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Just A Minute, Isn’t That De Minimis: California Should Not Burden or Require National Employers to Compensate Employees for De Minimis Off-the-Clock Work Activities

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JUST A MINUTE, ISN’T THAT DE MINIMIS: CALIFORNIA SHOULD NOT BURDEN OR REQUIRE NATIONAL EMPLOYERS TO COMPENSATE EMPLOYEES FOR DE MINIMIS OFF-THE-CLOCK WORK ACTIVITIES

Alan Persaud*

ABSTRACT

The Fair Labor Standards Act (“FLSA”) requires employers to adhere to the federal minimum wage and overtime requirements when compensating employees for all “hours worked.” Federal courts recognize and apply an exception known as the de minimis doctrine to disregard insubstantial amounts of time. The de minimis doctrine excuses employers from compensating employees for trivial amounts of time spent on off-the-clock work activities, such as waiting to log onto a computer, passing through a security check, and activating an alarm. Under the de minimis doctrine, employees cannot receive compensation for a few seconds or minutes that occurred outside scheduled working hours. States, however, have their own wage orders and labor codes that provide greater protections to employees that go beyond the FLSA requirements. Thus, the application of the de minimis doctrine to off-the-clock claims brought under the FLSA is different than the doctrine’s application to claims brought under state wage and hour laws. No state has explicitly refused to apply the de minimis doctrine in state wage and hour claims, other than California. Regardless of whether California explicitly adopted the de minimis doctrine in its respective wage orders and labor codes, California should have applied the de minimis doctrine to off-the-clock state wage and hour claims. The doctrine’s policy interests warrant its adoption and use in state wage and hour law and rejecting the de minimis doctrine only burdens employers to record insignificant amounts of time that are administratively difficult to capture.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Though employers are required to compensate employees for hours worked, smaller or trivial increments that are administratively difficult to record are often in dispute, and either highly advanced technologies are needed to capture those small amounts of time, or a doctrine is needed to disregard them, such as the de minimis doctrine. The de minimis doctrine excuses employers from paying wages for trivial amounts of otherwise compensable time. The doctrine derives from the Latin legal maxim de minimis non curat lex, which translates as “the law does not concern itself
with trifles.”\textsuperscript{3} De minimis, or “trifles,” are something of small value or little importance.\textsuperscript{4} The rule applies when the harm is trivial, but calculating it for purposes of a remedy would be burdensome, time-consuming, and not worthwhile given its trivial nature.\textsuperscript{5} The de minimis doctrine is applicable to a variety of factual contexts,\textsuperscript{6} and its application conserves judicial resources and prevents the court system from getting hung up with trivial matters.\textsuperscript{7} In the context of wage and hour law, the de minimis doctrine’s applicability is based on three factors: “(1) the practical administrative difficulty of recording the additional time; (2) the aggregate amount of compensable time; and (3) the regularity of the additional work.”\textsuperscript{8} In wage and hour cases, employers bear the burden of proving that the de minimis doctrine applies.\textsuperscript{9} Hence, employers use the doctrine as a defense to wage and hour violations concerning off-the-clock work activities.\textsuperscript{10}

Consider the following off-the-clock scenarios: A coffee shop manager spends about fifteen to twenty seconds unlocking the front door; about thirty seconds walking to the clock-in station; and one or two minutes to turn on the timekeeping system and finally clock-in. After completing his shift and clocking out, the manager spends about one minute activating the store’s alarm; fifty seconds exiting the store; fifteen seconds locking the main door; and forty seconds walking coworkers to their vehicles, if coworkers need to be walked to their vehicles. Assume the manager is only compensated for the time recorded via the clock-in system.

Another employee works at a plant that requires certain security measures. When the employee enters, she has to wait in a security line every day before clocking in and wait in the line after clocking out. The time spent waiting in the security line varies. On some days, the time spent passing through the security line is approximately less than three minutes. On other days, waiting time could be three or even five minutes. After passing through the security line, the employee takes twenty to thirty seconds to don (put on)
a hardhat, safety glasses, and gloves. Then, she clocks-in and finally starts working. After completing her shift and clocking out, the employee spends fifteen to twenty seconds to doff (take off) her safety gear and about one to five minutes passing through a security line. Only then, is the employee’s work-day complete. Assume that the plant worker is only compensated for the time recorded on the clock-in system, and no other advanced timekeeping systems were used.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (“FLSA” or the “Act”), employers risk federal wage and hour violations if they do not adhere to minimum wage and overtime requirements. Based on the aforementioned plant worker’s and coffee shop manager’s off-the-clock work activities, assume that they allege violations of wage and hour laws against their respective employers and seek remedy in court. If the coffee shop manager brings his off-the-clock claims under the FLSA, the manager will not prevail since the time spent on the off-the-clock work activities “concern[] only a few seconds or minutes of work beyond the scheduled working hours” and will be disregarded as de minimis. Specifically, the trivial amounts of time that the manager takes to walk to the clock-in station, turn on the timekeeping system, lock the door, activate the alarm, and walk coworkers to their cars are administratively difficult to record, insubstantial when aggregated, and vary in duration. Similarly, if the plant worker brings her off-the-clock claims under the FLSA, the plant worker will not prevail since the miniscule amounts of time that the worker takes to don generic safety gear and pass through a security line are de minimis.

Employers have to comply not only with the FLSA, but also with state wage and hour laws that provide higher standards than the FLSA because states may offer greater protections to employees. The coffee shop manager and plant worker will most likely prevail if they bring their off-the-clock claims under state wage and hour laws, specifically under California wage and hour law. States, like California, have not explicitly adopted the de

13 See Hubbs v. Big Lots Stores, Inc., No. LA CV15-01601 JAK (ASx), 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 85227, at *24–26 (C.D. Cal. May 12, 2017) (finding that time spent setting a store alarm and exiting the store after clocking out is de minimis); Corbin v. Time Warner Entm’l-Advance/Newhouse P’ship, 821 F.3d 1069, 1081–82 (9th Cir. 2016) (holding one minute spent waiting to log into the timekeeping system is de minimis); Fast v. Applebee’s Int’l, Inc., 502 F. Supp. 2d 996, 1006 (W.D. Mo. 2007) (finding that time spent between the time walking in the door and the time clocking-in is de minimis).
14 See Busk v. Integrity Staffing Sols., Inc. 713 F.3d 525, 532 (9th Cir. 2013) (acknowledging that time spent during a security check can be classified as de minimis); Von Friewalde v. Boeing Aero. Ops., Inc., 339 F. App’x 448, 454 (5th Cir. 2009) (finding that the time it takes to don and doff hearing and eye safety gear is de minimis).
minimis doctrine into their respective state labor codes and wage orders.¹⁷ No evidence exists concerning the intent of the California Labor Code and Industrial Wage Commission’s wage orders to adopt the de minimis doctrine.¹⁸ The California Supreme Court recently examined its own labor laws and determined that the doctrine does not apply to state wage and hour claims.¹⁹ Thus, employers must compensate employees for off-the-clock activities, such as activating an alarm, exiting a store, and locking a door, which last a few seconds or minutes.²⁰ California noted that it is free to provide greater protection to employees and that reliance on federal regulations or interpretations is misplaced when determining state law.²¹

First, this Comment gives an overview of federal and state wage and hour regulations and a history of the de minimis doctrine.²² Then, this Comment discusses the California Supreme Court’s refusal to apply the de minimis doctrine to its state wage and hour claims.²³ This Comment argues that forcing employers to reevaluate their polices based on miniscule amounts of time, requiring them to measure every second of off-the-clock work activities, and leaving employers exposed to liabilities should be avoided at all costs.²⁴

Regardless of whether California explicitly adopted the de minimis doctrine in its respective wage orders and labor codes, California should have used federal precedent and applied the de minimis doctrine to off-the-clock state wage and hour claims.²⁵ Rejecting the de minimis doctrine only restricts employees and burdens employers to record insignificant amounts of time that are administratively difficult to capture.²⁶ Finally, this Comment recommends that states, like California, recognize the policy interests associated with the de minimis doctrine, apply the doctrine to state wage and hour claims, and not require employers to compensate employees for de minimis off-the-clock work activities.²⁷

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¹⁷ See id.
¹⁸ Id. at 1119.
¹⁹ Id. at 1125.
²⁰ Id. at 1117.
²¹ Id. at 1119.
²² See infra Section II and III.
²³ See Troester, 421 P.3d at 1125.
²⁴ See Mitchell v. JCG Indus., Inc., 745 F.3d 837, 843 (7th Cir. 2014).
²⁵ See generally Troester, 421 P.3d at 1121.
²⁷ See infra Sections VI–VIII.
II. OVERVIEW OF WAGE AND HOUR LAW

Before the FLSA, the United States government attempted to regulate public and private workers. In 1936, Congress enacted the Walsh-Healy Public Contracts Act to improve labor conditions, but amendments and different court interpretations reduced the act’s impact. In support of better working conditions, President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously stated that employees should receive “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work” and that there is “no justification for the existence of child labor, no economic reason for chiseling workers’ wages or stretching workers’ hours.” President Roosevelt’s speech echoed throughout the nation, and his words were the basis for the creation of federal and state wage and hour laws.

A. Federal Wage and Hour Regulations

The principal federal law regulating the work environment, compensation, and hours worked is the FLSA. The administration and enforcement of the Act are the functions and responsibilities of the Department of Labor’s (“DOL”) Wage and Hour Division. Congress passed the Act to rectify working “conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency, and general well-being of workers.” Thus, the 1938 FLSA provides employees with minimum wage standards, overtime compensation protections, and child labor prohibitions. The FLSA balances employer and employee interests by ensuring that employees receive compensation for the work that they completed. The Act sets a national floor of a minimum hourly wage that all

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employers must adhere to. The FLSA also requires employers to pay employees overtime compensation, in the amount of at least one-and-a-half times regular pay, for employees who worked over forty hours in a week. Whether they sue individually and/or on behalf of “similarly situated” employees, employees can sue employers for violating the FLSA. If found liable for FLSA violations, employers risk paying for liquidated damages in the amount equal to unpaid wages and overtime, in addition to reasonable attorney’s fees and court costs.

For payroll purposes and the accurate calculation of wages, employers need to determine what exactly qualifies as working time. The FLSA does not define “work,” but the Act does define “employ” as “to suffer or permit to work.” When determining what constitutes “work,” courts have interpreted the term broadly as to mean the exertion that employers benefit from or, more specifically, as the time that employers require employees to be on the workplace premises, even if those work activities do not require exertion. In response to the different interpretations of what constituted “work,” Congress passed the Portal-to-Portal Act, which excluded preliminary and postliminary activities and the time traveling to the workplace from being calculated as compensable work. Preliminary and postliminary activities include walking and traveling to and from the workplace, changing clothes before and after shifts, and other activities that precede and succeed principal work activities. Activities are integral and indispensable if they have intrinsic elements of principal activities that employees cannot forgo if they are to perform their respective work activities.

40 See id.
42 29 U.S.C. § 203(g) (2019); IBP, Inc. v. Alvarez, 546 U.S. 21, 26 (2005); see 29 C.F.R. § 785.6 (2019); see also Reich v. N.Y. City Transit Auth., 45 F.3d 646, 649 (2d Cir. 1995) (“While . . . employers are required to compensate employees for ‘work’ . . . [Congress] did not define the contours of . . . ‘work.’”).
47 Busk, 574 U.S. at 30.
The DOL adopted regulations that make work activities compensable, especially since the activities are for the benefit of the employer.\textsuperscript{48} Accordingly, employers must compensate employees for off-the-clock work if employers knew or should have known that their employees completed work activities.\textsuperscript{49} The DOL also adopted the continuous workday rule.\textsuperscript{50} The rule defines a “workday” as the time period between commencing and completing principal work activities on the same workday.\textsuperscript{51} Preliminary and postliminary activities, however, to walk from a time clock to the work area or waiting to clock-in or receive safety gear occur outside of the continuous workday and are not compensable.\textsuperscript{52}

The DOL also codified the \textit{de minimis} doctrine.\textsuperscript{53} The DOL recognized that the amount of time spent on pre-shift and post-shift activities varies widely and that employers face difficulty when burdened with the task to monitor such off-the-clock work.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, those circumstances warranted a doctrine to disregard activities so minimal that they are not compensable.\textsuperscript{55}

The FLSA also contains recordkeeping standards and requirements for recording hours worked by employees.\textsuperscript{56} The DOL and FLSA require employers to ensure the maintenance of detailed and accurate records, such as information on each employee’s workweek, hours worked each day, applicable pay period, date of payment, and overtime compensation.\textsuperscript{57} The DOL also adopted regulations allowing time rounding practices, which round starting and stopping work time to the nearest five minutes.\textsuperscript{58} Time rounding practices are acceptable as long as the rounding does not fail to fully account for the time employees actually worked.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{flushright}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} See 29 C.F.R. § 785.11 (2019).
\item \textsuperscript{49} See id.
\item \textsuperscript{50} IBP, Inc. v. Alvarez, 546 U.S. 21, 29 (2005).
\item \textsuperscript{51} 29 C.F.R. § 790.6(b) (2019).
\item \textsuperscript{52} \textit{Alvarez}, 546 U.S. at 37.
\item \textsuperscript{53} 29 C.F.R. § 785.47 (2019) (“[I]nsubstantial or insignificant periods of time beyond the scheduled working hours, which cannot as a practical administrative matter be precisely recorded for payroll purposes, may be disregarded…. [S]uch trifles are de minimis.”); U.S. Dep’t of Labor, Wage & Hour Div., Opinion Letter FLSA2004-8NA at 1 (Aug. 1, 2004).
\item \textsuperscript{54} See 29 C.F.R. § 785.47 (2019).
\item \textsuperscript{55} See id.
\item \textsuperscript{56} See 29 C.F.R. § 516 (2019).
\item \textsuperscript{57} See id.; 29 C.F.R. § 785.13 (2019).
\item \textsuperscript{58} 29 C.F.R. § 785.48(b) (2019).
\item \textsuperscript{59} See id.
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B. State Wage and Hour Law

Although the FLSA offers minimum standards for minimum wage and overtime compensation, the Act contains a savings clause that authorizes states to enact stricter regulations than those found in the FLSA. States enact laws to require regular payment of wages and to prohibit employers from making unauthorized deductions from an employee’s pay. The savings clause allows states to regulate minimum wages and overtime weeks, as long as the federal minimums are satisfied. Thus, employers could violate state wage and hour laws without violating the FLSA.

States have overtime wage laws covering a certain number of hours worked in a day, rather than in a week. For instance, New York requires employers to compensate an additional hour of pay when employees work over ten hours within a work-day, which includes time from the beginning to the end of the workday and time off for meal breaks. Whereas, Colorado requires employers to pay one-and-a-half times regular earnings for employees who worked over forty hours in a week, over twelve hours in one work-day, or over twelve consecutive hours.

Similarly, California employers are obligated to pay one-and-a-half times regular earnings for employees who worked over eight hours in a day and over forty hours “in any one workday and the first eight hours worked on the seventh day of work in any one workweek.” California employers are also obligated to pay twice times regular pay for employees who worked over twelve hours in a day and over eight hours on the seventh day in a workweek. California defines “hours worked” either as the amount of time employers permit employees to work or the amount of time employees are subject to the employer’s control. Like the FLSA, California wage and hour law requires employers to compensate employees for off-the-clock work if the employers knew or should have known that their employees completed

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61 Id.
62 Id.
64 See COLO. CONST. art. XVIII, § 15; CAL. LAB. CODE § 510 (Deering 2019).
66 COLO. CONST. art. XVIII, § 15; 7 COLO. CODE REGS. § 1103-1(4) (2019).
67 CAL. LAB. CODE § 510(a) (Deering 2019).
68 Id.
such work. Employers must pay such compensation at the overtime rate, if applicable.

In California, the provisions of the California Labor Code and the wage orders of California’s Industrial Welfare Commission govern wage and hour claims. Courts characterize the purpose of California’s Labor Code and wage orders as to protect employees. Accordingly, the labor code and wage orders are liberally construed in favor of employees. Since state wage orders and labor codes are more favorable than FLSA regulations, it incentivizes plaintiffs to bring wage and hour claims solely under state wage and hour laws. Therefore, California and states with similar wage and hour laws would be hesitant to adopt a doctrine or defense that favors employers over employees.

III. HISTORY OF THE DE MINIMIS DOCTRINE

The de minimis doctrine has a long yet undeveloped history, and it consistently promotes reasonableness on a case-by-case basis. The main concept behind the doctrine is that violations may be so small that they would not be of the concern of the law. The United States Supreme Court stated that “it is most unlikely Congress meant [the definition of “hours worked” in the FLSA] to convert federal judges into time-study professionals.” The Court stated that the possible meaning of the FLSA’s definition of “hours worked” could avoid “inconsequential judicial involvement in ‘a morass of difficult, fact-specific determinations.’” Due to the trivial nature of de

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70 See id. at 585.
71 See id.
74 Augustus v. ABM Sec. Servs., Inc., 2 Cal. 5th 257, 262 (2016).
75 See Dorris, supra note 63, at 1252.
79 Id. at 1097–98.
81 Id. at 235 (quoting Sepulveda v. Allen Family Foods, Inc., 591 F.3d 209, 218 (4th Cir. 2009) (“[C]ourts and agencies would find themselves in a morass of difficult, fact-specific determinations if they were ultimately charged with deciding whether and how much of [small increments of] time was compensable.”)).
**A. Origin of the De Minimis Doctrine in Wage and Hour Law**

The origin of the *de minimis* doctrine and its use in wage and hour law was first mentioned in the seminal case, *Anderson v. Mount Clemens Pottery Co.*[^83] Even though the United States Supreme Court ruled that the employee activities of walking to and from clock-in stations to actual work stations were considered “work” under the FLSA, the Court noted that some, if not all, of the walking time may be non-compensable with a *de minimis* rule.[^84] When recording working time, employers may disregard insignificant amounts of overtime, which are administratively difficult to record for payroll purposes.[^85] Compensable work needs to be recorded in light of industrial realities, but neither the realities of working conditions nor the FLSA’s policy interests support recording split-second absurdities.[^86] Since the Court’s ruling in *Anderson*, courts have held that such trifles or insubstantial periods of time are “*de minimis*.”[^87] Therefore, the *de minimis* doctrine is a common defense to unpaid claims regarding small amounts of time.[^88]

**B. Courts Use the Lindow Factors to Determine Whether Off-the-Clock Activities Are De Minimis**

How much is *de minimis*, and when is the doctrine applied? Most circuits use the *Lindow* factors when determining the applicability of the *de

[^82]: Anita Bernstein, *Civil Rights Violations = Broken Windows: De Minimis Curet Lex*, 62 F.L.A. L. REV. 895, 897–98 (2010) (“Litigants lose when their stance is cast as trivial or when they fail to persuade the judge that their adversary has made a trivial claim.”).


[^84]: *Id.* at 692.

[^85]: *Id.*


[^87]: Von Friewalde v. Boeing Aero. Operations, Inc., 339 F. App’x 448, 458 (5th Cir. 2009); Mitchell v. Williams, 420 F.2d 67, 70 (8th Cir. 1969); Frank v. Wilson & Co., 172 F.2d 712, 716 (7th Cir. 1949); see *Anderson*, 328 U.S. at 692.

[^88]: Kellar v. Summit Seating Inc., 664 F.3d 169, 176 (7th Cir. 2011).
minimis doctrine. In a landmark case, Lindow v. United States, the Ninth Circuit laid out three guiding factors when analyzing the de minimis doctrine: “(1) the practical administrative difficulty of recording the additional time; (2) the aggregate amount of compensable time; and (3) the regularity of the additional work.” No one factor is dispositive of a de minimis finding, but the showing of more than one factor makes it more likely for a court to invoke the doctrine. When analyzing the Lindow factors, circuits engage in a factual inquiry that changes depending on the amount of Lindow factors present and the circumstances surrounding the off-the-clock work.

No exact “amount of time . . . is considered de minimis per se.” Though some courts vary regarding what exactly constitutes de minimis time, most courts recognize that daily periods of ten minutes are de minimis. When determining whether the de minimis doctrine is applicable, courts look to fairness, protection of individual rights, and enforcement of the law.

C. Federal Courts Apply the De Minimis Doctrine to Off-the-Clock Claims

The de minimis doctrine is commonly invoked in off-the-clock claims, including preliminary activities, such as putting on protective gear; post-shift work, such as waiting and going through security checks; work

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89 Id.; Perez v. Mountaire Farms, 650 F.3d 350, 373–74 (4th Cir. 2011); De Asencio v. Tyson Foods, Inc., 500 F.3d 361, 374 (3d Cir. 2007); Brock v. Cincinnati, 236 F.3d 793, 804–05 (6th Cir. 2001); Kosakow v. New Rochelle Radiology Assocs., P.C., 274 F.3d 706, 719 (2d Cir. 2001); Reich v. Monfort, Inc., 144 F.3d 1329, 1333–34 (10th Cir. 1998); Lindow v. United States, 738 F.2d 1057, 1063 (9th Cir. 1984).

90 Lindow, 738 F.2d at 1057.

91 Id. at 1063.


93 Perez, 650 F.3d at 373–74; Lindow, 738 F.2d at 1063; see Castaneda v. JBS USA, LLC, 819 F.3d 1237, 1243 (10th Cir. 2016); Corbin v. Time Warner Entm’t-Advance/Newhouse P’ship, 821 F.3d 1069, 1081 (9th Cir. 2016); Kellar v. Summit Seating, Inc., 664 F.3d 169, 176 (7th Cir. 2011); Singh v. New York, 524 F.3d 361, 371–72 (2d Cir. 2008); De Asencio, 500 F.3d at 374; Kosakow, 274 F.3d at 719; Brock, 236 F.3d at 804–05; Reich, 144 F.3d at 1333–34.


96 Nemerofsky, supra note 3, at 330.


activities necessary to complete other activities, such as spending time loading a computer before logging into a timekeeping system, and other factually similar unrecorded activities. If work activities are regularly occurring or substantial when aggregated, they are compensable and not de minimis. For example, the de minimis doctrine does not apply if employees send work e-mails after work hours, spend a few seconds or minutes to respond, and employers knew that employees completed such activities.

Waiting for a computer to boot up or waiting to log onto a computer network are examples of de minimis off-the-clock activities. For instance, the time technicians take to log into their system or look up assignments are de minimis, because those processes only take a minute or so. Since those processes are of fleeting and varied duration, it is administratively difficult to record the time each of them took. Even the one minute that call center employees spend to log onto or off a computer before clocking in or out is de minimis. Thus, the de minimis doctrine is appropriate when cross-referencing every employee’s logging patterns is administratively burdensome for employers and when monitoring each minute spent waiting to log in or out is practically difficult for an employer to record.

Spending time passing through a security line or bag check are also off-the-clock work activities that are de minimis. Specifically, the couple of minutes that bag-carrying employees spend waiting in a bag check line when exiting the workplace have been found de minimis. Although going through a bag check is a regular activity and the aggregated time is substantial, isolating the time spent in a bag check line from the time spent on non-compensable activities, such as shopping, socializing, and other personal activities, is administratively difficult to ascertain, even if a time

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99 Corbin v. Time Warner Entm’t-Advance/Newhouse P’ship, 821 F.3d 1069, 1082 (9th Cir. 2016).
100 Jeffrey Brecher & Eric Magnus, A Matter of Time: Managing Wage and Hour Risks in a Digitally Connected World, 20 No. 12 INTERNET L. 3, 6–7 (June 2017).
102 See Chambers v. Sears, 428 F. App’x 400, 418 (5th Cir. 2011).
103 Id. at 404, 418.
104 Id. at 418.
105 Corbin v. Time Warner Entm’t-Advance/Newhouse P’ship, 821 F.3d 1069, 1073, 1079–80 (9th Cir. 2016).
106 Id. at 1080–81.
107 See, e.g., Busk v. Integrity Staffing Sols., Inc., 713 F.3d 525, 532 (9th Cir. 2013).
Similarly, the de minimis doctrine applies to time spent in a security line. The administrative difficulty factor not only includes the burdens employers face, such as the costs and difficulties associated with capturing such time, but also the burdens that employees face. For example, if each second spent in a security line or clock out station is tracked, then employers will impose significant restrictions on how long an employee spends when arriving, leaving, or staying on the premises.

Other off-the-clock activities, such as time spent straightening up chairs and cleaning up trash between walking in and clocking in, have been found de minimis. Also, seconds spent on donning and doffing hardhats, safety glasses, and ear plugs have been held to be de minimis.

D. Other States Use Federal Precedent and Apply the De Minimis Doctrine to State Wage and Hour Claims

Courts in other states followed federal precedent and found the de minimis doctrine to be generally and equally applicable to state wage and hour claims. For example, in Illinois, a state court found that federal case law is instructive when applying the doctrine to a state law claim. While analyzing the de minimis doctrine, the court rationalized that it would be an “administrative nightmare” to even attempt to capture the seconds and few minutes of hundreds of employees. Even though the claim was brought under Illinois wage and hour law, the court still indicated that federal precedent is persuasive and that the de minimis doctrine applies to split-second absurdities.

In Kentucky, a court found that the de minimis defense was not a “creature of the FLSA,” but rather a highly recognized principle of Kentucky common law. Since Kentucky case law recognized the doctrine in multiple

109 Id. at *4.
111 Id. at 1217–19.
112 Id. at 1219.
116 Bartoszewski, 269 Ill. App. 3d at 982–83.
118 Id. at *9 (quoting Sandifer v. U.S. Steel Corp., 678 F.3d 590, 593 (7th Cir. 2012)).
respects, the doctrine was not exclusive to federal law. When deciding a Kentucky wage and hour claim, the court noted that referring to federal law to determine the applicability of the *de minimis* defense was not contrary to the history or purpose of Kentucky wage and hour law. Thus, the court’s reliance on FLSA case law and absent any conflicting authority kept the intent of the Kentucky Wages and Hours Act intact.

In Wisconsin, the state supreme court assumed, without deciding, that the *de minimis* doctrine applied to Wisconsin wage and hour claims. The court explained that no explicit basis exists for the court to apply the *de minimis* doctrine. Nevertheless, the court recognized that Wisconsin courts applied the doctrine in other contexts. After viewing the *de minimis* doctrine with skepticism, Wisconsin courts may apply it narrowly to state wage and hour claims in the future.

**IV. CALIFORNIA FOUND THE *DE MINIMIS* DOCTRINE NOT APPLICABLE TO CALIFORNIA WAGE AND HOUR CLAIMS**

California is the first and only state to explicitly refuse and practically reject the application of the *de minimis* doctrine to state wage and hour claims. The California Supreme Court found that California’s labor code and wage orders did not adopt or incorporate the *de minimis* doctrine. Thus, the court held that employers must compensate employees for off-the-clock activities, such as activating an alarm, exiting a store, and locking a door, which last a few seconds or minutes.

In *Troester*, a previous shift supervisor brought a putative class action under California wage and hour law, against Starbucks, on behalf of all nonmanagerial California employees who performed a store closing

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120 See *id.*; see also *Munson v. White*, 217 S.W.2d 641, 642 (Ky. 1949); *J.N. Youngblood Truck Lines v. Hatfield*, 201 S.W.2d 567, 571–72 (Ky. 1947); *Clark v. Mason*, 95 S.W.2d 292, 296 (Ky. 1934).
122 *Id.*
124 *Id.*
125 *United Food*, 367 Wis. 2d at 165.
128 *Id.*
129 *Id.* at 1117.
procedure. The closing tasks involved logging out of a computer and clocking out before initiating the close store procedure. After the close store procedure, the shift supervisor would: (1) activate the alarm, which took approximately one minute; (2) exit the store, which took less than one minute; (3) lock the front door, which took fifteen seconds to a few minutes; and (4) walk coworkers to their cars, which took thirty-five to forty-five seconds. Occasionally, the plaintiff would have to spend a few minutes to wait with employees for their transportation to arrive, reopen the store to allow employees to retrieve left-behind items, or bring in store patio furniture left outside mistakenly. The unpaid time spent on these activities amounted to twelve hours and fifty minutes over a seventeen-month period, which added up to $102.67.

The court stated that the practical administrative difficulty of recording the trivial amounts of time may be circumvented by using new technological advances to track small amounts of time, restructuring work to not have employees work off-the-clock, or initiating a rounding policy to reasonably estimate the compensable worktime. The court noted that the need for a de minimis doctrine is limited, due to new legal advances, such as the modern availability of class actions. The California Supreme Court decided that California’s wage and hour laws did not adopt the de minimis doctrine and that the de minimis doctrine is not applicable to the specific facts of Troester. The court left open the question of “whether there are circumstances where compensable time is so minute or irregular that it is unreasonable to expect the time to be recorded.”

V. THE DE MINIMIS DOCTRINE APPLIES TO CALIFORNIA WAGE AND HOUR CLAIMS SINCE IT IS A GENERAL PRINCIPLE NOT RESTRICTED TO FEDERAL CASES

The de minimis doctrine is a generally adopted principle rather than just a federal doctrine. Even though the United States Supreme Court first recognized the de minimis doctrine in a FLSA suit, the Court did so based not on any aspect of federal law but rather on the concept that a few seconds or

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130 Id. at 1116.
131 Id.
132 Id. at 1117.
133 Id.
134 This was totaled according to the then-applicable minimum wage of $8 per hour. Id. at 1117.
135 Id. at 1124.
136 Id.
137 Id. at 1125.
138 Id. at 1116.
139 See generally id. at 1114.
minutes of overtime should be disregarded as trifles.\textsuperscript{140} Lindow even explained that the \textit{de minimis} doctrine is not limited to federal cases, but rather it is a general rule that employees may not recover otherwise compensable time if the insignificant amounts of time are administratively difficult to track.\textsuperscript{141} Moreover, the \textit{de minimis} doctrine is an integral component of the established background of legal principles that govern all enactments, including state wage and hour laws.\textsuperscript{142} Hence, the doctrine is not restricted to federal law and should be applied to California wage and hour claims.\textsuperscript{143}

Even if courts construe the \textit{de minimis} doctrine as a federal law, the court should have found that California wage and hour laws are modeled on and derived from federal laws.\textsuperscript{144} Given the significant similarities between the requirements in the FLSA and the California Labor Code, California should have permitted a \textit{de minimis} analysis to \textit{Troester}, in accordance with previous decisions.\textsuperscript{145} Before the California Supreme Court decided \textit{Troester}, courts in California found that the \textit{de minimis} doctrine applied to state wage and hour claims.\textsuperscript{146} When courts held that the \textit{de minimis} doctrine applied to state wage and hour claims, they did not expect the California Supreme Court to find the contrary, indicating the state’s departure from federal precedent.\textsuperscript{147}

When establishing that there are no controlling California labor laws mentioning the \textit{de minimis} doctrine, the California Supreme Court should have turned to federal regulations, such as the FLSA, for guidance.\textsuperscript{148} The court mistakenly reasons that since California labor codes and wage orders are silent on whether the \textit{de minimis} doctrine applies to California wage and hour claims, the California Legislature did not intend to adopt the doctrine.\textsuperscript{149} Complete silence of a doctrine, however, only indicates that the Legislature

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Lindow v. United States, 738 F.2d 1057, 1062 (9th Cir. 1984).
\item See \textit{Troester}, 421 P.3d at 1121 (citing Wisc. Dep’t. of Revenue v. William Wrigley, Jr., Co., 505 U.S. 214, 231 (1992)).
\item See generally \textit{id.} at 1114.
\item Alcala v. W. Ag Enters., 182 Cal. App. 3d 546, 550 (1986) (“California’s wage orders are closely modeled after the federal wage and hour statutes.”).
\item See \textit{Troester} v. Starbucks Corp., 421 P.3d 1114, 1119–21 (Cal. 2018).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
never meant to explicitly depart from the well-established doctrine, not the contrary.\(^{150}\)

California’s Division of Labor Standards Enforcement’s (“DLSE”) opinion letters also prove that the \textit{de minimis} doctrine applies to California wage and hour claims.\(^ {151}\) The DLSE administers and enforces California’s wage and hour laws.\(^ {152}\) Though the DLSE’s opinion letters are not binding, courts may use the letters for guidance.\(^ {153}\) The California Supreme Court even stated that the court takes into account the DLSE’s interpretations because the agency has the relevant knowledge and experience to properly inform the court’s judgment.\(^ {154}\) Therefore, the California Supreme Court should have respected and considered the DLSE opinion letters, as they contain helpful analysis that should not be dismissed.\(^ {155}\) The California Legislature could have amended the labor codes and wage orders if it believed that the DLSE’s adoption of the \textit{de minimis} doctrine did not correctly reflect the Legislature’s intent.\(^ {156}\) Since the California Legislature did not amend California’s wage and hour laws, it indicated that it did not disagree with the DLSE’s application of the \textit{de minimis} doctrine to state wage and hour claims.\(^ {157}\) By the California Supreme Court dismissing the DLSE opinion letters that adopted the \textit{de minimis} doctrine, the court disincentivized courts in California from using DLSE opinion letters for guidance in the future.\(^ {158}\)

\(^{150}\) See \textit{United States v. Stafford}, 831 F.2d 1479, 1485 (9th Cir. 1987) (“[I]f anything is to be assumed from the congressional silence on this point, it is that Congress was aware of the Blockburger rule and legislated with it in mind.”).


\(^{152}\) \textit{Morillion v. Royal Packing Co.}, 22 Cal. 4th 575, 582 (2000) (“The DLSE ‘is the state agency empowered to enforce California’s labor laws, including IWC wage orders.’”).


\(^{154}\) \textit{Augustus v. ABM Sec. Servs., Inc.}, 2 Cal. 5th 257, 267 (2016).

\(^{155}\) \textit{See Harris v. Superior Court}, 53 Cal. 4th 170, 190 (2011).

\(^{156}\) \textit{See Yamaha Corp. of Am. v. State Bd. of Equalization}, 19 Cal. 4th 1, 22 (Mosk, J., concurring) (1998) (“Lawmakers are presumed to be aware of long-standing administrative practice and, thus, the . . . failure to substantially modify a provision, is a strong indication [that] the administrative practice was consistent with underlying legislative intent.”) (internal quotations omitted).

\(^{157}\) \textit{See id.}

VI. THE DE MINIMIS DOCTRINE’S POLICY INTERESTS WARRANT ITS ADOPTION AND USE IN CALIFORNIA WAGE AND HOUR LAW

Rejecting to adopt or apply the de minimis doctrine to off-the-clock work activities would conflict with the doctrine’s supporting policy interests, restrict employee behavior, reduce employee safety and security, and subject employers to administrative burdens.

A. Not Applying the De Minimis Doctrine Is Against Public Policy

California employers rely on the de minimis doctrine as a general industry practice and custom, and by not applying the de minimis doctrine to state wage and hour claims, employers will face new lawsuits and penalties for mere seconds or minutes of work. The de minimis doctrine serves the public by preventing costly litigation and deterring delays that injure other plaintiffs. Moreover, protecting and fairly compensating employees are the purposes of the California Labor Code. The de minimis doctrine furthers those purposes by not allowing employers to disregard even small amounts of time if it is practical to record the time. Founded on reason and policy, the doctrine does not allow employers to avoid compensating employees, but rather the doctrine strikes a balance between compensating for on-the-clock work activities and disregarding trivial amounts of time that are not practical to record. The application of the de minimis doctrine is generally appropriate when the negligible time is small and measuring it would be time-consuming, difficult, and not worthwhile.

B. Rejecting the Doctrine Imposes Unfair Administrative Burdens on Employers

California believes that employers are in a better position than employees to develop other alternatives to capture trivial amounts of time, but refusing to adopt the de minimis doctrine for off-the-clock activities, such as locking and exiting a door, would invalidate a majority of timekeeping

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160 Nemerofsky, supra note 3, at 323–24.

161 CAL. LAB. CODE § 90.5 (2019).


163 Rutti v. Lojack Corp., 596 F.3d 1046, 1057 (9th Cir. 2010).

164 Mitchell v. JCG Indus., Inc., 745 F.3d 837, 841 (7th Cir. 2014).
systems based on a few seconds or minutes.\textsuperscript{165} Employers have to either acquire uniform, creative, or highly advanced timekeeping systems or risk not compensating employees for such trifles.\textsuperscript{166} Since every minute, second, or even millisecond is difficult for timekeeping systems to capture, the \textit{de minimis} doctrine is needed for employers to forgo such an arduous task.\textsuperscript{167}

California’s reluctance to apply the \textit{de minimis} doctrine imposes tremendous burdens on all employers, including small businesses and national employers that employ California employees.\textsuperscript{168} National employers will have to start paying millions of dollars for penalties, back pay, and other expenses just for a few minutes or seconds that used to be \textit{de minimis}.\textsuperscript{169} Employers, including small businesses, will have to pay a front-end expense for a program to track each second employees work and will have to pay penalties and legal expenses if there are potential labor code violations.\textsuperscript{170} Although legitimate injuries and claims for reasonable compensation exist, “a great deal of waste and excess” continues to permeate the judicial system.\textsuperscript{171} This is because of the trivial claims plaintiffs bring, the extreme costs associated with defending lawsuits, and the “drag” of waste and excess that most small businesses have to bear.\textsuperscript{172} In light of industrial realities, the \textit{de minimis} doctrine is needed because requiring employers and small businesses to track every minute or second that each employee works is impractical.\textsuperscript{173}

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\item \textsuperscript{165} See Troester v. Starbucks Corp., 421 P.3d 1114, 1125 (Cal. 2018).
\item \textsuperscript{166} See id.
\item \textsuperscript{167} See 29 C.F.R. § 785.47 (2019); Corbin v. Time Warner Entm’t-Advance/Newhouse P’ship, 821 F.3d 1069, 1082 (9th Cir. 2016).
\item \textsuperscript{172} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{173} See Troester v. Starbucks Corp., 421 P.3d 1114, 1130 (Cal. 2018) (Cuellar, J., concurring).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
C. The Doctrine’s Inapplicability Will Result in Restrictions on Employee Behavior

California refuses to apply a doctrine that is less protective of employees, but employees will face greater restrictions and repercussions without the adoption of the de minimis doctrine. For instance, if employers prohibit off-the-clock work and create restrictive policies governing employee behavior, then employees will be subject to penalties if they accidentally complete de minimis work activities. Recussions will consist of prohibiting employees from spending any time around the working facility when not clocked-in or notifying employees about schedule changes only when they arrive rather than informing them through prior email correspondence. Employers would not have to implement such restrictive policies or closely monitor each employee’s movements if California adopted the de minimis doctrine.

Other restrictions would involve reducing or eliminating off-the-clock activities, such as going through a security check or bag check, which would expose the workplace to dangerous working conditions. Security screenings serve the essential purposes of safety, but they do not constitute integral principal work activities and are not compensable. Though security and bag checks have obvious benefits to employers, such as safekeeping of company products, security screenings and bag checks also keep employees safe and protected from others trying to bring weapons into the workplace. If an employer has to reclassify security checks as on-the-clock activities, then employers risk compensating employees for personal and non-compensable activities that precede the security check. To minimize that time, employers will have to regulate how long employees are allowed to stay on the premises after their respective shifts are complete. For example, employers could resort to instructing employees to not bring bags or other personal items, which would eliminate the need for bag checks.

174 See id. at 1120 (majority opinion).
176 See Brecher & Magnus, supra note 100, at 7.
177 See id.
178 See id.
180 See id. at 593–94.
182 See Gorman, 488 F.3d at 593–94.
183 See id.
and security screenings. However, abolishing minimal security measures, such as bag checks and security screenings, will expose employers to product theft and expose employees to an unsafe work environment.

VII. _Troester’s Off-the-Clock Claims Fail Since The Lindow Factors Are Present and the De Minimis Doctrine Applies_

_Lindow_ explained that though an aggregate claim calculated over a long period of time may be significant, the administrative difficulty of tracking the disputed time and the irregularity of the off-the-clock work will still weigh in the favor of a _de minimis_ finding. In its reasoning, the California Supreme Court misinterpreted the _Lindow_ factor of the practical administrative difficulty of recording the additional time for a factor of impossibility. Employers, like Starbucks, do not dispute that it is indeed possible to track and record the small amounts of time. What is at dispute is the burden and cost that employers will face when required to track and record such miniscule amounts of time. That is the practical administrative difficulty explained in _Lindow_.

With that noted, some off-the-clock work activities are just not quantifiable. For example, the activities mentioned in _Troester_ varied in their duration and it is unclear as to exactly how long each activity took. Without the exact time for each off-the-clock activity, payment for such work is administratively difficult to ascertain. Even if the court found that the time spent on the _Troester_ activities amounted to a few minutes, the court should have found that ten minutes per day are _de minimis_. The court stated that the compensable work over the seventeen month period that amounted to $102.67 “is enough to pay a utility bill, buy a week of groceries, or cover a month of bus fares.” However, the court misinterpreted the aggregate

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184 See Alvarado v. Costco Wholesale Corp., No. C 06-04015, 2008 WL 2477393, at *9 (N.D. Cal. June 18, 2008) (“People who do not carry bags or who have not purchased merchandise do not have to subject themselves to a security inspection and have no wait at all.”).
185 See Kisti, _supra_ note 181.
187 See _Troester_ v. Starbucks Corp., 421 P.3d 1124, 1124 (Cal. 2018); _Lindow_, 738 F.2d at 1063.
188 See _Troester_ v. Starbucks Corp., No. CV 12-7677 GAF (PJWx), 2014 WL 1004098, at *5 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 7, 2014) (“[N]ot every second can be or need be recorded and compensated.”).
190 _Lindow_, 738 F.2d at 1063.
191 _Troester_, 421 P.3d at 1116–17.
193 _Troester_, 421 P.3d at 1125.
amount of compensable time factor. The aggregate amount of compensable time is supposed to consider daily amounts of compensable time, not the total amount of time over the disputed time period. Troester’s total amount of off-the-clock time per day was around four minutes to ten minutes, which is even less than what most courts hold as de minimis.

VIII. GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS AND THE FUTURE OF STATE WAGE AND HOUR CLAIMS

No state has explicitly refused to apply the de minimis doctrine in state wage and hour claims, other than California. States with similar wage and hour laws, like Colorado or Washington, will be prompted to evaluate the application of the de minimis doctrine in their respective wage and hour laws and use California’s holding in Troester as persuasive precedent. Like courts in California, courts in Washington have construed state wage and hour laws liberally in favor of employees. Given the similarities between California’s and Washington’s wage and hour laws, it is more likely that a Washington court would arrive at the same conclusion as the California Supreme Court. This would widen the differences of the doctrine’s application in federal and state wage and hour claims.

Even if states find the de minimis doctrine inapplicable and require compensation for trivial off-the-clock work activities, the time spent on such work needs to be capped or “cabinied” at a specified number, otherwise the

194 See Lindow, 738 F.2d at 1063.
195 See id.
196 Farris, 667 F. Supp. 2d at 1165; see Hodgson v. Katz & Beshoff, #38, Inc., 365 F. Supp. 1193, 1197 n.3 (W.D. La. 1973) (acknowledging 1 to 10 minutes spent by employees before shift to count their cash bank and ensure everything is in order was de minimis); Carter v. Pan. Canal Co., 314 F. Supp. 386, 392 (D.D.C. 1970) (holding preliminary activities of 2 to 15 minutes per day fall under the de minimis rule as not compensable); E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. v. Harrup, 227 F.2d 133, 135–36 (4th Cir. 1955) (finding preliminary activities of 10 minutes in length are so insignificant and of so short a duration that they are de minimis and not worthy of compensation).
197 See Troester, 421 P.3d at 1125.
199 Sparks, supra note 198; see Bostain v. Food Express, Inc., 153 P.3d 846, 852 (2007) (“[The] coverage provisions of the MWA must be liberally construed in favor of the employee.”) (citing Int’l Ass’n of Fire Fighters, Local 46 v. City of Everett, 42 P.3d 1265, 1267 (Wash. 2002)).
200 Sparks, supra note 198.
time would be vulnerable to adjustment for other work days.\textsuperscript{202} If there were no cap on the total amount of time spent on off-the-clock work per day, then the time would be irregular and non-compensable, as per the \textit{de minimis} doctrine.\textsuperscript{203} Without an appropriate cap on the compensable amount of time spent on off-the-clock work, it would be nearly impossible for employers to accurately record the varying amounts of time for each employee’s payroll.\textsuperscript{204} Also, since the California Supreme Court left open the question of whether sporadic and unanticipated off-the-clock work activities are compensable, the Court will have to decide whether a defense similar to the \textit{de minimis} doctrine would apply.\textsuperscript{205} However, by finding that its wage and hour regulations did not adopt the doctrine, California will most likely adopt a limited rule similar to the \textit{de minimis} doctrine only in rare cases and will apply it narrowly to unforeseeable, irregular, and brief off-the-clock work activities.\textsuperscript{206}

Due to California’s favorable state wage and hour laws and its rejection of the \textit{de minimis} doctrine, plaintiffs have the incentive to bring their unpaid wage claims solely under state wage and hour law rather than under the FLSA.\textsuperscript{207} By refusing to adopt the \textit{de minimis} doctrine, the California Supreme Court practically removed one of the very few defenses employers had left to defend against off-the-clock claims.\textsuperscript{208} That removal opened up the floodgates to unwarranted off-the-clock claims, lawsuits, and class actions.\textsuperscript{209} Specifically, plaintiffs will bring claims to receive remedies for off-the-clock work activities similar to those in \textit{Troester} or bring claims concerning other previously determined \textit{de minimis} activities.\textsuperscript{210} If California employers do not use and implement new, highly advanced technologies to track every second and minute each employee works, then employers risk being exposed to class action lawsuits and seven-figure verdicts.\textsuperscript{211}

Employers should consider amending employee handbooks to implement policies that would prohibit off-the-clock work activities and instruct employees to report unauthorized off-the-clock work, even if

\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Id.} at 178.
\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Id.} at 180.
\textsuperscript{205} \textit{See} \textit{Troester} v. Starbucks Corp., 421 P.3d 1114, 1125 (Cal. 2018).
\textsuperscript{206} \textit{See} \textit{id.}
\textsuperscript{209} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{210} \textit{See} \textit{Troester}, 421 P.3d at 1125.
\textsuperscript{211} \textit{See} Nagele-Piazza, \textit{supra} note 170.
incidental. If there is no business necessity for off-the-clock work activities, then employers should counsel managers and supervisors on how to stop employees from completing off-the-clock work activities. Whether employers have to hire additional personnel or install surveillance cameras, ongoing monitoring is important to make sure that employees are complying with the policies and that all hours worked are being recorded. Employers need to make clear that off-the-clock work is prohibited and that employees will be disciplined if they violate the policies.

Employers should also make their employees verify, in writing, their time worked each week. Modern-day technologies, smartphones, and mobile apps could be used to track off-the-clock work activities. Before purchasing and implementing such technologies into the workplace, employers need to consider exactly how much time the technologies will actually capture and what degree of employee training and involvement is needed in order for the time to be recorded properly and efficiently. Also, employers need to be aware of new technologies and consistently make updates to confirm that the chosen technology accurately records every second worked. Otherwise, plaintiffs may bring in experts to testify that the employer could have used and implemented alternative technologies that were available at the time of the purported wage and hour violations. Advanced timekeeping systems or apps that can track locations upon clock-in and that allow employers to choose when and where employees have access to clock-in are examples of how employers can capture each second and minute worked by employees. Though these timekeeping methods may be expensive, intrusive, and restrictive, they are necessary if employers want to accurately record each employee’s hours worked. With restrictive policies and costly technologies

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213 See id.


215 Brecher & Magnus, *supra* note 100, at 22.

216 See id. at 21.


218 See id.


220 See id.


222 See id.
in place, employers will be able to eliminate off-the-clock work or at least be able to record and compensate for it.223 Employers in states that have similar wage and hour laws as California should implement similar policy changes and acquire new timekeeping methods to avoid potential state wage and hour claims, given the Troester decision.225

IX. CONCLUSION

The California Supreme Court should take into account all of the policy interests associated with the de minimis doctrine and find that the doctrine applies to state wage and hour claims.226 Though the doctrine is a defense that employers use against wage and hour violations, the de minimis doctrine balances employer and employee interests.227 If the doctrine is not applied, then “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work” would not truly be achieved.228 Even if California’s Labor Code and Industrial Welfare Commission’s wage orders did not explicitly adopt the doctrine, the doctrine should nonetheless apply to state wage and hour claims.229 Given that the court decided Troester according to the specific facts of the case, and that the court left open the possibility of applying a limited and narrower rule similar to the de minimis doctrine, it is unclear as to what California would hold as non-compensable, off-the-clock work activities in the future.230 The adoption of the de minimis doctrine to applicable off-the-clock claims would alleviate such uncertainties and burdens on California employers.

States, like California, should apply the de minimis doctrine in off-the-clock claims, especially in cases where the Lindow factors are present.231 Given that federal and state courts routinely apply the doctrine to wage and hour claims and that the doctrine stands for a general principle, not just a federal rule, the California Supreme Court should have found the de minimis doctrine applicable to its state wage and hour claims.232 The court should have deferred to California’s Department of Industrial Relations DLSE because the DLSE’s opinion letters explicitly adopted the de minimis doctrine and provided guidance that the doctrine should be used in appropriate

223 See Holden, supra note 214.
225 See Sparks, supra note 198.
227 See Rutti v. Lojack Corp., 596 F.3d 1046, 1057 (9th Cir. 2010).
229 See Troester, 421 P.3d at 1125.
230 See id.
231 See Lindow v. United States, 738 F.2d 1057, 1063 (9th Cir. 1984).
cases. The doctrine’s application would prevent unreasonable expenses and deter delays associated with litigation over a few seconds or minutes. The de minimis doctrine’s application would also relieve employers from unfair administrative burdens of recording such miniscule amounts of time.

Employers would not have to purchase expensive technologies or implement restrictive policies if the de minimis doctrine applied to state off-the-clock claims. Employers should compensate employees for meaningful amounts of time, not for a few seconds spent on trivial off-the-clock work activities. Due to the rejection of the de minimis doctrine, California employers will have to carefully monitor and surveil the workplace, impose disciplinary actions, and make sure that they are only paying for their employees’ actual work time. High litigation expenses, unsafe working conditions, and compensation for non-compensable social activities are the inevitable outcomes associated with the abolition of the de minimis doctrine.

Other states with similar wage and hour laws may arrive at the same holding as California. Nevertheless, states that refuse to apply the de minimis doctrine will have to cap or cabin the amount of time spent on off-the-clock work activities to ensure employers accurately record their employees’ payrolls. Since California has favorable state wage and hour regulations that do not adopt the de minimis doctrine, plaintiffs will most


234 See 29 C.F.R. § 785.47 (2019); Corbin v. Time Warner Entm’t-Advance/Newhouse P’ship, 821 F.3d 1069, 1082 (9th Cir. 2016).

235 See Accurate Timekeeping More Important than Ever in California and Beyond, supra note 221.

236 See Anderson, 328 U.S. at 692.


239 See Sparks, supra note 198.

likely bring off-the-clock claims solely under state wage and hour law, rather than under the FLSA.\textsuperscript{242} Therefore, California courts should be prepared to see a flood of off-the-clock claims that concern small amounts of previously considered \textit{de minimis} time.\textsuperscript{243} For instance, if the coffee shop manager and plant worker\textsuperscript{244} each bring their off-the-clock claims under California wage and hour law, they will most likely prevail since the \textit{de minimis} doctrine would not likely be applied to their respective state wage and hour claims.\textsuperscript{245} However, states should adopt the \textit{de minimis} doctrine and find that the doctrine applies to such claims. States, including California, should not require employers to compensate employees for off-the-clock work activities that last a few seconds or minutes because such time is administratively difficult to capture—\textit{de minimis}—and thus not compensable.\textsuperscript{246}

\textsuperscript{242} See Groden, \textit{supra} note 207.
\textsuperscript{243} Alexander, \textit{supra} note 208.
\textsuperscript{244} See \textit{supra} Part I.
\textsuperscript{245} See Troester v. Starbucks Corp., 421 P.3d 1114, 1125 (Cal. 2018).
\textsuperscript{246} See 29 C.F.R. § 785.47 (2019).