

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA
CHARLESTON DIVISION

COMMISSIONERS OF PUBLIC WORKS OF)
THE CITY OF CHARLESTON (d.b.a.)
Charleston Water System), Individually and on)
Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,)

Plaintiff,)

vs.)

DUDE PRODUCTS INC.)

Defendant.)
_____)
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)
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Civil Action No. 2:24-cv-02935-RMG

CLASS ACTION

MEMORANDUM OF LAW IN SUPPORT
OF: (1) PLAINTIFF’S MOTION FOR FINAL
APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION
SETTLEMENT; AND (2) CLASS
COUNSEL’S APPLICATION FOR AN
AWARD OF ATTORNEYS’ FEES AND
EXPENSES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES iv

I. INTRODUCTION1

II. BACKGROUND OF THE LITIGATION AND SETTLEMENT3

 A. The Investigation and Litigation.....3

 B. Summary of the Settlement Negotiations5

 C. The Proposed Settlement Class.....5

 D. Terms of the Settlement5

III. THE NOTICE SATISFIED RULE 23 AND DUE PROCESS6

IV. THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT WARRANTS FINAL APPROVAL9

 A. The Settlement is Procedurally Fair: Plaintiff and Class Counsel Have Adequately Represented the Settlement Class and Engaged in Arm’s Length Negotiations with Defendant.....10

 B. The Settlement is Substantially Fair: The Relief Provided to the Settlement Class is Adequate and Equitable12

 1. The Costs, Risks, and Delay of Trial and Appeal Support Approval of the Settlement12

 2. The Relief Provided is Effective and Equitable.....13

 3. The Terms of the Attorneys’ Fee Award Are Fair, Reasonable, and in Line with Other Cases14

 4. The Settling Parties Have No Side Agreements15

 5. Settlement Class Members Are Treated Equitably15

V. THE REQUESTED ATTORNEYS’ FEES AND EXPENSES ARE REASONABLE15

 A. The Requested Attorneys’ Fees are Reasonable and Should be Granted16

 1. *Barber* Factor No. 1: The Time and Labor Expended by Class Counsel Support the Requested Fee18

 2. *Barber* Factor No. 2: The Novelty and Complexity of the Issues Support the Requested Fee19

3.	<i>Barber</i> Factor Nos. 3 and 9: Class Counsel’s Experience, Reputation, and Ability, Along with the Skill Required to Perform Their Legal Services, Support the Requested Fee	19
4.	<i>Barber</i> Factor No. 8 and 10: The Result Obtained and Undesirability of the Case Support the Requested Fee	20
5.	<i>Barber</i> Factor Nos. 5 and 12: Fee Awards in Similar Cases, and the Customary Fee for Like Work, Support the Requested Fee	21
6.	<i>Barber</i> Factor No. 4: Class Counsel’s Opportunity Costs in Pressing the Litigation Supports the Requested Fee	22
B.	The Requested Litigation Expenses Are Reasonable and Should be Granted.....	22
VI.	THE COURT SHOULD GRANT FINAL CERTIFICATION OF THE SETTLEMENT CLASS	23
VII.	CONCLUSION.....	23

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

CASES

Barber v. Kimbrell,
577 F.2d 216 (4th Cir. 1978) *passim*

Berry v. LexisNexis Risk & Info. Analytics Grp., Inc.,
2014 WL 4403524 (E.D. Va. Sept. 5, 2014)..... 11,14-15,18-19,22

Berry v. Schulman,
807 F.3d 600 (4th Cir. 2015) 11,16-17

Blanchard v. Bergeron,
489 U.S. 87 (1989)16

Bowling v. Pfizer, Inc.,
922 F. Supp. 1261 (S.D. Ohio 1996) *aff'd*, 102 F.3d 777 (6th Cir. 1996).....17

City of Perry, Iowa v. Procter & Gamble Co.,
No. 1:15-cv-08051-JMF (S.D.N.Y.).....21

City of Wyoming v. Procter & Gamble Co.,
No. 0:15-cv-02101-JRT-TNL (D. Minn.).....21

Clark v. Duke Univ.,
2019 WL 2588029 (M.D.N.C. June 24, 2019)13

Commrs. of Public Works of City of Charleston v. Costco Wholesale Corp. et al.,
2024 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 41395 *, 2024 WL 10046971

Eisen v. Carlisle & Jacquelin,
417 U.S. 156 (1974).....7

Gaston v. LexisNexis Risk Sols. Inc.,
2021 WL 2077812 (W.D.N.C. May 24, 2021) 15,18,21-23

Greenspun v. Bogan,
492 F.2d 375 (1st Cir. 1974)8

Hensley v. Eckerhart,
461 U.S. 424 (1983)17

Hill v. State St. Corp.,
2015 WL 127728 (D. Mass. Jan. 8, 2015) 8-9

In re Cardinal Health Inc. Sec. Litig.,
528 F.Supp.2d 752 (S.D. Ohio 2007)15

In re Genworth Fin. Sec. Litigation,
210 F. Supp. 3d 837 (E.D. Va. 2016)16,18,20,22

In re Jiffy Lube Securities Litigation,
927 F.2d 155 (4th Cir. 1991) 9-10,12,15

In re NeuStar, Inc. Sec. Litigation,
2015 WL 5674798 (E.D. Va. Sept. 23, 2015)..... 9-11

In re The Mills Corp. Sec. Litigation,
265 F.R.D. 246 (E.D. Va. 2009)..... 10-11

In re Rite Aid Corp. Sec. Litigation,
396 F.3d 294 (3d Cir. 2005).....17

In re Sunbeam Sec. Litigation.,
176 F. Supp. 2d 1323 (S.D. Fla. 2001).....20

In re TJX Cos. Retail SEC Breach Litigation,
584 F. Supp. 2d 395 (D. Mass. 2008)..... 20-21

Johnson v. Ga. Highway Express, Inc.,
488 F.2d 714 (5th Cir. 1974)16

Kay Co. v. Equitable Prod. Co.,
749 F. Supp. 2d 455 (S.D. W. Va. 2010)18

Kurtz v. Kimberly-Clark Corporation, et al.,
No. 1:14-cv-01142-PKC-RML (E.D.N.Y.).....11

The Preserve at Connetquot Homeowners Assn, Inc. v. Costco Wholesale Corp., et al.,
No. 2:17-cv-07050-JFB-AYS4,21

Ressler v. Jacobson,
149 F.R.D. 651 (M.D. Fla. 1992).....20

Sims v. BB&T Corp.,
2019 WL 1993519 (M.D.N.C. May 6, 2019).....19,23

Stayler v. Rohoho, Inc.,
2019 WL 1491873 (D.S.C. Apr. 4, 2019).....16

RULES

Federal Rule of Civil Procedure

FRCP 23(a)23

FRCP 23(b)(1)23

FRCP 23(b)(2) *passim*

FRCP 23(c)(2)(A)7,9

FRCP 23(c)(2)(B)7

FRCP 23(e)(1).....7

FRCP 23(e)(2)..... 9-10,15

FRCP 23(e)(2)(A) 9-10,12

FRCP 23(e)(2)(B) 9-10

FRCP 23(e)(2)(C) *passim*

FRCP 23(e)(2)(D)9,12,15

FRCP 23(h).....16

Representative plaintiff, the Commissioners of Public Works of the City of Charleston (d.b.a. “Charleston Water System”) (“Plaintiff”), submits this memorandum of law in support of its motion for: (i) final approval of the proposed Settlement, which resolves Plaintiff’s common law claims in this class action (the “Litigation”) against defendant Dude Products Inc. (“Dude Products” and “Defendant”) (together with Plaintiff, the “Settling Parties”), brought on behalf of all entities that own and/or operate sewage or wastewater conveyance and treatment systems, including municipalities, authorities and wastewater districts (sewage treatment plant, or “STP Operators”) in the United States whose systems were in operation between May 9, 2021 and May 31, 2024, the date of preliminary approval (“Settlement Class” and the “Settlement Class Period”), and (ii) an award of attorneys’ fees and expenses.¹

I. INTRODUCTION

The Settlement provides crucial injunctive relief to municipal wastewater systems throughout the country, commitments by the Defendant to meet a national municipal wastewater industry flushability standard for its flushable wipes, submit to confirmatory testing, and improve the labeling for non-flushable wipes – to resolve all of Plaintiff’s Released Claims against Defendant during the Settlement Class Period. The Settlement follows hard-fought litigation in *Commissioners of Public Works of the City of Charleston v. Costco Wholesale Corporation et al.*, 2:21-cv-00042-RMG (ECF No. 1) (the “Related Action”), previously pending before this Court and is the result of intense arm’s-length negotiations between Class Counsel and counsel for Defendant. Plaintiff and Class Counsel believe the Settlement – which follow and largely parallel similar settlements with Kimberly-Clark Corporation (“Kimberly-Clark”), Walmart Inc.

¹ Citations and internal quotations are omitted and emphasis is added throughout unless otherwise noted. All capitalized terms that are not otherwise defined herein have the same meanings ascribed to them in the Stipulation of Settlement entered into between Plaintiff and Defendant dated May 10, 2024 (ECF No. 5-2) (the “Settlement Agreement”).

(“Walmart”), Costco Wholesale Corporation (“Costco”), Target Corporation (“Target”), CVS Health Corporation (“CVS”), Walgreen Co. (“Walgreens”), and Proctor & Gamble (“P&G”) in the Related Action – presents an excellent result for the Settlement Class in the face of substantial uncertainty, and will provide wastewater treatment facilities nationwide with not only significant additional relief from wipes-related clogs and blockages, but will play a critical role in the transformation of the flushable wipes industry for the benefit of the Settlement Class.

On May 31, 2024, the Court granted preliminary approval of the Settlement under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23. ECF No. 14 (“Preliminary Approval Order”). In doing so, the Court found the Settlement was “the result of a fair process” and was “negotiated at arm’s length” given the “the Parties’ experience litigating similar issues and Class Counsel’s experience negotiating previous flushable wipes settlements.” *Id.* at 8. In addition to preliminarily approving the Settlement, the Court: (i) conditionally certified the proposed Settlement Class, and (ii) found the Notice plan “reasonable and adequate.” *Id.* at 11.

Following implementation of the Court-approved Notice plan, to date not a *single* Settlement Class Member has filed an objection to *any* aspect of the Settlement. The absence of objections is of particular note here, and weighs heavily in favor of the Settlement, because the Settlement Class consists of municipal sewage treatment systems that are staffed and managed by professionals in the field. Over 15,000 potential Settlement Class Members identified in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (“EPA”) records were notified of the Settlement by First-Class Mail. Settlement Class Members were also notified about the Settlement through publication in a premier professional publication, as well as by press release, a dedicated settlement website, and email transmittal to state and federal water, wastewater and/or municipal associations. Thus, the lack of objections despite the extensive notice plan further supports the Settlement.

The Settlement provides nationwide injunctive relief that will have ongoing benefits to Settlement Class Members. This injunctive relief will reduce both the accumulation of wipes in Settlement Class Members' systems and the expenses incurred to address wipes-related clogs. The relief will also lessen the costly and time-consuming preventative measures necessary to mitigate future clogging, in addition to improving the safety and efficiency of those systems. For these reasons, and those detailed below, Plaintiff respectfully submits the Settlement is fair, reasonable and adequate, and should be approved.

Class Counsel also respectfully request that the Court approve a fee and expense award totaling \$275,000, consisting of attorneys' fees of \$272,006.75, and the payment of litigation expenses and charges of \$2,993.25, as compensation for their efforts. Class Counsel's work to date has been wholly contingent on the results obtained in the Litigation. The requested fee and expense award is consistent with awards in similar actions in the Fourth Circuit and throughout the country, and is fully supported by Plaintiff. Since fee awards are designed to encourage counsel to achieve the best possible result for the class, the amount requested in this case is warranted, given the exceptional result obtained and the obstacles and risks Class Counsel faced in bringing and prosecuting this case.

Accordingly, Plaintiff requests that the Court enter an order granting final approval of the Settlement, and awarding Class Counsel's requested attorneys' fees and expenses.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE LITIGATION AND SETTLEMENT²

A. The Investigation and Litigation

Class Counsel's investigation in the Related Action began in November 2018, over five

² Further information about the Litigation and Settlement is detailed in the Joint Declaration of Vincent M. Serra and F. Paul Calamita in Support of Plaintiff's Motion for Final Approval of Class Action Settlement and an Award of Attorneys' Fees and Expenses ("Jt. Decl." or "Joint Declaration"), submitted herewith. The Joint Declaration is an integral part of this submission and, for the sake of brevity in this memorandum,

years before the filing of the complaint here. *See* Jt. Decl. at ¶10. Before that time, Plaintiff’s counsel, Robbins Geller Rudman & Dowd LLP (“Robbins Geller”), was litigating an analogous case on behalf of a different STP Operator against defendants³ in the Eastern District of New York – *The Preserve at Connetquot Homeowners Association, Inc. v. Costco Wholesale Corporation, et al.*, No. 2:17-cv-07050-JFB-AYS. *Id.* Plaintiff’s expert consultant in *Preserve* – Robert Villée, the former Executive Director of the Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority and former chair of WEF – advised Plaintiff in connection with Plaintiff’s investigation and litigation in the Related Action. *Id.*

As part of their investigation, Class Counsel communicated extensively with Plaintiff about its experience dealing with flushable wipes at Plaintiff’s facilities, and coordinated with industry experts and consultants – including Mr. Villée and Barry Orr, a prominent wastewater industry specialist and representative of the Canadian Water and Wastewater Association on the International Water Services Flushability Group (“IWSFG”), a group of water associations, utilities and professionals focused on flushability – who advised Class Counsel on the factual bases of Plaintiff’s claims. *Id.* at ¶11.

The instant case comes on the heels of the Related Action, a similar case before this Court which led to settlements with seven defendants that were approved by the Court in 2021 (Kimberly-Clark) and 2024 (Costco, CVS, P&G, Target, Walgreen, and Walmart). *Id.* The extensive litigation with those fortune 100 defendants provides the backdrop to the current Litigation and Settlement.

Plaintiff’s investigation here gained steam after Plaintiff and Class Counsel’s receipt of

the Court is respectfully referred to it for a detailed description of, *inter alia*: the history of the Litigation; the nature of the claims asserted; the negotiations leading to the Settlement; and the risks and uncertainties of continued litigation, among other things.

³ “Defendant” refers to Dude Products Inc..

testing results from Plaintiff's consultant, Mr. Orr, in December 2023 demonstrating that Defendant's Wipes failed the wastewater industry's preferred flushability standard. *Id.* at ¶19. As part of their investigation, Class Counsel also reviewed publicly available information, media reports, market analyses, and drew on their extensive knowledge of flushable wipes-related litigation, including the industry-wide contentious litigation and settlements in the Related Action. *Id.* at ¶11. Plaintiff prepared and filed its complaint on May 9, 2024 (setting forth claims for nuisance, trespass, defective design, failure to warn, and negligence on behalf of STP Operators in South Carolina and throughout the country). *Id.*

B. Summary of the Settlement Negotiations

To avoid repetition, Plaintiff respectfully refers the Court to the accompanying Joint Declaration for a detailed discussion of the settlement negotiations leading to the Settlement. *Jt. Decl.* at ¶15-22.

C. The Proposed Settlement Class

The Settlement Agreement calls for certification for settlement purposes of a Settlement Class consisting of “[a]ll STP Operators in the United States whose systems were in operation between May 9, 2021 and the date of preliminary approval” (May 31, 2024). Settlement Agreement at ¶1.22. “STP Operators” are defined in the Settlement Agreement as “entities that own and/or operate sewage or wastewater conveyance and treatment systems, including municipalities, authorities and wastewater districts.” *Id.* at 1. The Court conditionally certified the Settlement Class in its Preliminary Approval Order on May 31, 2024. ECF No. 14 at 11.

D. Terms of the Settlement

The Settlement provides meaningful injunctive relief for STP Operators nationwide in response to Plaintiff's claims, including: (1) commitments by Defendant to achieve compliance with the wastewater industry's preferred flushability standards, including the IWSFG Publicly

Available Specification (PAS) 3: 2020 “Slosh Box” disintegration test (“IWSFG 2020: PAS 3”), for its’ flushable wipes products; (2) confirmatory testing for two years; and (3) labeling improvements for Defendant’s non-flushable wipes products. The cumulative effect of the Settlement is to reduce the accumulation of flushable and non-flushable wipes in Class Members’ wastewater systems, along with corresponding wipes-related clogs and backups, and to lessen the financial and human resource burdens associated with addressing such clogs.

First, Defendant commits that the Products it manufactures and/or sells will meet the IWSFG 2020: PAS 3 flushability specification by November 10, 2025. Settlement Agreement ¶2.1(a).

Second, Defendant has agreed to certain testing implementation and monitoring, including two years of confirmatory testing to verify the Products continue to meet the IWSFG 2020: PAS 3 specification upon achieving compliance, with testing to be conducted every four months, either by: (1) hosting periodic independent testing of the Products; or (2) submitting the Products to a mutually acceptable lab for independent testing. Settlement Agreement ¶2.1(b).

Third, Defendant has agreed to labeling changes for non-flushable products, including meeting the “Do Not Flush” labeling standards set forth in, *inter alia*, Chapter 590 of Assembly Bill No. 818 (“AB818”) of California State – considered the most stringent labeling law in the United States – nationwide to the extent its products are “Covered Products” as defined in AB818. Settlement Agreement ¶2.1(c).

In combination with similar relief obtained in the previously-approved settlements with Kimberly-Clark as well as Costco, CVS, P&G, Target, Walgreen, and Walmart in the Related Action, this injunctive relief should dramatically reduce the wipes-related impacts to public sewer systems nationwide.

III. THE NOTICE SATISFIED RULE 23 AND DUE PROCESS

Since the Court conditionally certified the Settlement Class under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure (“Rule”) 23(b)(2), Plaintiff was required to provide notice to Settlement Class Members under Rule 23(c)(2)(A). Here, the Notice went beyond those requirements and, instead, met the stricter requirement of Rule 23(c)(2)(B) (applicable only to Rule 23(b)(3) classes), which requires “the best notice that is practicable under the circumstances, including individual notice to all members who can be identified through reasonable effort.” Rule 23(c)(2)(B); *see also Eisen v. Carlisle & Jacquelin*, 417 U.S. 156, 173-75 (1974). The Notice further satisfied Rule 23(e)(1), which requires that notice be directed “in a reasonable manner to all class members who would be bound.” Rule 23(e)(1)(B).

In granting preliminary approval, the Court approved the notice procedures outlined in the Settlement Agreement, which were identical to the five prior settlements in the Related Action, including: (1) First-Class Mail notice to over 15,000 potential Settlement Class Members consisting of publicly owned STP Operators located in the United States as of November 1, 2023; (2) publication of a Summary Notice in both the print and online editions of WEF’s magazine, *Water Environment & Technology*; (3) direct email notice to 23 national and local water organizations; (4) creation of a dedicated settlement website; and (5) publication of a Summary Notice via press release. *See* ECF No. 5 at 10-11; Jt. Decl. at ¶¶23-26; Settlement Agreement at ¶¶7.1-7.6.

In accordance with the Preliminary Approval Order and the June 12, 2024 Specialized Scheduling Order for Settlement (ECF No. 16), by the June 28, 2024 deadline for publishing Notice of the Settlement – Class Counsel had emailed Notice to the State wastewater associations and other entities identified in ¶7.2 of the Settlement Agreement, and developed and activated a website dedicated to the Settlement with pertinent information and documents for Settlement Class

Members, www.charlestonwipessettlement.com. Jt. Decl. at ¶24. Additionally, Class Counsel and Defense Counsel coordinated and caused the Summary Notice to be published in the August 2024 print and online editions of WEF's *Water Environment & Technology* magazine. *Id.* at ¶25. The Settling Parties also retained the services of Gilardi & Co. LLC ("Gilardi") to provide the Summary Notice by First-Class Mail to Settlement Class Members and issue notice via press release. *Id.* at ¶26. Gilardi mailed the Summary Notice and issued notice via press release over *Business Wire* on June 28, 2024. *Id.*; see also Declaration of Ross D. Murray Regarding Notice Dissemination and Publication ("Murray Decl."), at ¶¶4-6, submitted herewith.

The Notice apprises Settlement Class Members of their right to, and the deadline by which they must, object to the Settlement and/or Class Counsel's application for the requested attorneys' fees and expenses. Jt. Decl. at ¶25; Settlement Agreement at Ex. B. The Notice also states that Settlement Class Members can request to speak about their opinion of the Settlement and/or the request for an award of attorneys' fees and expenses at the Final Approval Hearing, details information about the Settlement and its benefits, and provides further explanation about the various ways to receive additional information about the Settlement. *Id.* Additionally, the Notice includes, *inter alia*: (i) a statement indicating the attorneys' fees and expenses that will be sought; (ii) the Settlement Class definition; and (iii) the time and place of the Fairness Hearing. Settlement Agreement at Exs. B-C; Murray Decl. Exs. A-B.

Overall, the Notice's content and manner of dissemination "'fairly apprise[d] the prospective members of the class of the terms of the proposed settlement and of the options that are open to them.'" See *Hill v. State St. Corp.*, 2015 WL 127728, at *15 (D. Mass. Jan. 8, 2015) (quoting *Greenspun v. Bogan*, 492 F.2d 375, 382 (1st Cir. 1974)). In sum, the efforts of Class Counsel "'fairly apprise[d]'" Settlement Class Members about the Settlement consistent with

certification of a Rule 23(b)(2) class and in accordance with Rule 23(c)(2)(A) and (e)(1). *Hill*, 2015 WL 127728, at *15.

IV. THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT WARRANTS FINAL APPROVAL

Rule 23(e) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure provides that class action settlements must be presented to the Court for approval. The Rule further directs that a settlement should be approved if the Court finds it “fair, reasonable, and adequate.” Rule 23(e)(2).

Rule 23(e)(2) articulates specific factors for courts to consider when evaluating a settlement for final approval. Specifically, courts are called upon to assess whether:

- (A) the class representatives and class counsel have adequately represented the class;
- (B) the proposal was negotiated at arm’s length;
- (C) the relief provided for the class is adequate, taking into account:
 - (i) the costs, risks, and delay of trial and appeal;
 - (ii) the effectiveness of any proposed method of distributing relief to the class, including the method of processing class-member claims;
 - (iii) the terms of any proposed award of attorney’s fees, including timing of payment; and
 - (iv) any agreement required to be identified under Rule 23(e)(3); and
- (D) the proposal treats class members equitably relative to each other.

Id. Subsections 23(e)(2)(A)-(B) of the revised Rule focus on the “procedural” fairness of the settlement, while subsections 23(e)(2)(C)-(D) concern the settlement’s “substantive” fairness. Advisory Committee Notes to 2018 Amendment to Rule 23(e)(2).

Overlapping with Rule 23(e)(2)(B) (arm’s-length negotiation) and Rule 23(e)(2)(C)(i) (adequacy of the settlements based on the costs, risks, and delay of trial and appeal) is the two-level analysis in the Fourth Circuit set forth in *In re Jiffy Lube Securities Litigation*, 927 F.2d 155, 158-60 (4th Cir. 1991), which “includes an assessment of both the procedural fairness of the settlement negotiations and the substantive adequacy of the settlement itself.” *In re NeuStar, Inc. Sec. Litig.*, 2015 WL 5674798, at *9 (E.D. Va. Sept. 23, 2015). The procedural fairness factor ensures “that the settlement was reached as a result of good-faith bargaining at arm’s length,

without collusion.” *Jiffy Lube*, 927 F.2d at 158-59. The substantive adequacy analysis, on the other hand, “weigh[s] the likelihood of the plaintiff’s recovery on the merits against the amount offered in settlement.” *NeuStar*, 2015 WL 5674798, at *11. As discussed below, the proposed Settlement satisfies each of the factors identified under Rule 23(e)(2), as well as the Fourth Circuit’s “fairness” and “adequacy” analysis.

A. The Settlement Is Procedurally Fair: Plaintiff and Class Counsel Have Adequately Represented the Settlement Class and Engaged in Arm’s-Length Negotiations with Defendant

Plaintiff and Class Counsel have adequately represented the Settlement Class as required by Rule 23(e)(2)(A) by diligently prosecuting this Litigation on their behalf. Among other things, Plaintiff investigated the relevant factual information and retained and/or consulted with experts in connection with Plaintiff’s claims and to perform product testing and analysis and technical research. *See* Jt. Decl. at ¶¶10-11. Furthermore, Class Counsel researched the legal issues underlying Plaintiff’s claims, drafted a detailed complaint and had the benefit of extensive motions practice and discovery in the Related Action that resulted in settlements approved by this Court. The result is a Settlement comprised of the comprehensive injunctive relief described above, *supra* §II.D. The facts set out in the Joint Declaration (¶¶10-22) and §II.D. above demonstrate the adequacy, competence and diligence of Class Counsel and Plaintiff, as well as the arms-length nature of the negotiations. This comprehensive injunctive relief also satisfies both Rule 23(e)(2) and the principles required by *Jiffy Lube*, 927 F.2d at 158-60.

In addition, the Settling Parties achieved the Settlement as the result of good faith, arm’s-length negotiations by experienced counsel, satisfying Rule 23(e)(2)(B) and the first part of the Fourth Circuit’s *Jiffy Lube* analysis. The Settling Parties engaged in settlement negotiations which were built on the guideposts from *five* prior settlements approved by this Court. The Fourth Circuit considers whether the case has progressed far enough to dispel any wariness of “possible collusion among

the settling parties.” *NeuStar*, 2015 WL 5674798, at *10 (quoting *In re The Mills Corp. Sec. Litig.*, 265 F.R.D. 246, 254 (E.D. Va. 2009)). Here, there can be no question the Settlement was the result of arm’s-length negotiations in which there is no hint of collusion. As discussed, the Settling Parties negotiated the terms of the Settlement and rejected or countered numerous key terms over the course of months, informed by years of litigation and mediator-assisted negotiations in the Related Action. The substantive terms of the Settlement go beyond the most stringent requirements of any of the handful of States which have adopted legislation on the topic of flushable and non-flushable wipes. “These adversarial encounters dispel any apprehension of collusion between the parties.” *NeuStar*, 2015 WL 5674798, at *10.⁴

Moreover, Class Counsel have litigated several class action suits against other defendants related to their flushable wipes, the first of which – *Kurtz v. Kimberly-Clark Corporation, et al.*, No. 1:14-cv-01142-PKC-RML (E.D.N.Y.) – has been pending since 2014 and involved significant discovery. “These factors alone could be enough to demonstrate the fairness of the Settlement[.]” *Berry v. LexisNexis Risk & Info. Analytics Grp., Inc.*, 2014 WL 4403524, at *14 (E.D. Va. Sept. 5, 2014), *aff’d sub nom. Berry v. Schulman*, 807 F.3d 600 (4th Cir. 2015) (plaintiff’s counsel’s involvement in two prior class actions against the same defendants related to the same challenged practices following extensive discovery supported a finding of fairness). This, combined with the significant pre-suit investigation, litigation efforts, discovery, and negotiations with Defendant and, in the Related Action, with virtually every other major industry player, gave Plaintiff a meaningful understanding of the merits of its factual allegations, and the strengths and weaknesses

⁴ The Fourth Circuit also looks to the extent of discovery. *NeuStar*, 2015 WL 5674798, at *10. Here, Plaintiff had the benefit of extensive discovery in the prior related cases which assisted the Settling Parties to reach the Settlement. Further, as described *supra* §II(A), and in the Joint Declaration (¶¶10-22), Plaintiff conducted a particularly expansive pre-filing investigation and related investigation as well as extensive use of consulting experts and a well-regarded mediator.

of its legal claims.

In sum, Class Counsel brought its extensive experience to bear on the prosecution and settlement of this case. As detailed in the Joint Declaration, Class Counsel have substantial experience in complex class actions, flushable wipes-related litigation, and disputes involving water and infrastructure. *Jt. Decl.* at ¶¶15-17. Class Counsel have zealously represented the Settlement Class, and achieved a meaningful Settlement after extensive arm’s-length negotiations with Defense Counsel. Moreover, Plaintiff has assisted Class Counsel throughout this process and adequately represented the Settlement Class. *See* Declaration of Mark Cline on Behalf of Charleston Water System (“Pl. Decl.”), at ¶5. Accordingly, the Settlement satisfies the “procedural” factors outlined in Rule 23(e)(2)(A)-(B) and *Jiffy Lube*.

B. The Settlement Is Substantively Fair: The Relief Provided to the Settlement Class Is Adequate and Equitable

“The relief that the settlement is expected to provide to class members is a central concern” of the analysis under Rules 23(e)(2)(C)-(D). Notes of Advisory Committee on 2018 Amendment to Rule 23(e)(2)(C)-(D). This factor overlaps with the Fourth Circuit’s analysis of the substantive adequacy of the Settlement. *Jiffy Lube*, 927 F.2d at 159.

The injunctive relief achieved through the Settlement – in the form of enhanced product performance, confirmatory testing, and labeling improvements – supports the adequacy of the Settlement and its equitable effect. In addition to providing substantial value to Settlement Class Members through reduced costs and effort to address wipes-related clogs and backups, the Settlement meets the other indicia of “substantive” fairness set forth in Rule 23(e)(2)(C)-(D).

1. The Costs, Risks, and Delay of Trial and Appeal Support Approval of the Settlement

The costs, risks, and delay associated with taking this case to trial – and, inevitably, appeals, weigh in favor of approval. *See* Rule 23(e)(2)(C)(i). The prosecution of this case to trial

would require substantial reliance on expert witnesses, including experts in the areas of materials and methods used to manufacture flushable wipes, as well as experts in sewage treatment systems and the causes and effects of materials that obstruct such systems. Experts would have to address a suitable dispersibility standard in order for a wipe to be truly “flushable”. Defense Counsel would undoubtedly challenge the approaches and methodologies of Plaintiff’s experts and call their own experts to dispute the findings of Plaintiff’s experts. This would place a battle of experts into the hands of the jury, which is risky for both parties. The expense of expert witnesses for both sides would be substantial.

If Plaintiff was unsuccessful at any stage of the Litigation, including class certification or summary judgment, this could result in the recovery being significantly delayed, reduced, or lost entirely. *See Clark v. Duke Univ.*, 2019 WL 2588029, at *6 (M.D.N.C. June 24, 2019) (finding that the “likelihoods that the defendants may either prevail in motions practice or at trial or appeal any recovery” would likely have the effect of “delaying (or foreclosing) any benefit to the class members”). Causation issues would also be highly contested at summary judgment. *Jt. Decl.* at ¶35. Ultimately, any judgment would likely present significant legal questions, which the losing parties would likely appeal, adding further cost, risk and delay to these proceedings.

In sum, the “costs, risks, and delay of trial and appeal” strongly favor final approval of the Settlement. Rule 23(e)(2)(C)(i).

2. The Relief Provided Is Effective and Equitable

The relief described above, *supra* §II.D., provides an effective and far-reaching benefit that extends equitably to all Settlement Class Members. For example, the specific standards that Defendant agreed to meet – IWSFG 2020; PAS 3 flushability specification, along with confirmatory testing and labeling improvements – provide strong objective evidence of the effectiveness of the Settlement. The relief is equitable because it applies universally to the

Products throughout the country, and all Settlement Class Members will thus benefit equally.

Notably, after having been informed of its terms by virtue of the Court-approved notice plan, to date not a single Settlement Class Member has filed a formal objection to the Settlement. As noted above, *supra* §II.C., the Settlement Class is comprised of all STP Operators in the United States whose systems were in operation between May 9, 2021 and May 31, 2024. The Notice was sent to the professional managers and engineers who operate those systems. Unlike consumer-oriented class action notices, it is necessarily part of the work responsibilities of those STP Operators who received the Notice to read and evaluate it. Moreover, it is fair to assume that such entities generally have access to legal counsel to assist in evaluating the Settlement if needed. Therefore, the Court should consider the absence of formal objections as very strong evidence that the Settlement is both effective and equitable.

3. The Terms of the Attorneys' Fee Award Are Fair, Reasonable, and in Line with Other Cases

As detailed further below, *infra* §V., the terms of the requested attorneys' fees are fair, reasonable, and in line with awards in similar cases. This also weighs in favor of approval of the Settlement. *See* Rule 23(e)(2)(C)(iii). The Notice states that Class Counsel would apply to the Court for an award of attorneys' fees and expenses of up to \$275,000 (Settlement Agreement at ¶6.1). The proposed attorneys' fee award is below awards and lodestar multipliers in similar injunctive relief cases. *See Berry*, 2014 WL 4403524, at *6, *15 (approving approximately \$5.3 million attorneys' fee award, representing a multiplier of 1.99 times counsel's lodestar, for Rule 23(b)(3) injunctive relief settlement based on the purported "value of the relief to consumers and the dynamic shift that it represents in the industry and the fact that the injunction affords far better substantive rights than the Court or a jury could compel following a complete victory on all of Plaintiff's claims"); *Gaston v. LexisNexis Risk Sols. Inc.*, 2021 WL 2077812, at *7 (W.D.N.C.

May 24, 2021) (awarding \$5.15 million total fee and expense award in a Rule 23(b)(2) settlement, representing 1.85 lodestar multiplier); *see also In re Cardinal Health Inc. Sec. Litig.*, 528 F.Supp.2d 752, 768 (S.D. Ohio 2007) (cited approvingly by the Fourth Circuit in *Berry*, 2014 WL 4403524, at *15, and noting that “typical lodestar multiplier[s]” in large class actions “range[] from 1.3 to 4.5”).

4. The Settling Parties Have No Side Agreements

Rule 23(e)(2)(C)(iv) requires the disclosure of any other agreements. The Settling Parties have entered into no other agreements here.

5. Settlement Class Members Are Treated Equitably

The final factor under Rule 23(e)(2) is whether Settlement Class Members are treated equitably. Rule 23(e)(2)(D). The injunctive relief benefits all Settlement Class Members – STP Operators nationwide – equitably by reducing the harm caused by wipes, both flushable and non-flushable, thus generally increasing safety and efficiency equally across the Settlement Class. There are no sub-classes and all Settlement Class Members get the same benefits.

Thus, each factor identified under Rule 23(e)(2) and *Jiffy Lube* is satisfied. For all of the foregoing reasons, and for each of the reasons set forth in the Court’s Preliminary Approval Order, the Court should find that the Settlement is fair, adequate and reasonable, and in Settlement Class Members’ best interests.

V. THE REQUESTED ATTORNEYS’ FEES AND EXPENSES ARE REASONABLE

Class Counsel requests that the Court approve an award of attorneys’ fees and expenses of \$275,000 – consisting of \$272,006.75 in attorneys fees’ and \$2,993.25 in actual expenses (including Court costs). Class Counsel’s efforts have been wholly contingent upon the result achieved. For all of the reasons discussed above, and those set forth further below, the amount requested in this case is warranted given the exceptional injunctive relief obtained and the

significant obstacles and risks Class Counsel faced in bringing and prosecuting this case.

A. The Requested Attorneys' Fees Are Reasonable and Should Be Granted

Under Rule 23(h), “[i]n a certified class action, the court may award reasonable attorney’s fees and nontaxable costs that are authorized by law or by the parties’ agreement.” Rule 23(h). Courts in this Circuit generally consider the following factors identified in *Barber v. Kimbrell’s, Inc.* to determine the reasonableness of fee awards in class actions:

(1) the time and labor expended; (2) the novelty and difficulty of the questions raised; (3) the skill required to properly perform the legal services rendered; (4) the attorney’s opportunity costs in pressing the instant litigation; (5) the customary fee for like work; (6) the attorney’s expectations at the outset of the litigation; (7) the time limitations imposed by the client or circumstances; (8) the amount in controversy and the results obtained; (9) the experience, reputation and ability of the attorney; (10) the undesirability of the case within the legal community in which the suit arose; (11) the nature and length of the professional relationship between attorney and client; and (12) attorneys’ fees awards in similar cases.

577 F.2d 216, 226 & n.28 (4th Cir. 1978) (adopting factors from *Johnson v. Ga. Highway Express, Inc.*, 488 F.2d 714, 717-19 (5th Cir. 1974), *abrogated on other grounds by Blanchard v. Bergeron*, 489 U.S. 87, 92-93 (1989)); *see also Stayler v. Rohoho, Inc.*, 2019 WL 1491873, at *3 (D.S.C. Apr. 4, 2019) (Gergel, J.) (finding proposed attorneys’ fees reasonable under *Barber* factors). As discussed below, Class Counsel’s requested fee satisfies each of the *Barber* factors, and therefore, should be awarded as fair and reasonable in this case.

In addition to the *Barber* factors, the Fourth Circuit has confirmed that in settlements under Rule 23(b)(2), a lack of objections by class members as to the fees requested by counsel weighs in favor of the reasonableness of the fees. *See Berry*, 807 F.3d at 618-19; *see also In re Genworth Fin. Sec. Litig.*, 210 F. Supp. 3d 837, 844 (E.D. Va. 2016) (citing *Berry*, 807 F.3d at 618-19). Pursuant to the Preliminary Approval Order, Class Counsel (with the assistance of Gilardi and/or in coordination with Defense Counsel) mailed copies of the Summary Notice via First-Class Mail to the EPA’s list of over 15,000 publicly owned treatment works, published the Summary Notice

in the August editions of WEF's *Water Environment & Technology* magazine, emailed notice to 23 prominent wastewater associations and related entities, issued notice via press release, and posted the Notice and other relevant case documents to the Settlement website, <https://charlestonwipessettlement.com/>. Jt. Decl. at ¶¶24-26; Murray Decl. at ¶¶4-6. The Notice informed recipients that Class Counsel would ask the Court for attorneys' fees and expenses of up to \$275,000. Although the deadline for filing objections is September 6, 2024, thus far, there have been no formal objections to the requested attorneys' fees. Thus, the reaction of the Settlement Class to date here supports the appropriateness of the requested fee. *See Berry*, 807 F.3d at 618-19 (citing *In re Rite Aid Corp. Sec. Litig.*, 396 F.3d 294, 305 (3d Cir. 2005) (noting that only two class members objecting to fee request is a "rare phenomenon" and evidence that the district court did not abuse its discretion in awarding fees)).

Moreover, the United States Supreme Court has held that negotiated, agreed-upon attorneys' fee provisions are the ideal toward which the parties should strive. *Hensley v. Eckerhart*, 461 U.S. 424, 437 (1983) ("Ideally, of course, litigants will settle the amount of a fee."). Moreover, unlike in a common fund case, the fee amount here will not affect the Settlement's benefits. A decision to reduce or even to refuse to award a fee, while beneficial to Defendant, will not affect the Settlement Class. *See Berry*, 807 F.3d at 618 (where "there was never any realistic possibility of class-wide monetary relief . . . there is no reason to think that class counsel left money on the table in negotiating this Agreement"). Nor does a negotiated fee present the potential for adversity between counsel and the class that the traditional common fund fee may present, because the negotiated fee is being paid in addition to the class benefits. *See Bowling v. Pfizer, Inc.*, 922 F. Supp. 1261, 1277-78 (S.D. Ohio 1996) (recognizing that divergence of interest can arise in traditional common fund situations), *aff'd*, 102 F.3d 777 (6th Cir. 1996).

1. *Barber* Factor No. 1: The Time and Labor Expended by Class Counsel Support the Requested Fee

The time and diligent effort expended by Class Counsel to achieve the Settlement supports the requested fee. Class Counsel and their paraprofessionals have expended more than 252.9 hours in the prosecution of this Litigation. *See* Declaration of Vincent M. Serra Filed on Behalf of Robbins Geller in Support of Application for Award of Attorneys' Fees and Expenses ("Robbins Geller Decl."), at ¶4 and Ex. A; Declaration of Frank P. Calamita Filed on Behalf of AquaLaw PLC in Support of Application for Award of Attorneys' Fees and Expenses ("AquaLaw Decl."), at ¶4 and Ex. A. As set forth in more detail in the Joint Declaration, Class Counsel have committed extensive resources to pursuing Plaintiff's claims, consulting with experts, performing complex analyses developing Plaintiff's claims, and negotiating the terms of the injunctive relief provided in the Settlement. *Jt. Decl.* at ¶¶10-22.

Class Counsel's combined lodestar is \$180,466.50 resulting in a 1.5 multiplier to counsel's lodestar. *See* Robbins Geller Decl. at ¶4; AquaLaw Decl. at ¶4. Courts in this Circuit frequently approve fee requests in injunctive relief actions where plaintiffs' counsel, like Class Counsel here, "expended large amounts of time and labor." *Berry*, 2014 WL 4403524, at *15; *Gaston*, 2021 WL 2077812, at *7.

Moreover, "[d]istrict courts within the Fourth Circuit have regularly approved attorneys' fees awards with 2-3 times lodestar multipliers." *Genworth*, 210 F. Supp. 3d at 845, n.5 (citing cases approving lodestar multipliers of 2.6 to 2.9); *see also Kay Co. v. Equitable Prod. Co.*, 749 F. Supp. 2d 455, 470-71 (S.D. W. Va. 2010) (awarding fee reflecting multiplier of between 2.8 and 3.4 and noting that "Courts have generally held that lodestar multipliers falling between 2 and 4.5 demonstrate a reasonable attorneys' fee"); *Gaston*, 2021 WL 2077812, at *7 (awarding fees reflecting a "multiplier of approximately 1.85[, which] is less than or similar to those applied in

similar cases”); *Berry*, 2014 WL 4403524, at *15 (awarding fees representing a “multiplier of 1.99[, which] is similar to those applied in similar cases”). The modest lodestar multiplier here confirms the reasonableness of the requested fee award, as it is well below the range of reasonableness. *See Sims v. BB&T Corp.*, 2019 WL 1993519, at *3 (M.D.N.C. May 6, 2019).⁵

2. Barber Factor No. 2: The Novelty and Complexity of the Issues Support the Requested Fee

The injunctive relief that Class Counsel obtained on behalf of Plaintiff and Settlement Class Members follows and substantively parallels the Court-approved settlements with Kimberly-Clark, Walmart, Costco, Target, CVS, Walgreens, and P&G, which commit these flushable wipes manufacturers and retailers to ensure their “flushable” products will meet the national municipal wastewater industry flushability standard, and to, *inter alia*, implement industry-leading labeling improvements for non-flushable products. The Litigation itself, and Class Counsel’s efforts to resolve it, are the reason Defendant has agreed to improve the performance and labeling of its products. The injunctive relief achieved here (*see supra* §II.D.) includes significant benefits to Settlement Class Members as well as to the public at large. Moreover, had Class Counsel been unable to secure the Settlement, Defendant would likely continue to assert, including at summary judgment, arguments regarding many of the complex legal and factual issues raised in the briefing of the prior settling defendants’ multiple joint motions to dismiss. *Jt. Decl.* at ¶35. The novelty and complexity of the issues in the Litigation thus further support the requested fee.

3. Barber Factor Nos. 3 and 9: Class Counsel’s Experience, Reputation, and Ability, Along with the Skill Required to Perform Their Legal Services, Support the Requested Fee

The result obtained for the Settlement Class stems from the efforts of Class Counsel, whose

⁵ Unlike Defense Counsel, who received ongoing payment, Class Counsel litigated this action entirely on a contingent fee basis, not receiving compensation for their services underpinning this application until awarded by the Court. Class Counsel have expended substantial time and effort to prosecute and settle the Litigation with no guarantee of recovery and where the risk of success was highly speculative.

experience, reputation, diligence, and skill enabled them to thoroughly investigate the facts and oversee the expert testing and analysis underlying Plaintiff's claims, and to negotiate favorable injunctive relief for the Settlement Class under challenging circumstances with one of the largest flushable wipes companies in the world. *See generally* Jt. Decl.; *Genworth*, 210 F. Supp. 3d at 844 (noting the "skill required in complex cases such as this involving massive discovery efforts and complicated issues of fact and law" weighed in favor of fee award). Additionally, Class Counsel showed skill by "litigat[ing] the action and obtain[ing] this excellent settlement without the benefit of any active assistance from any governmental agency." *Ressler v. Jacobson*, 149 F.R.D. 651, 654 (M.D. Fla. 1992).

Additionally, the "quality of the opposition the plaintiffs' attorneys faced" during the action is an important consideration in evaluating Class Counsel's skill here. *In re Sunbeam Sec. Litig.*, 176 F. Supp. 2d 1323, 1334 (S.D. Fla. 2001). Defense Counsel in this Litigation, Barnes & Thornburg LLP, is one of the 100 largest law firms in the United States known for their experience in defending cases similar to this one and other class actions, and have been formidable opponents for Class Counsel in this case. Jt. Decl. at ¶29. The ability of Class Counsel to obtain such a favorable result despite Defense Counsel's impressive qualifications and experience, including just last year with a similar wipes-related class action, confirms the quality of Class Counsel's representation.

4. Barber Factor Nos. 8 and 10: The Result Obtained and Undesirability of the Case Support the Requested Fee

Perhaps the "most important factor for a court to consider when making a fee award is the result achieved." *Genworth*, 210 F. Supp. 3d at 843. "[C]lass action litigation should benefit the individuals who have been harmed." *In re TJX Cos. Retail SEC Breach Litig.*, 584 F. Supp. 2d 395, 406 (D. Mass. 2008). Accordingly, a court may judge the reasonableness of the attorneys'

fees relative to the benefits actually provided to class members. *Id.* at 403.

Here, the injunctive relief is an excellent result for the Settlement Class by any measure. As discussed above, the injunctive relief will provide not only economic, efficiency, and safety benefits to Settlement Class Members, but also economic benefits to taxpayers, and benefits to all consumers in the form of product improvements and enhanced labeling. The recovery has been obtained through the considerable efforts of Class Counsel without the expense, delay, and uncertainty of continued litigation against Defendant. In the end, Plaintiff and the Settlement Class care most about getting a great result. The outstanding result obtained here supports Class Counsel's fee request and merits an appropriate fee that encourages counsel to seek excellent results.

Moreover, the result obtained is all the more significant given the fact that three similar class actions seeking nearly identical relief from certain defendants were dismissed without securing the class-wide injunctive relief obtained by Class Counsel here. *See City of Wyoming v. Procter & Gamble Co.*, No. 0:15-cv-02101-JRT-TNL (D. Minn.); *City of Perry, Iowa v. Procter & Gamble Co.*, No. 1:15-cv-08051-JMF (S.D.N.Y.); *Preserve*, No. 2:17-cv-07050-JFB-AYS (E.D.N.Y.). This fact also weighs in favor of supporting the requested fee in connection with *Barber* factor No. 10 – the undesirability of the case within the legal community in which the suit arose.

5. *Barber* Factor Nos. 5 and 12: Fee Awards in Similar Cases, and the Customary Fee for Like Work, Support the Requested Fee

The requested fee award is reasonable in light of significantly larger attorneys' fee awards in recent and similar injunctive relief class actions in the Fourth Circuit. *See, e.g., Gaston*, 2021 WL 2077812, at *7 (approving total attorneys' fee award of \$5.15 million for Rule 23(b)(2) settlement, finding that the plaintiffs' counsel "expended large amounts of time and labor,"

demonstrated skill and achieved an “excellent result” that provides “substantial benefits” to the class, and the defendants “agreed to pay the requested amount”); *Berry*, 2014 WL 4403524, at *6 (approving award of approximately \$5.3 million for Rule 23(b)(2) settlement).

Moreover, district courts in this Circuit have recognized that a fee award that results in a 2-3 times lodestar multiplier is reasonable. *See, e.g., Genworth*, 210 F. Supp. 3d at 845; *see also supra* §§V.A.1. and IV.B.3. Here, the requested fee results in a much more modest lodestar multiplier of 1.5, well within or even below the range of lodestar multipliers commonly approved by courts in this Circuit and elsewhere.

6. Barber Factor No. 4: Class Counsel’s Opportunity Costs in Pressing the Litigation Supports the Requested Fee

As noted above, Class Counsel has documented over 259 attorney and paraprofessional hours of time devoted to this case. Such a time commitment represents a significant opportunity cost for Class Counsel, in terms of other cases that could have been handled during the same period. In addition, Class Counsel advanced all of the costs of the Litigation and settlement efforts. This factor thus supports the court’s approval of the requested amount of attorney’s fees.⁶

B. The Requested Litigation Expenses Are Reasonable and Should be Granted

Payment of reasonable litigation expenses to counsel in Rule 23(b)(2) class settlements is both necessary and routine. *See, e.g., Gaston*, 2021 WL 2077812, at *7 (awarding expenses in connection with Rule 23(b)(2) settlement). Class Counsel’s expenses and charges here are

⁶ The remaining *Barber* factors – the attorneys’ expectations at the outset of the litigation (No. 6), any time limitations imposed by the client or the circumstances (No. 7), and the length and nature of the professional relationship between the attorneys and client (No. 11), also support the requested fee. As to Class Counsel’s expectations at the outset of the Litigation, Class Counsel has represented Plaintiff on a contingency basis and under the ambit of Rule 23, thus Class Counsel expected any fee award to be subject to Court review and only granted if they were successful. Moreover, while there were no time limitations in this Litigation per se, Class Counsel sought to secure the Settlement expeditiously given the circumstances – namely, the continued harm caused by wipes that do not break down sufficiently to pass through Settlement Class Members’ systems. Finally, Class Counsel has represented Plaintiff in connection with this and prior related litigation for over five years and has worked closely with Plaintiff throughout the process.

\$2,993.25 and are set forth in the accompanying Class Counsel declarations. Robbins Geller Decl. at ¶5 and Ex. B, AquaLaw Decl. at ¶5 and Ex. B. These expenses and charges are modest and were reasonable and necessary to the prosecution of the claims and achieving the Settlement.

The expenses sought here – such as court filing fees and expert testing of the flushability of Defendant’s products – are precisely the type of expenses which have been awarded in other class actions in the Fourth Circuit. *See Sims*, 2019 WL 1993519, at *4 (“Reimbursable expenses include expert fees, travel, long-distance and conference telephone, postage, delivery services, settlement costs, and computerized legal research.”). The Settlement Notice advised Settlement Class Members that Class Counsel would seek a fee and expense award of up to \$275,000, and there have been no formal objections to date. Class Counsel respectfully requests payment of these reasonable litigation expenses.

VI. THE COURT SHOULD GRANT FINAL CERTIFICATION OF THE SETTLEMENT CLASS

In its Preliminary Approval Order, the Court conditionally certified the Settlement Class for settlement purposes, thereby recognizing that Plaintiff had satisfied the requirements of Rules 23(a) and 23(b)(1). ECF No. 14 at 6. Since the Court’s Preliminary Approval Order, nothing has changed to disturb the Court’s conclusion that class treatment is appropriate, and there is good reason and just cause to finally certify the Settlement Class, for settlement purposes, under Rules 23(a) and 23(b)(2).

VII. CONCLUSION

Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court enter an order granting final approval of the Settlement, finally certifying the Settlement Class, and awarding attorneys’ fees and expenses of \$275,000 (\$272,006.75 in fees and \$2,993.25 in expenses).

DATED: August 23, 2024

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that on August 23, 2024, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system which sent notification of such filing to all counsel of record.

/s/ F. Paul Calamita

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