| Case 1:17-cv-03160-CAP-LTW Doc | ument 1 Filed 08/21/17 Page 1 of 13 | | | | |
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| UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA ATLANTA DIVISION | | | | | |
| MALIK ASANTE, ON BEHALF OF HIMSELF, AND ALL OTHERS SIMILARLY SITUATED, Plaintiff, | Case No.: CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT | | | | |
| VS. | AND | | | | |
| BAYLOR & CONNOR, INC. a/k/a MUSIC MERCHANT RECOVERY, |)) JURY TRIAL DEMAND | | | | |
| Defendant. |) | | | | |
| Plaintiff, Malik Asante, on behalf of himself (hereinafter "Plaintiff"), and all others similarly situated, by and through his undersigned attorney, alleges against the Baylor & Connor, Inc. a/k/a Music Merchant Recovery (hereinafter "Defendant") as follows: | | | | | |
| PRELIMINARY STATEMENT | | | | | |
| 1. This is an action for damages arising from Defendant's violations of 15 | | | | | |
| U.S.C. § 1692, et seq., the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (hereinafter | | | | | |
| "FDCPA"), which prohibits debt collectors from engaging in abusive, deceptive | | | | | |
| and unfair practices, brought by Malik Asante, in his own individual capacity, and | | | | | |
| on behalf of a class of other, as of yet unidentified, similarly situated individuals. | | | | | |

JURSIDICTION AND VENUE

2. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. §1692k (d).

3. Venue is proper in this district under 28 U.S.C § 1391(b).

PARTIES

4. Plaintiff, Malik Asante, is a natural person, who at all relevant times has resided in the city of Duluth, Gwinnett County, State of Georgia, and is a "consumer" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3).

5. Defendant is a collection company and does business in the State of Georgia, with its corporate mailing address as 560 Main Street, Suite 1E, Allenhurst, NJ 07711, and is a "debt collector" as defined by 15 U.S.C § 1692a(6).

CLASS ACTION ALLEGATIONS

6. Plaintiff brings this action as a class action, pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil Procedure ("FRCP") Rule 23, on behalf of himself and all persons/consumers, along with their successors-in-interest, who have received similar debt collection notices/letters/communications from Defendant which, as alleged herein, is in violation of the FDCPA, and who reside in the State of Georgia as of one year from the date of Plaintiff's Complaint (the "Class"). Excluded from the Class is Defendant herein, and any person, firm, trust, corporation, or other entity related to or affiliated with the Defendant, including,

without limitation, persons who are officers, directors, employees, associates or
partners of Defendant as impracticable. On information and belief, thousands of
persons have received debt collection notices/letters/communications from
Defendants, which violate various provisions of the FDCPA.

7. This Class satisfies all the requirements of FRCP Rule 23 for maintaining a class action.

8. The Class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable. On information and belief, thousands of persons have received debt collection notices/letters/communications from Defendant which violate various provisions of the FDCPA.

9. The debt collection notices/letters/communications from Defendant, received by the Class, are to be evaluated by the objective standard of the hypothetical "least sophisticated consumer."

10. There are questions of law and fact which are common to the Class and which predominate over questions affecting any individual Class member. These common questions of law and fact include, without limitation: (i) Whether Defendant violated various provisions of the FDCPA; (ii) Whether Plaintiff and the Class have been injured by Defendant's conduct; (c) Whether Plaintiff and the Class have sustained damages and are entitled to restitution as a result of Defendant's wrongdoing and, if so, what is the proper measure and appropriate

statutory formula to be applied in determining such damages and restitution; and, (iv) Whether Plaintiff and the Class are entitled to declaratory and/or injunctive relief.

Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class, and Plaintiff has no interests adverse or antagonistic to the interests of other members of the Class.
 A class action is superior to other methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the claims herein asserted, this being specifically envisioned by Congress as a principal means of enforcing the FDCPA, as codified by 15 U.S.C. § 1692(k).

13. The members of the class have claims which are unlikely to be vindicated in the absence of a class action.

14. Prosecution of separate actions by individual members of the Class would create the risk of inconsistent or varying adjudications resulting in the establishment of inconsistent or varying standards for the parties.

15. A class action will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum simultaneously, efficiently, and without the duplication of effort and expense that numerous individual actions would engender. Class treatment also will permit the adjudication of relatively small claims by many Class members who could not otherwise afford to seek legal redress for the wrongs complained of herein.

16. Plaintiff will fairly and adequately represent the Class members' interests, in that the Plaintiff's counsel is experienced and, further, anticipates no impediments in the pursuit and maintenance of the class action as sought herein.

17. Absent a class action, the Class members will continue to suffer losses borne from Defendant's breaches of their statutorily protected rights as well as monetary damages, thus allowing and enabling: (a) Defendant's conduct to proceed and; (b) Defendant to further enjoy the benefit of its ill-gotten gains.

18. Defendant has acted, and will act, on grounds generally applicable to the entire Class, thereby making appropriate final injunctive relief or corresponding declaratory relief with respect to the Class as a whole.

FACTUAL STATEMENT

19. At all times relevant to this litigation, Defendant has engaged in a course of collection activity in furtherance of the collection of a debt stemming from the purchase of a violin. Plaintiff purchased the violin for his minor daughter, and in furtherance of her own personal, musical edification.

20. As the transaction which gave rise to the underlying debt was for Plaintiff's daughters personal use and enjoyment, the debt created falls under the definition of a "debt" as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692(5).

21. Defendant's collection attempts have been inclusive of, but likely not limited to, telephonic communications attempts and written correspondence. Defendant sent Plaintiff two (2) letters.

22. The first collection letter was dated February 22, 2017 ("FCL"). The FCL is attached hereto marked "**Exhibit A**," and is incorporated in full herein by reference. The FCL was received and read by Plaintiff on the same day it was dated.

23. The second collection letter was dated March 16, 2017 ("SCL"). The SCL is attached hereto marked "**Exhibit B**," and is incorporated in full herein by reference. The SCL was received and read by Plaintiff on the same day it was dated.

24. Immediately after receipt of the FCL, Plaintiff emailed Defendant and advised he no longer wished to be contacted any longer. This email was sent on February 22, 2017, the same day Defendant transmitted the FCL. The SCL was sent approximate three and one half weeks after Plaintiff's written request for cessation of contact was transmitted.

<u>COUNT I</u> <u>VIOLATIONS OF THE AIR DEBT COLECTIONS PRACTICES ACT</u> 15 U.S.C. §1692e(2)(a) & 15 U.S.C. §1692e(10)

25. Plaintiff repeats and realleges the allegation contained in paragraphs (1) through (24) above and incorporates them with the same force and effect as if set forth specifically herein.

26. The FCL was dated February 22, 2017, sent to Plaintiff on the same day and received and read by Plaintiff on the same day.

27. In the reference line on the FCL, Defendant uses the phrases "Case Number," and "Amount of Complaint."

28. The utilization of the phrases outlined in the preceding paragraph is clearly intended to infer that there has been complaint filed against Plaintiff in a court of law.

29. The FCL references O.C.G.A. § 16-8-5, theft of services, with the implication that Plaintiff has violated same.

30. The utilization of the phrase outlined in the preceding paragraph is clearly intended to infer that a legal determination as to the Plaintiff's guilt with respect to the cited law has been made.

31. The first sentence of the FCL read as follows, "We wish to bring to your attention that the above-mentioned client **has initiated a complaint** of Theft of Services against you." (Emphasis Added)

32. The utilization of the phrase outlined in the preceding paragraph clearly states that a complaint has been filed against him for, presumably, theft of services as that is the law to which Defendant alleges Plaintiff has violated in the FCL.Upon information and belief, no action has been commenced as of the filing of this complaint, much less on or before the date of the FCL.

33. The second to last paragraph of the FCL advises as follows, "Please note that you have seven (7) days from the above noted date **to contact this firm** or we will advise our client to turn this matter over to the County Prosecutor." (Emphasis Added).

34. The utilization of the phrase outlined in the preceding paragraph is clearly intended to infer that Baylor & Cohen is a law firm, especially when the phrase is read in context with all of the other references to legal terms and phrases in the whole of the FCL.

35. Defendant styles their name in the FCL as "Baylor & Cohen."

36. The utilization of the name "Baylor & Cohen," is done with the intent to deceive the consumer into thinking they are a law firm.

37. The FCL closes with the following, "Govern yourself accordingly," and is executed by "Senior Partner, Steven Cohen."

38. The use of the phrase "Govern yourself accordingly" is common legal parlance; upon information and belief, Defendant is well aware of this and utilizes

the phrase to further their deception upon Plaintiff that they are in fact, a law firm when they are not.

39. The use of the title "Senior Partner," as outlined in paragraph thirty-seven, is a commonly used title at law firms, and upon information and belief, Defendant utilizes this in an effort to deceive Plaintiff into believing they are a law firm.
40. When viewed in totality, Defendant's FCL is fraught with implications that they are a law firm, when they are not, and misrepresent the fact that a complaint has been initiated against the Plaintiff, when one has not. Plaintiff's use of the various terms and phrases, in conjunction with the material misrepresentation that criminal proceedings have been initiated against him, is nothing less than false, deceptive and misleading in violation of 15 U.S.C. §1692e(10), and have mischaracterized the status, and legal nature of the debt, in violation of 15 U.S.C. §1692e(2)(A).

41. Plaintiff has been damaged and is entitled to relief.

<u>COUNT II</u> <u>VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLECTIONS PRACTICES ACT</u> <u>15 U.S.C. §1692e(2)(a) & 15 U.S.C. §1692e(10)</u>

42. Plaintiff repeats and realleges the allegation contained in paragraphs (1) through (41) above and incorporates them with the same force and effect as if set forth specifically herein.

43. The SCL was dated March 16, 2017, sent to Plaintiff on the same day and received and read by Plaintiff on the same day.

44. In the reference line on the SCL, Defendant uses the phrases "Case Number," and "Amount of Complaint."

45. The utilization of the phrases outlined in the preceding paragraph is clearly intended to infer that there has been complaint filed against Plaintiff in a court of law.

46. The SCL includes a bold notice at the top of the body of the letter and reads,"FINAL NOTICE OF COMPLAINT."

47. The utilization of the phrase outlined in the preceding paragraph is clearly intended to infer that there has been complaint filed against Plaintiff in a court of law.

48. The third paragraph in the SLC reads as follows, "Be advised that once this complaint has been turned over to the prosecutor, you will be responsible for all additional fees, including but not limited to additional rental fees, court costs, attorney's fees and all fines imposed by the courts." (Emphasis added)
49. The statements made in the preceding paragraph which outline that the Plaintiff will be responsible for "additional rental fees" and "attorney's fees" are false and misleading. The Plaintiff, if he is liable on the contract in the first place, would not be charged additional rental fees, but rather the fees in accordance with

the contract. Additionally, the criminal court system does not impose attorney's fees. Prosecutors are public servants, who draw a salary for their service; fees for their time in criminal prosecutions are neither sought after, nor recoverable.
50. The SCL closes much in the same way the FCL does, with the following, "Please govern yourself accordingly," and is executed by "Charles Minor, Senior Partner."

51. The use of the phrase "Govern yourself accordingly" is common legal parlance; upon information and belief, Defendant is well aware of this and utilizes the phrase to further their deception upon Plaintiff that they are, in fact, a law firm when they are not.

52. The use of the title "Senior Partner," as outlined in paragraph thirty-seven, is a commonly used title at law firms, and upon information and belief, Defendant utilizes this in an effort to deceive Plaintiff into believing they are a law firm. 53. When viewed in totality, Defendant's FCLis fraught with implications that they are a law firm, when they are not, and misrepresent the fact that "additional rental fees" and "Attorney's fees" are recoverable against the Plaintiff, when this is not the case. Plaintiff's use of the various terms and phrases, in conjunction with the material misrepresentation regarding fees, is nothing less than false, deceptive and misleading in violation of 15 U.S.C. §1692e(10), and have mischaracterized the status, and legal nature of the debt, in violation of 15 U.S.C. §1692e(2)(A).

54. Defendant's actions have caused damage to Plaintiff to which she is entitled relief.

JURY TRIAL DEMAND

Plaintiff demands a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, Malik Asante, requests that this Court enter judgment against the Defendant, and on behalf of Plaintiff for the following:

A. That an order be entered certifying the class as described above, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. Pro. 23(b)(3).

- B. That an order be entered declaring the Defendant actions, as described above, in violation of the FDCPA;
- C. That judgment be entered against the Defendant, and for all class members, for actual damages, pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(a)(1);
- D. That judgment be entered against the Defendant and for all class members, for statutory damages, pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(a)(2)(A) and (B);

E. That the Court award costs and reasonable attorneys' fees, pursuant to 15

U.S.C. § 1692k(a)(3);

F. That the Court enjoin Defendants from further misrepresenting the effects of a consumer's failure to dispute the debt within the applicable (30) day period under 15 U.S.C. §1692g, *et seq*.

G. That the Court grant such other and further relief as may be just and proper.

Dated: August 21, 2017

Respectfully Submitted,

| lass Action Complaint Asanta Malik y Baylor & Connor Inc | p | 2000 1 |
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| | Facsimile: 201-608-7116 Email: DPF@lupoloverlaw.com | |
| | Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632 Telephone: 201-461-0059 | |
| | Of Counsel to the firm: Law Offices of Michael Lupolove 120 Sylvan Avenue, Suite 303 | r |
| | Telephone: 404-920-8040 Email: jmason@atlshowbizlaw.co | m |
| | 1100 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 2 Atlanta, GA 30309 | 200 |
| | Jonathan B. Mason, Esq. Mason Law Group, P.C. | 000 |
| | s/ Jonathan B. Mason | / |
| | | |

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Baylor & Connor 560 Main Street, Suite 1E Allenhurst, NJ 07711 Phone: 732-686-1867 / Fax: 866-684-7577

2/22/2017

Malik Asante 3457 Willgrove Ct Duluth, GA 30096

Case Number: Client: Ronald Sachs Violins Amount of Complaint: \$1,050.00

Malik Asante,

We wish to bring to your attention that the above-mentioned client has initiated a complaint of Theft of Services against you.

Your possession of the client's rental property without payment constitutes violation of Georgia Theft laws under Sec. 16-8-5. Specifically:

"A person commits the offense of theft of services when by deception and with the intent to avoid payment he knowingly obtains services, accommodations, entertainment, or the use of personal property which is available only for compensation."

Please note that you have seven (7) days from the above noted date to contact this firm or we will advise our client to turn this matter over to the County Prosecutor.

You can contact Steven Cohen with Baylor & Connor, by calling (732) 686-1867.

Govern yourself accordingly.

Steven Cohen Senior Partner Baylor & Connor Case 1:17-cv-03160-CAP-LTW Document 1-2 Filed 08/21/17 Page 1 of 1

Baylor & Connor 560 Main Street, Suite 1E Allenhurst, NJ 07711 Phone: 732-686-1867 / Fax: 866-684-7577

3/16/2017

Malik Asante 3457 Willgrove Ct Duluth, GA 30096

Case Number: Client: Ronald Sachs Violins Amount of Complaint: \$1,050.00

FINAL NOTICE OF COMPLAINT

Malik Asante,

Since you have chosen to ignore my demands concerning your possession of my client's property, I have no other alternative but to recommend that my client turn this matter over to your county's prosecutor's office.

I will withhold this recommendation for 7 (seven) days from the date of this letter to allow you time to respond. However, if I do not hear from you by that time, I will move forward with my recommendation.

Be advised that once this complaint has been turned over to the prosecutor, you will be responsible for all additional fees, including but not limited to additional rental fees, court costs, attorney's fees and all fines imposed by the courts.

You have the opportunity to resolve this matter now. Do not ignore it.

You can contact Charles Minor, Senior Partner with Baylor & Connor, by calling (732) 686-1867, extension 10 to resolve this matter.

Govern yourself accordingly.

Charles Minor Senior Partner Baylor & Connor

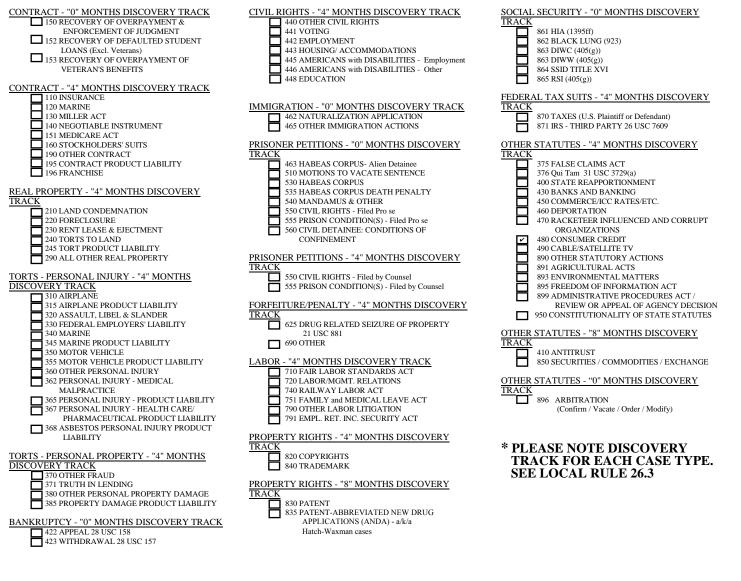
JS44 (Rev. 6/2017 ND CASE 1:17-CV-03160-CAP-LCTWIL DOGVER SHEEF Filed 08/21/17 Page 1 of 2

The JS44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket record. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ATTACHED)

| I. (a) PLAINTIFF(S) | | DEFENDANT(S) |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| MALIK ASANTE, ON BEHALF OF HIMSELF, | | BAYLOR & CONNOR, INC. |
| AND ALL OTHERS SIMILARLY SITUATED | | BATEOR & CONNOR, INC. |
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| | | |
| (b) COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED PLAINTIFF GWINNETT | | COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED |
| PLAINTIFF GWINNE (except in u.s. plaintiff cases) | | DEFENDANT |
| | | NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED |
| (c) ATTORNEYS (FIRM NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUL E-MAIL ADDRESS) | MBER, AND | ATTORNEYS (IF KNOWN) |
| Jonathan B. Mason | | |
| Mason Law Group, P.C. | | |
| 1100 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 200 Atlanta, GA 30309 | | |
| Telephone: 404-920-8040 | | |
| II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION | | ZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES |
| (PLACE AN "X" IN ONE BOX ONLY) | (PLACE A | N "X" IN ONE BOX FOR PLAINTIFF AND ONE BOX FOR DEFENDANT) (FOR DIVERSITY CASES ONLY) |
| | PLF DEF | |
| L 1 U.S. GOVERNMENT PLAINTIFF (U.S. GOVERNMENT NOT A PARTY) | | FIZEN OF THIS STATE 4 4 INCORPORATED OR PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS IN THIS STATE |
| 2 U.S. GOVERNMENT 4 DIVERSITY DEFENDANT (INDICATE CITIZENSHIP OF PARTIES | | FIZEN OF ANOTHER STATE 5 5 INCORPORATED AND PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS IN ANOTHER STATE |
| IN ITEM III) | | FIZEN OR SUBJECT OF A 6 FOREIGN NATION REIGN COUNTRY |
| IV. ORIGIN (PLACE AN "X "IN ONE BOX ONLY) | | |
| I ORIGINAL PROCEEDING C 2 REMOVED FROM STATE COURT APPELLATE COURT APPELLATE COURT | 4 REINSTATED REOPENED | DR 5 ANOTHER DISTRICT (Specify District) MULTIDISTRICT 7 FROM MAGISTRATE JUDGE TRANSFER JUDGMENT |
| MULTIDISTRICT 8 LITIGATION - DIRECT FILE | | |
| V. CAUSE OF ACTION (CITE THE U.S. CIVIL STATUTE JURISDICTIONAL STATUTES UNIT | UNDER WHICH YOU | ARE FILING AND WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF CAUSE - DO NOT CITE |
| JURISDICTIONAL STATUTES UN 15 U.S.C. § 1692, et seq.; unlawful debt collec | | |
| 10 0.0.0. 3 1002, or coq., amama aber conco | | |
| | | |
| (IF COMPLEX, CHECK REASON BELOW) | | |
| 1. Unusually large number of parties. | 6. Prob | lems locating or preserving evidence |
| \Box 2. Unusually large number of claims or defenses. | 7. Pend | ing parallel investigations or actions by government. |
| 3. Factual issues are exceptionally complex | 🗌 8. Mult | iple use of experts. |
| 4. Greater than normal volume of evidence. | | d for discovery outside United States boundaries. |
| 5. Extended discovery period is needed. | 10. Exist | ence of highly technical issues and proof. |
| C | ONTINUED | ON REVERSE |
| FOR OFFICE USE ONLY | | |
| RECEIPT # AMOUNT \$ | | STFPMAG. JUDGE (TFP) |
| JUDGE MAG. JUDGE(Referral) | NATURE | DF SUIT CAUSE OF ACTION |

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VI. NATURE OF SUIT (PLACE AN "X" IN ONE BOX ONLY)



VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:

TBD

JURY DEMAND VES NO (CHECK YES ONLY IF DEMANDED IN COMPLAINT)

CHECK IF CLASS ACTION UNDER F.R.Civ.P. 23 DEMAND \$_

VIII. RELATED/REFILED CASE(S) IF ANY

JUDGE___

DOCKET NO.

CIVIL CASES ARE DEEMED RELATED IF THE PENDING CASE INVOLVES: (CHECK APPROPRIATE BOX)

- **1. PROPERTY INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.**
- □ 2. SAME ISSUE OF FACT OR ARISES OUT OF THE SAME EVENT OR TRANSACTION INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- □ 3. VALIDITY OR INFRINGEMENT OF THE SAME PATENT, COPYRIGHT OR TRADEMARK INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- 4. APPEALS ARISING OUT OF THE SAME BANKRUPTCY CASE AND ANY CASE RELATED THERETO WHICH HAVE BEEN DECIDED BY THE SAME BANKRUPTCY JUDGE,
- **5.** REPETITIVE CASES FILED BY <u>PRO SE</u> LITIGANTS.
- 6. COMPANION OR RELATED CASE TO CASE(S) BEING SIMULTANEOUSLY FILED (INCLUDE ABBREVIATED STYLE OF OTHER CASE(S)):

□ 7. EITHER SAME OR ALL OF THE PARTIES AND ISSUES IN THIS CASE WERE PREVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN CASE NO. DISMISSED. This case □ IS □ IS NOT (check one box) SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME CASE.

, WHICH WAS

| /s/ Jonathan Masor | n |
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ClassAction.org

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>Baylor & Connor Faced with Multiple-Count FDCPA Lawsuit</u>