law ("UCL") set forth in Business & Professions Code § 17200; (6) violation of the California Customer Records Act ("CRA") set forth in Civil Code § 1798.80 et seq.; and (7) violation of the California Consumer Protection Act ("CCPA") set forth in Civil Code § 1798.100 et seq., specifically § 1798.150. Id. ¶ 15.

On July 9, 2021, the Bank demurred to the first, second, third, fifth, sixth and seventh causes of action of the Complaint; and moved to strike certain allegations and requests for relief from the Complaint. A hearing was held on September 2, 2021, after which the Court issued an Order sustaining the Bank's demurrer to the second, third, fifth, sixth, and seventh causes of action, overruling the Bank's demurrer to only the first cause of action for negligence. The Court granted Plaintiff Rodriguez leave to amend the fifth, sixth and seventh causes of action. Hammond Prelim. Decl. ¶¶ 16-18.

Following the Court's rulings on Defendant's demurrer and motion to strike, Plaintiff recognized that the potential recovery in the case had been significantly limited, and it was unclear whether Plaintiff would be able to successfully amend the FAC in a manner that could withstand a further demurrer. Id. ¶ 19. If Plaintiff was unsuccessful, he would only be able to pursue the two remaining causes of action, for negligence and breach of implied contract. While the cause of action based on the CCPA would have authorized the recovery of statutory damages, the negligence and implied contract causes of action would require not only proof pertaining to liability, but also proof of actual damages suffered by Plaintiff and each Class Member, which could vary considerably and potentially impact class certification. Id. ¶ 20. The Bank had also already offered and provided, at its sole expense, two years of credit monitoring and related services to any affected customer who desired such services. Id. ¶ 21. At the same time, the Bank recognized that the lawsuit still presented some risks and that the costs of defending the lawsuit could be substantial. Id. In view of the circumstances, shortly after issuance of the Court's order, the Parties entered into intensive, arms-length settlement negotiations. Id. ¶ 22-23. During the course of the negotiations counsel for the Bank shared pertinent information regarding the details of the September 29th data breach and the Bank's investigation thereof, which suggested that actually proving that the Bank's data security procedures were infirm and that Bank customer data had been misused by nefarious actors who caused damage, could be difficult. Id. ¶ 23. Given the significant hurdles likely to be faced by Plaintiff in maintaining the only two claims remaining in the case, settlement of the case at this juncture appeared to be in the best interest of the Class. Id. ¶ 24. The parties thereupon reached the basic terms of a settlement, which were presented to the Court for approval on March 17, 2022.

B. The Court's Preliminary Approval of the Settlement

On April 26, 2022, this Court preliminarily approved the Settlement. *See* PA Order. In the Preliminary Approval Order, the Court found that the proposed Settlement appeared to be "the product of serious, informed, non-collusive negotiations; that it does not improperly grant preferential treatment to any individual or segment of the Class; and that its terms appear to be fair, reasonable, and adequate." *Id.* Nothing that has occurred since the PA Order calls the Court's preliminary findings into question. Indeed, all developments since that date confirm that the Settlement should receive final approval.

III. SUMMARY OF SETTLEMENT TERMS

The preliminarily approved Settlement Class is defined as:

All of the Bank's customers who are natural persons (i.e., excluding entities such as corporations, partnerships, limited liability companies, limited liability partnerships and trusts) with California mailing addresses, whose Personal Information was, on or about September 27-29, 2020, transferred, copied or stored on a storage drive or storage service not authorized by the Bank and/or was accessed by a person not authorized by the Bank; provided, however, that the following are excluded from the Class: (i) the Bank; (ii) any entity in which the Bank has a controlling interest; (iii) the Bank's officers, directors, and attorneys; (iv) any judge or judicial officer presiding over this matter and the members of their immediate families; and (v) any individual or entity that timely and validly opts-out from the Class.

PA Order ¶ 8. If the Settlement is finally approved, the \$140,000 Settlement Fund will be distributed as follows: (1) \$2,500 to Plaintiff as a Service Award for his role as Class Representative; (3) Class Counsel attorneys' fees in the amount of \$49,000 and costs in the amount of \$4,619.84; (4) the Settlement Administrator costs in the amount of \$25,000; and (5) payments to the Settlement Class Members who did not exclude themselves from the Settlement as described below. PA Order ¶ 4.

The SA does not include a claims process—rather each Settlement Class Member will automatically receive his or her equal share of the Net Settlement Amount. PA Order ¶ 4. No amount of the Settlement Fund will revert to River City; any payments to Class Members not accepted within six months will be donated to Bet Tzedek as the *cy pres* beneficiary. PA Order ¶ 4; *see also* Cal. Civ. Proc. Code § 384 (appropriate *cy pres* recipient is non-profit entity that furthers purposes of the underlying action or promotes justice for all Californians). In consideration of the Settlement benefits described above, Plaintiff and each Settlement Class Member will release River City from all claims alleged against the Bank in the operative Complaint (i.e., the FAC). SA ¶ 37.

IV. THE CLASS RECEIVED ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THE SETTLEMENT

To protect the rights of absent Settlement Class Members, the Settlement Class must be provided with the best notice practicable. *See Philips Petroleum Co. v. Shutts*, 472 U.S. 797, 811-12 (1985)

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(provision of "best practicable" notice with description of the litigation and explanation of opt-out rights satisfies due process); *Wershba v. Apple Computers, Inc.*, 91 Cal.App.4th 224, 251-52 (2001). California law vests the court with discretion to fashion an appropriate notice program. Cal. Civ. Code § 1781; *Martorana v. Marlin & Saltzman*, 175 Cal.App.4th 685, 695 (2009) ("a trial court in a class action has virtually complete discretion as to the manner of giving notice to class members") (citations and internal quotation marks omitted); *Cartt v. Sup. Ct.*, 50 Cal.App.3d 960, 973-74 (1975).

The Court-approved notice program has now been fully implemented, such that Settlement Class Members were provided with sufficient notice of the Settlement, including information on how they could exercise their option to opt out of or object to the Settlement. On May 5, 2020, the Settlement Administrator received contact information for 16,417 putative Class Members. Bridley Decl. ¶ 4. The Class List was processed through the National Change of Address databank maintained by the United States Postal Service (USPS) prior to dissemination of notice. Id. ¶ 5. On May 26, 2022, the Settlement Administrator mailed the Court-approved Notice (Long Form) of Proposed Settlement of Class Action Regarding River City Bank Data Breach ("Class Notice" or "Notice") by U.S. first class mail to 8,754 Class Members and by electronic mail to the 7,663 Class Members whose email addresses were included in the Class List. Id. ¶ 6. As a result of skip tracing and other diligent efforts to obtain accurate contact information, notice was successfully delivered to 15,803 of the 16,417 Class Members, or 96.3% of the Class. Id. ¶ 11. This is an extraordinarily high direct notice deliverability. See Federal Judicial Center, Judge's Class Action Notice and Claims Process Checklist and Plain Language Guide (2010), at 3 ("The lynchpin in an objective determination of the adequacy of a proposed notice effort is whether all the notice efforts together will reach a high percentage of the class. It is reasonable to reach between 70-95%. A study of recent published decisions showed that the median reach calculation on approved notice plans was 87%").

V. <u>SETTLEMENT CLASS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORTS SETTLEMENT</u>

The deadline for Settlement Class Members to submit an objection or exclusion request was July 11, 2022. Bridley Decl. ¶¶ 12-13. In response to the Notice, 0.04% of the Class (77 of 16,417 Class Members) opted out; and one Class Member objected to the requested attorneys' fees and administration costs. Id. and **Exhibits B** and **C**. As discussed in the Motion for Attorney's Fees and Costs, filed herewith, the lone Objection has no merit and should be overruled. The overwhelmingly positive response rate evidences strong support of the Settlement.

VI. THE COURT SHOULD GRANT FINAL APPROVAL

A. Legal Standard

The law favors settlement, particularly in complex cases, such as class actions where substantial resources can be conserved by avoiding the delay, costs, and attendant risks of further litigation. *See 7-Eleven Owners for Fair Franchising v. Southland Corp.*, 85 Cal.App.4th 1135, 1151 (2000). Accordingly, when evaluating a class action settlement for final approval, the Court should give "[due] regard to what is otherwise a private consensual agreement between the parties." *Wershba*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 245. The Court's inquiry, thus, is limited to whether the proposed settlement is "fair, adequate and reasonable." *Id.* at 244-45; *Dunk v. Ford Motor Co.*, 48 Cal.App.4th 1794, 1801 (1996). A settlement is "fair, adequate and reasonable" warranting final approval when "the interests of the class are better served by the settlement than by further litigation." Manual for Complex Litigation § 21.61 (4th ed. 2008).

B. The Settlement Is Presumptively Fair, Reasonable, and Adequate

A settlement agreement is presumptively fair when it is (1) the product of arm's-length bargaining; (2) supported by sufficient investigation and/or discovery to allow assessment of plaintiff's claims; (3) supported by experienced counsel; and (4) subject to only a small percentage of objections. *Cellphone Fee Termination Cases*, 186 Cal.App.4th 1380, 1389 (2010) (citations omitted); *Chavez v. Netflix, Inc.*, 162 Cal.App.4th 43, 52-53 (2008) (same). Thus, the Settlement is presumptively fair.

First, the parties executed the Settlement Agreement only after they had engaged in extensive informal discovery and investigation and motion practice upon the filing by Defendant of its demurrer and motion to strike. After this Court's ruling mostly sustaining the demurrer, the parties engaged in informed, extensive arm's-length negotiations and thereafter engaged in informal confirmatory discovery. Hammond Prelim. Decl. ¶¶ 19-23; see also Wershba, 91 Cal.App.4th at 245 (the fact that "settlement was the product of extensive and hard-fought adversarial negotiations between the parties" supported a finding of presumptive fairness). The parties' informal and confirmatory discovery allowed them to adequately assess the merits of Plaintiff's claims and River City's defenses, and was sufficient to allow counsel to "make an informed decision about settlement." Barani v. Wells Fargo, No. 12CV2999-GPC (KSC), 2014 WL 1389329, at *5 (S.D. Cal. Apr. 9, 2014); Chavez, 162 Cal.App.4th at 53. Indeed, the Court has already found that the Settlement "appears to be the result of serious, informed, non-collusive negotiations . . . and that its terms appear to be fair, reasonable, and adequate." PA Order ¶ 5.

Second, Class Counsel strongly support the Settlement based on their extensive experience litigating consumer class actions. Class Counsel are highly experienced class action attorneys and were well informed to adequately assess the Settlement benefit against the risk, delay, and costs of further

litigation. Class Counsel has been designated as adequate class counsel by numerous California state and federal courts. Declaration of Julian Hammond in support of Plaintiffs' Motion for Order Granting Final Approval of Class Action Settlement and Motion for Attorneys' Fees, Costs, and Service Award for Class Representative ("Hammond Final Decl."), filed herewith, ¶¶ 19-23.

Third, the Class overwhelmingly supports the Settlement, further supporting a presumptive finding of fairness. Only a single Class Member has objected, and only 77 Class Members opted out of the Settlement. Bridley Decl. ¶¶ 12-13. "[T]the absence of a large number of objections to a proposed class action settlement raises a strong presumption that the terms of a proposed class settlement action are favorable to the class members." *Nat'l Rural Telecomm. Coop. v. DIRECTV, Inc.*, 221 F.R.D. 523, 529 (C.D. Cal. 2004).

C. All Relevant Factors Support Final Approval

In addition to the Settlement's presumptive fairness, other factors courts frequently consider strongly favor final approval, including: (1) the amount offered in settlement; (2) the risks inherent in continued litigation; (3) the extent of investigation and discovery completed and the stage of proceedings when settlement was reached; (4) the experience and views of class counsel; and (5) the reaction of class members. *See Wershba*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 244-45; *In re Microsoft I-V Cases*, 135 Cal.App.4th 706, 723 (2006); *see also Lane v. Facebook*, 696 F.3d 811, 819 (9th Cir. 2012). The Settlement Agreement satisfies all of these factors.

1. The Settlement's Substantial Benefits to the Class Favors Final Approval

The proposed Settlement creates a \$140,000 non-reversionary fund that will pay (i) Class Counsel for their fees in an amount of \$49,000 and litigation costs in the amount of \$4,619.84; (ii) a service award to Plaintiff in an amount of \$2,500; and (iii) costs to the Settlement Administrator in an amount of \$25,000. After deduction of these amounts, subject to Court approval, the \$58,880.16 Net Settlement Amount will be automatically distributed to the 16,340 Class Members who did not opt out. Bridley Decl. ¶ 14. Each Class Member will receive approximately \$3.60. Id. This is a significant in comparison to the per capita payment per class member in other data breach cases over the past several years. Hammond Prelim. Decl. ¶¶ 26-28. In addition to these monetary awards, the Bank has already offered to provide 2 years of free credit monitoring. Id. ¶ 29. The Settlement maximizes the benefits paid to the Settlement Class by eliminating the burden and expense associated with a claims process.

2. The Strength of Plaintiff's Case and The Risk, Expense, Complexity, and Likely Duration of Further Litigation Favors Final Approval

Any proposed settlement must necessarily be discounted to account for the litigation risks and

uncertainties presented by continued litigation. *See Wershba*, 91 Cal.App.4th at 246 ("[t]he proposed settlement is not to be judged against a hypothetical or speculative measure of what might have been achieved had plaintiffs prevailed at trial"); 7-Eleven Owners for Fair Franchising, 85 Cal.App.4th at 1150 ("the merits of the underlying class claims are not a basis for upsetting the settlement of a class action"); Dunk, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1801. Settlement resolves that inherent uncertainty and is, therefore, strongly favored, particularly in class actions. *See Van Bronkhorst v. Safeco Corp.*, 529 F.2d 943, 950 (9th Cir. 1976); Cotton v. Hinton, 559 F.2d 1326, 1330-31 (5th Cir. 1977).

Further litigation of this case poses real risks for a number of reasons, and would result in significant additional costs and delay. First, the Court's rulings on Defendant's demurrer and motion to strike significantly reduced the overall strength of Plaintiff's case. Following the Court's ruling, it was unclear whether Plaintiff would be able to successfully amend the FAC, given the legal deficiencies decided by the Court. Hammond Prelim. Decl. ¶ 30. Moreover, if Plaintiff was unsuccessful in amending his Complaint, he would only be able to pursue two causes of action, for negligence and breach of implied contract. Id. While the cause of action based on the CCPA would have authorized the recovery of statutory damages, the negligence and implied contract causes of action would require not only proof pertaining to liability, but also proof of actual damages suffered by Plaintiff and each Class Member, which could vary considerably and potentially impact class certification. Id. If Defendant were to then challenge certification, time would have to be allocated to complete class discovery, resolve discovery issues, and extensive class-related briefing. Id. ¶ 31.

Even assuming class certification would be granted, Plaintiff would have to conduct merits discovery, and face dispositive motions, trial preparation, and trial. There would be a risk of unfavorable rulings on the merits and the cost of such litigation would be substantial. Furthermore, it could delay the final outcome by several years and put Settlement Class Members at risk of recovering nothing at all. Id.

Additionally, even if a class was certified and a judgment obtained, there are also risks surrounding recovery and damages. Hammond Prelim. Decl. ¶ 31. As with most complex consumer class actions, a dispositive order or final judgment as to liability, damages, and/or restitution is unlikely to end the litigation. In class action litigation, such as this one, the losing party is likely to appeal. *See, e.g., Chau v. Starbucks Corp.*, 174 Cal.App.4th 688, 706-07 (2009) (appellate court reversal of \$86 million restitution award to certified class). This would cause further delay and expense, and final outcome would be uncertain. In contrast, this Settlement will conserve the resources of the parties and the Court and provide Settlement Class Members with a certain and meaningful recovery, as discussed above.

Thus, the significant and immediate relief provided by this Settlement amount is commensurate

with the risks presented by Defendant's defenses and the inherent uncertainties of continued litigation.

3. The Parties' Investigation Favors Final Approval

"[T]he extent of discovery completed and the stage of the proceedings" are factors considered in assessing the fairness, adequacy, and reasonableness of a class action Settlement. *Dunk*, 48 Cal. App. 4th at 1801. "This factor evaluates whether the parties have sufficient information to make an informed decision about settlement." *In re LinkedIn User Privacy Litig.*, 309 F.R.D. 573, 588 (N.D. Cal. 2015) (citations and internal quotation marks omitted). Prior to filing the Complaint, Class Counsel conducted an extensive investigation into Plaintiff's claims against River City stemming from the data breach incident at issue in this case. Hammond Final Decl. ¶ 14. After the Complaint's filing, the Parties continued to research and evaluate the factual and legal strengths and weaknesses of their respective cases, including in light of extensive motion practice, informal and confirmatory discovery, and this Court's rulings. Id. ¶ 16. The pre-filing investigation Class Counsel conducted, and the extensive motion practice followed by this Court's rulings and informal and confirmatory discovery, put the Parties and their counsel in a position to make an informed decision regarding settlement. *See also 7-Eleven Owners for Fair Franchising*, 85 Cal.App.4th at 1150 (As long as the parties have sufficient information to make an informed decision about settlement, formal discovery is not necessarily required); *In re LinkedIn*, 309 F.R.D. at 588 ("Formal discovery is not a requirement for final settlement approval").

4. Counsel's Experience and Endorsement of the Settlement Favors Final Approval

The endorsement of experienced and well-informed counsel of a settlement as fair, reasonable, and adequate is entitled to significant weight. *See Dunk*, 48 Cal.App.4th at 1801-02; *see also Larsen v. Trader Joe's Company*, No. 11-cv-05188-WHO, 2014 WL 3404531, at *5 (N.D. Cal. July 11, 2014) ("A [trial] court is entitled to give consideration to the opinion of competent counsel that the settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate") (citations and internal quotation marks omitted). Here, Class Counsel has significant experience litigating consumer class actions and endorse the Settlement as being fair, adequate, and reasonable, in the Class's best interest, and an excellent result for the Class. Hammond Final Decl. ¶ 20-23. Accordingly, this endorsement weighs in favor of final approval.

5. Settlement Class Members' Positive Reaction Supports Final Approval

The overwhelmingly positive response of the Class to the Settlement strongly favors final approval. DirectTV, Inc., 221 F.R.D. at 529 ("It is established that the absence of a large number of objections to a proposed class action settlement raises a strong presumption that the terms of a proposed class settlement action are favorable to the class members."). As discussed above, notice was successfully delivered to

over 96% of the Class Members. Bridley Decl. ¶ 11. Only 77 Class members opted out, and only one Class Member has objected. Bridley Decl. ¶¶ 12-13. This is an overwhelmingly positive Class response. *See 7-Eleven Owners for Fair Franchising*, 85 Cal.App.4th at 1152-53 (response of absent class members was "overwhelmingly positive" where only 1.5% elected to opt-out).

VII. CONCLUSION

The Settlement provides monetary benefits to Settlement Class Members that are demonstrably fair when weighed against the significant potential risks, delays, and costs of continued litigation. The Settlement is supported by a robust investigation and motion practice, is the produce of arm's-length negotiations, and is endorsed by experienced and qualified Class Counsel, as well as the Class. Accordingly, Plaintiff requests that the Court grant final approval of the Settlement as fair, reasonable, and adequate.

Dated: September 30, 2022

HAMMONDLAW, P.C.

By: Julian Hammond

Attorneys for Plaintiff Kyle Rodriguez and the Putative Class