FILED

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA JACKSONVILLE DIVISION

2018 DEC 26 PM 1: 17

CLERK, US DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT

WAYNE BROOM, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff(s),

Civil Action No:

3:\\ 8-\(\sigma-\)\ \S\\ 5 - \(\sigma-\)\ CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

-v.-

WHIPPLE LAW, P.A., MSW CAPITAL, LLC and JOHN DOES 1-25,

Defendant(s).

Plaintiff Wayne Broom (hereinafter, "Plaintiff" or "Broom"), a Florida resident, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through his attorneys, Zeig Law Firm, LLC, against Defendants Whipple Law, P.A. (hereinafter "Defendant Whipple") and MSW Capital, LLC (hereinafter "Defendant MSW"), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff's counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff's personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Congress enacted the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (hereinafter "the FDCPA" or "the Act") in 1977 in response to the "abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors." 15 U.S.C. §1692(a). At that time, Congress was concerned that "abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual privacy." *Id.* Congress concluded that "existing laws...[we]re inadequate to protect consumers,"

and that "the effective collection of debts" does not require "misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices." 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).

2. Congress explained that the purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to "insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged." *Id.* § 1692(e). "After determining that the existing consumer protection laws were inadequate." *Id.* § 1692(b), Congress gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply with the Act. *Id.* § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. The Court has pendent jurisdiction over any state law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).
- 4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) as this is where a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

- 5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of Florida consumers under §1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA"), and
 - 6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory relief.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of Florida, County of Columbia, residing at 8214 SW County Road 242, Lake City, Florida 32024.

- 8. Defendant Whipple is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and used in the FDCPA with an address at 233 Mt. Airy Road, Basking Ridge, New Jersey 07920.
- 9. Defendant MSW is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and used in the FDCPA with an address at 1900 Main Street, Suite 750, Sarasota, Florida 34236.
- 10. Upon information and belief, Defendants Whipple and MSW are companies that use the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engage in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.
- 11. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

- 12. Plaintiff brings this claim on behalf of the following class, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).
 - 13. The Class consists of:
 - a. all individuals with addresses in the State of Florida;
 - b. who were sent a letter from Defendant Whipple attempting to collect a consumer debt;
 - c. on behalf of Defendant MSW;
 - d. whose letter gives a final demand with a threat of a lawsuit, in which legal action was never intended to be taken;
 - e. and could not legally be taken by Defendant Whipple;

- f. which letter was sent on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.
- 14. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendants and those companies and entities on whose behalf they attempt to collect and/or have purchased debts.
- 15. Excluded from the Plaintiff Class are the Defendants and all officer, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendants and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.
- 16. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Class, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibit A, violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e and 1692f.
- 17. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor her attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.
- 18. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- g. <u>Numerosity:</u> The Plaintiff is informed and believes, and on that basis alleges, that the Plaintiff Class defined above is so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.
- h. <u>Common Questions Predominate:</u> Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Class and those questions predominance over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibit A violate 15 USC §1692e and §1692f.
- i. <u>Typicality:</u> The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members.
 The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Class have claims arising out of the Defendants' common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- j. Adequacy: The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are adverse to the absent class members. The Plaintiff is committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor her counsel has any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.
- k. <u>Superiority:</u> A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single

forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

- 19. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff Class predominate over any questions affecting an individual member, and a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.
- 20. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiffs may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

- 21. Plaintiff incorporates by reference all of the above paragraphs of this Complaint as though fully state herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 22. On information and belief, and on a date better known to Defendants, Defendants began collection activities on an alleged consumer debt from the Plaintiff ("Alleged Debt").
- 23. This debt was incurred as a personal financial obligation with the original creditor of Sunbelt Credit who issued credit to Plaintiff, the funds from which were used to purchase items primarily for personal, family and household purposes and therefore constitutes a "debt" as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(5).
 - 24. The alleged Sunbelt Credit obligation is a "debt" as defined in 15 U.S.C. §1692a(5).
- 25. Sometime thereafter on a date better know to Defendant MSW, Defendant MSW purchased the alleged debt.

- 26. Defendant MSW, a subsequent owner of the Sunbelt Credit debt, and itself a debt collector, contracted with Defendant Whipple to collect the alleged debt from Plaintiff.
- 27. Defendants Whipple and Defendant MSW collect and attempt to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of creditors using the United States Postal Services, telephone and internet.

Violation - January 4, 2018 Collection Letter

- 28. On or around January 4, 2018, Defendant Whipple sent a collection letter to Plaintiff on behalf of Defendant MSW. See a true and accurate copy of the Collection Letter (hereinafter the "Letter") attached hereto as Exhibit A.
- 29. The Letter threatens "If you fail to contact this office, our client has authorized our attorneys to review this account and determine if a lawsuit should be filed."
- 30. This language is threatening, and coercive, and only used with the intent of scaring Plaintiff into making payment.
- 31. Specifically, though, this language was false since one year later Defendant Whipple has not brought legal action against Plaintiff for collection on this account.
- 32. This Letter is additionally false because Defendant Whipple is not authorized to practice law in the Plaintiff's home state of Florida and, therefore, cannot bring suit against him to collect this alleged debt.
- 33. Defendant Whipple's letterhead states as much showing its only attorney as Kristen Nethken, Esq. (licensed in NC).
- 34. Defendant Whipple's false and threatening Letter would deceive the least sophisticated consumer into believing that its filing of a lawsuit was imminent, when Defendant never had any intention of filing a law suit and Defendant Whipple was not even authorized to file suit against Plaintiff in Florida.

- 35. Defendants made deceptive and misleading representations when they communicated to Plaintiff that Defendants were intending to imminently sue Plaintiff when, in fact, they were not permitted to sue as a matter of law, in violation of 15 U.S.C. §§1692e, 1692e(2), 1692e(5) and 1692e(10).
- 36. As a result of Defendants' false, deceptive, misleading and unfair debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

COUNT I VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692e et seq.

- 37. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 38. Defendants' debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.
- 39. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.
- 40. Defendants made false and misleading representations when they communicated to Plaintiff and threatened to take legal action when Defendants had no intention of doing so, and were not licensed to do so, in violation of 15 U.S.C. §§1692e, 1692e(2), 1692e(5) and 1692e(10).
- 41. By reason thereof, Defendants are liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendants' conduct violated Section 1692e et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692f et seg.

- 42. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 43. Defendants' debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692f.
- 44. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692f, a debt collector may not use any unfair or unconscionable means in connection with the collection of any debt.
- 45. Defendants violated this section by threatening the Plaintiff with imminet legal action, when they had no intention of filing suit and were not licensed to do so in the state of Florida.
- 46. By reason thereof, Defendants are liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendants' conduct violated Section 1692f et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

47. Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby requests a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Wayne Broom, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated demands judgment from Defendant Whipple Law, P.A. and Defendant MSW Capital, LLC as follows:

- 1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Justin Zeig, Esq. as Class Counsel;
 - 2. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
 - 3. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
- 4. Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;
 - 5. Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and
- 6. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: December 13, 2018

Respectfully Submitted,

ZEIG LAW FIRM, LLC

/s/ Justin Zeig Justin Zeig, Esq. FL Bar No. 112306 3475 Sheridan Street, Suite 310 Hollywood, FL 33021 Telephone: 754-217-3084 Fax: 954-272-7807 justin@zeiglawfirm.com

Attorneys for Plaintiff

EXHIBIT A

Case 3:18-cv-01515-HES-JBT Document 1-1 Filed 12/26/18 Page 2 of 2 PageID 12

WHIPPLE LAW, P.A.

ATTORNEYS:

Krystal Nethken, Esq. (licensed in NC)

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

233 Mount Airy Rd, 1st Floor, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920 525 North Tryon Street, Suite 1600, Charlotte, North Carolina, 28202

TEL: 1-855-LAWHIP1 (529-4471)

January 04, 2018

1386 ******************ALL FOR AADC 320***2-5

Wayne Broom

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Dear Wayne Broom:

The undersigned law firm represents MSW Capital, LLC with respect to collecting the account with original creditor Sunbelt Credit, account #1277, charge off date on March 30, 2015 and an original creditor balance of \$829.84. This account has been purchased by MSW Capital, LLC and is due and owing to them. You previously received a letter about this debt and we have attempted to reach you by phone but have not been able to contact you to make arrangements and satisfy the debt. Your current balance equals \$829.84.

We would like the opportunity to assist you in resolving this debt without taking legal action and to that extent; we would like to offer you the following options:

- 1. A one-time payment of \$165.97 representing 20% of the current balance, payable no later than 30 days from the date of this letter.
- 2. A six month payment plan consisting of \$41.49 per month representing 30% of the current balance, payable on the 15th day of each month. The first payment must be received no later than 30 days from the date of this letter.
- 3. A twelve month payment plan consisting of \$34.58 per month representing 50% of the current balance, payable on the 15th day of each month. The first payment must be received no later than 30 days from the date of this letter.

should be filed. Please be aware that if a lawsuit is filed, you may be served with a summons and complaint. With a summons and complaint, and filing your answer or other responsive pleading if any, you may be required to appear in court in the county where you reside.

You can accept these options by calling 855-529-4471 to confirm your selection with a paralegal or by making arrangements online at www.whipplelawpayments.com. Alternatively, if these options do not fit, please call us to discuss an arrangement that will work for you. Please refer to Account ID: 1277

Very truly yours. Whipple Law, P.A.

THIS COLLECTION AGENCY IS LICENSED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE PERMIT #111943

IMPORTANT NOTICE THIS COMMUNICATION IS FROM A DEBT COLLECTOR AND IS AN ATTEMPT TO COLLECT A DEBT. ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE.

Basking Ridge . Charlotte

Case 3:18-cv-01515-HES-JBT Document 1-2 Filed 12/26/18 Page 10 Page 10 CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 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, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil decket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM)

provided by local rules of court purpose of initiating the civil do					1974, is requi	red for the use of	ine Clerk of Court 1	or the	
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANTS					
Wayne Broom, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situ				ted Whipple Law, P.A., MSW Capital, LLC and John Does 1-25					
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Columbia (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)				County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.					
(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, A Zeig Law Firm, LLC 3475 Sheridan Street, St Tel: (754) 217-3084				Attorneys (If Known)			•		
II. BASIS OF JURISDI	CTION (Place an "X" in C	ne Box Only)	III. CI	TIZENSHIP OF P	RINCIPA	L PARTIES			
U.S. Government Plaintiff	t 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)			(For Diversity Cases Only) and One Box for Defendant) PTF DEF Citizen of This State					
O 2 U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)		Citiz	Citizen of Another State					
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IV. NATURE OF SUIT							Suit Code Descri		
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTIO	Cite the U.S. Civil St. 15 U.S.C. Sect. Brief description of c. False, Deceptive	Appellate Court atute under which you a 1692 et seq. Fair D ause: and Misleading Co	Reo are filing (Debt Coll llection	(specify Do not cite jurisdictional sta ection Practices Act Letter	er District		l,it	idistrict igation - ect File	
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	UNDER RULE 2	S IS A CLASS ACTION 23, F.R.Cv.P.	N D	EMAND \$		URY DEMAND:	if demanded in cor 又 Yes		
VIII. RELATED CASI IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE			DOCKE	T NUMBER	t ·		
DATE 12/14/2018	SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF RECORD /s/ Justin Zeig							e pro-	
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY RECEIPT # AI	MOUNT \$ 4 OC	APPLYING IFP		JUDGE	20	MAG. JUI	OGE ST		

ClassAction.org

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: Whipple Law, MSW Capital Made False Threats in Collection Letter, Florida Consumer Alleges