## UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

ELKE GOLDBERG, on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated,

Plaintiffs,

-against-

MIDLAND CREDIT MANAGEMENT, INC.

Defendants.

## **CIVIL ACTION**

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT AND DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff ELKE GOLDBERG (hereinafter, "Plaintiff"), a New York resident, brings this class action complaint by and through her attorneys, Joseph H. Mizrahi Law, P.C., against Defendants MIDLAND CREDIT MANAGEMENT, INC. (hereinafter "Defendant"), 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 FDCPA 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 under 28 U.S.C. § 1331, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.* and 28 U.S.C. § 2201. If applicable, the Court also has pendent jurisdiction over the 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).

## NATURE OF THE ACTION

- 5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of New York consumers seeking redress for Defendant's actions of using an unfair and unconscionable means to collect a debt.
- 6. Defendant's actions violated § 1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA") which prohibits debt collectors from engaging in abusive, deceptive and unfair practices.
- 7. Plaintiff is seeking damages, and declaratory and injunctive relief.

#### **PARTIES**

- 8. Plaintiff is a natural person and a resident of the State of New York, and is a "Consumer" as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692(a)(3).
- 9. Defendant is a collection agency with its principal office located in San Diego, California.
- 10. Defendant is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.
- 11. Defendant is a "debt collector," as defined under the FDCPA under 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(6).

### **CLASS ALLEGATIONS**

- 12. Plaintiff brings claims, pursuant to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (hereinafter "FRCP")
  Rule 23, individually and on behalf of the following consumer class (the "Class"):
  - All New York consumers who received a collection Letter from Defendant attempting to collect an obligation owed to or allegedly owed to Midland Funding LLC, that contains the alleged violation arising from Defendant's failure to adequately advise the consumer of their right to dispute the debt in violation of 15 U.S.C. §1692e, et seq.
  - The Class period begins one year to the filing of this Action.
- 13. The Class satisfies all the requirements of Rule 23 of the FRCP for maintaining a class action:
  - Upon information and belief, the Class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable because there are hundreds and/or thousands of persons who have received debt collection Letter and/or notices from Defendant that fail to adequately advise the consumer of their right to dispute the debt in violation of the FDCPA. Plaintiff is complaining of a standard form Letter and/or notice that is sent to hundreds of persons (*See* Exhibit A, except that the undersigned attorney has, in accordance with Fed. R. Civ. P. 5.2 partially redacted the financial account numbers in an effort to protect Plaintiff's privacy);
  - 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:
    - a. Whether Defendant violated various provisions of the FDCPA;
    - b. 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
- d. Whether Plaintiff and the Class are entitled to declaratory and/or injunctive relief.
- Plaintiff's claims are typical of the Class, which all arise from the same operative facts and are based on the same legal theories.
- Plaintiff has no interest adverse or antagonistic to the interest of the other members of the Class.
- Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interest of the Class and has retained experienced and competent attorneys to represent the Class.
- A Class Action is superior to other methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the claims herein asserted. Plaintiff anticipates that no unusual difficulties are likely to be encountered in the management of this class action.
- A Class Action will permit large numbers of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum simultaneously and without the duplication of effort and expense that numerous individual actions would engender. Class treatment will also 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. Absent a Class Action, class members will continue to suffer losses of statutory protected rights as well as monetary damages. If

- Defendant's conduct is allowed to proceed without remedy they will continue to reap and retain the proceeds of their ill-gotten gains.
- Defendant has acted 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.

### **ALLEGATIONS OF FACT PARTICULAR TO ELKE GOLDBERG**

- 14. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs numbered "1" through "13" herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 15. Defendant collects and attempts 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.
- 16. Upon information and belief, within the last year Defendant commenced efforts to collect an alleged consumer "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C. 1692a(5), when it mailed a Collection Letter to Plaintiff seeking to collect on an unpaid account originally owed to Midland Funding LLC.
- 17. On or about August 17, 2016, Defendant sent Plaintiff a collection letter (the "Letter"). *See* Exhibit A.
- 18. The Letter was sent or caused to be sent by persons employed by Defendant, as "any person that uses any instrumentality of interstate commerce or the mails in any business the principal purpose of which is the collection of any debts..." as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692a(6).
- 19. The Letter is a "communication" as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692a(2).
- 20. The Letter was an initial communication between Plaintiff and Defendant.
- 21. The Letter states in pertinent part, "MAIL CORRESPONDENCE BUT PAYMENTS TO:"
- 22. As a result of the following Counts Defendant violated the FDCPA.

# Firsts Count 15 U.S.C. §1692g(a)(3) Suggesting a Dispute Must be Made in Writing

- 23. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs numbered "1" through "22" herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 24. 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(3) requires the notice to include a statement that unless the consumer, within thirty days after receipt of the notice, disputes the validity of the debt, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt collector.
- 25. There is no requirement that the consumer dispute the debt in writing.
- 26. It is a violation of FDCPA to require disputes be made in writing.
- 27. It is a violation of the FDCPA to include language in the Letter that overshadows the required 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(3) statement.
- 28. It is a violation of the FDCPA to include language in the Letter that contradicts the required 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(3) statement.
- 29. It is a violation of the FDCPA to include language in the Letter that, when examined from the perspective of the least sophisticated consumer, overshadows the required § 1692g(a)(3) statement.
- 30. It is a violation of the FDCPA to include language in the Letter that, when examined from the perspective of the least sophisticated consumer, contradicts the required § 1692g(a)(3) statement.
- 31. It is a violation of the FDCPA to include language in the Letter that, when examined from the perspective of the least sophisticated consumer, leads the least sophisticated consumer to believe that her dispute must be in writing.
- 32. Defendant's Letter states "MAIL CORRESPONDENCE BUT PAYMENTS TO:" and proceeds to provide a mailing address for which to mail same.

- 33. The least sophisticated consumer, reading the Letter as a whole, would be likely to understand that, because a dispute is a correspondence, all disputes must be communicated in writing, thereby invalidating the right to make a dispute orally.
- 34. Disputes need not be in writing. *Hooks v. Forman, Holt, Eliades & Ravin, LLC*, 717 F.3d 282 (2d Cir. 2013).
- 35. The language concerning written disputes overshadows the required 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(3) statement.
- 36. The language concerning written disputes contradicts the required 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(3) statement.
- 37. The language concerning written disputes, when examined from the perspective of the least sophisticated consumer, overshadows the required § 1692g(a)(3) statement.
- 38. The language concerning written disputes, when examined from the perspective of the least sophisticated consumer, contradicts the required § 1692g(a)(3) statement.
- 39. The language concerning written disputes, when examined from the perspective of the least sophisticated consumer, leads the least sophisticated consumer to believe that her dispute must be in writing.
- 40. Defendant has violated § 1692g as the above-referenced language overshadows the information required to be provided by that Section. See *Balke v. All. One Receivables Mgt.*, *Inc.*, 16-CV-5624(ADS)(AKT), 2017 WL 2634653, at \*8 (E.D.N.Y. June 19, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Namely, the Court finds that, although the Collection Letter did not explicitly state that the Plaintiff could only dispute the debt in writing, from the perspective of the least sophisticated consumer, the inclusion of a mailing address to which "all correspondence for this account should be mailed" introduces enough uncertainty regarding the permissible methods of disputing the debt to state a plausible claim for relief under the statute.

# Second Count Violation of 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, et seq False and Misleading Representations

- 41. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs numbered "1" through "40" herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 42. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e prohibits a debt collector from using any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.
- 43. While § 1692e specifically prohibits certain practices, the list is non-exhaustive, and does not preclude a claim of falsity or deception based on non-enumerated practice.
- 44. For purposes of 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, the failure to clearly provide the consumer with complete and accurate information notifying them of their rights and obligations is unfair and deceptive to the least sophisticated consumer.
- 45. Collection notices are deceptive if they can be reasonably read to have two or more different meanings, one of which is inaccurate.
- 46. The question of whether a collection Letter is deceptive is determined from the perspective of the "least sophisticated consumer."
- 47. Because the collection Letter in the instant case was reasonably susceptible to an inaccurate reading concerning Plaintiff's right to dispute the debt by something other than in writing, it is deceptive within the meaning of the FDCPA.
- 48. When confronted with Defendant's Letter which stated, "MAIL CORRESPONDENCE BUT PAYMENTS TO:" it is reasonable for the least sophisticated consumer to believe that all disputes would be needed in writing. That is inaccurate since you can also call to orally dispute the debt.

- 49. When confronted with Defendant's Letter which states, "MAIL CORRESPONDENCE BUT PAYMENTS TO:" it would be reasonable for the least sophisticated consumer to understand that statement to mean that in order to dispute the debt she must send it in writing. That would be inaccurate since she can dispute the debt verbally.
- 50. The least sophisticated consumer would likely be deceived by Defendants' conduct.
- 51. The least sophisticated consumer would likely be deceived in a material way by Defendant's conduct.
- 52. The least sophisticated consumer would be unsure as to whether a writing or oral communication is necessary to dispute the underlying debt.
- 53. Defendant's conduct violated 15 U.S.C. §1692e. There is no requirement that the consumer dispute the debt in writing.
- 54. Because the Letter, for the reasons described above, could be read by the least sophisticated consumer to have two or more meanings, one of which is inaccurate, such violates 15 U.S.C. § 1692e. See *Balke v. Alliance One Receivables Management, Inc.*, No. 16-CV 5624(ADS)(AKT), 2017 WL 2634653 (E.D.N.Y. June 19, 2017).

## **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants as follows:

- (a) Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative and Joseph H. Mizrahi Law, P.C., as Class Counsel;
- (b) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
- (c) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
- (d) Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;

- (e) Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and
- (f) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Respectfully submitted,

By: /s/ Joseph H. Mizrahi
Joseph H. Mizrahi, Esq.
Joseph H. Mizrahi Law, P.C.
337 Avenue W, Suite 2F
Brooklyn, New York 11223
Phone: (917) 299-6612

Phone: (917) 299-6612 Fax: (347) 665-1545

Email: Jmizrahilaw@gmail.com

Attorney for Plaintiff

## **DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY**

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

/s/ Joseph H. Mizrahi
Joseph H. Mizrahi, Esq.

Dated: Brooklyn, New York August 7, 2017 JS 44 (Rev. 06/17)

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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 docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

purpose of initiating the civil do	ocket sheet. (SEE INSTRUC	TIONS ON NEXT FAGE C	n ms re	JKW.)					
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANTS	3				
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(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff				County of Residence of First Listed Defendant					
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(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, A	Address, and Telephone Numbe	r)		Attorneys (If Known)					
JOSEPH H. MIZRAHI LA 11223, (917) 299-6612	W, P.C., 337 Avenue	W, Ste 2f, Brooklyı	n, NY						
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## CERTIFICATION OF ARBITRATION ELIGIBILITY

Local Arbitration Rule 83.10 provides that with certain exceptions, actions seeking money damages only in an amount not in excess of \$150,000, exclusive of interest and costs, are eligible for compulsory arbitration. The amount of damages is presumed to be below the threshold amount unless a certification to the contrary is filed.

I, JOSEPH ineligib	ole for co	counsel for PLAINTIFF, do hereby certify that the above captioned civil action is compulsory arbitration for the following reason(s):
	X	monetary damages sought are in excess of \$150,000, exclusive of interest and costs,
		the complaint seeks injunctive relief,
	X	the matter is otherwise ineligible for the following reason  Questions of law rather than questions of fact predominate <u>DISCLOSURE STATEMENT - FEDERAL RULES CIVIL PROCEDURE 7.1</u>
NONE		Identify any parent corporation and any publicly held corporation that owns 10% or more or its stocks:
		RELATED CASE STATEMENT (Section VIII on the Front of this Form)
provides because same jud case: (A)	that "A ci the cases a ge and ma involves	s that are arguably related pursuant to Division of Business Rule 50.3.1 in Section VIII on the front of this form. Rule 50.3.1 (a) ivil case is "related" to another civil case for purposes of this guideline when, because of the similarity of facts and legal issues or arise from the same transactions or events, a substantial saving of judicial resources is likely to result from assigning both cases to the agistrate judge." Rule 50.3.1 (b) provides that "A civil case shall not be deemed "related" to another civil case merely because the civil identical legal issues, or (B) involves the same parties." Rule 50.3.1 (c) further provides that "Presumptively, and subject to the power mine otherwise pursuant to paragraph (d), civil cases shall not be deemed to be "related" unless both cases are still pending before the
		NY-E DIVISION OF BUSINESS RULE 50.1(d)(2)
1.)	Is the ci County:	vil action being filed in the Eastern District removed from a New York State Court located in Nassau or Suffolk
2.)		nswered "no" above: he events or omissions giving rise to the claim or claims, or a substantial part thereof, occur in Nassau or Suffolk
	b) Did the District	he events or omissions giving rise to the claim or claims, or a substantial part thereof, occur in the Eastern
Suffolk	County, olk Count	question 2 (b) is "No," does the defendant (or a majority of the defendants, if there is more than one) reside in Nassau or or, in an interpleader action, does the claimant (or a majority of the claimants, if there is more than one) reside in Nassau y?ote: A corporation shall be considered a resident of the County in which it has the most significant contacts).
		BAR ADMISSION
I am cui	rently ad	Imitted in the Eastern District of New York and currently a member in good standing of the bar of this court.  Yes  No
Are you	currently	y the subject of any disciplinary action (s) in this or any other state or federal court?  Yes (If yes, please explain) No

I certify the accuracy of all information provided above.

Signature:\_/s/ Joseph H. Mizrahi

## UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Eastern District of New York

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ELKE GOLDBERG, on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated,	) ) )
Plaintiff(s) v. MIDLAND CREDIT MANAGEMENT, INC.	) Civil Action No. ) )
Defendant(s)	) )
SUMMONS IN A	A CIVIL ACTION
To: (Defendant's name and address) MIDLAND CREDIT MANAG 80 STATE STREET ALBANY, NEW YORK 1220	
	n must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, P.C.
If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be early You also must file your answer or motion with the court.	entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint.
	DOUGLAS C. PALMER CLERK OF COURT
Date:	
	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

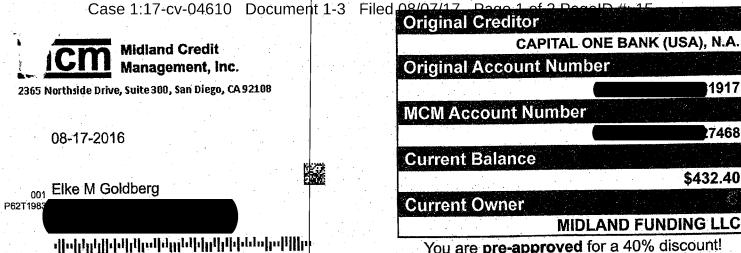
Civil Action No.

## PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))

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	on (date)	, and mailed a	copy to the individual's last known addre	ess; or	
	☐ I served the summ	nons on (name of individual)			, who is
	designated by law to	o accept service of process	on behalf of (name of organization)		_
			on (date)	; or	
	☐ I returned the sun	nmons unexecuted because			; or
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	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a tota	nl of \$(	).00 .
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Date:					
			Server's signature		
		_	Printed name and title	,	
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Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:



You are pre-approved for a 40% discount! Call now: (800) 282-2644

## Choose The Option That Works For You.

RE: Capital One Bank (USA), N.A.

Dear Elke,

Congratulations! You have been <u>pre-approved</u> for a discount program designed to save you money. Act now to maximize your savings and put this debt behind you by calling (800) 282-2644. Pay online today at www.midlandcreditonline.com.

	You Pay Only		
Option 1: 40% OFF Payment Due Date: 09-16-2016	\$259.44		
	hly Payments of Only		
Option 2: 20% OFF First Payment Due Date; 09-16-2016	\$115.30		
Option 3: Monthly Payments As Low As:	\$50 per month <sup>†</sup>		
Call today to discuss your options and get more details			

Sincerely,

Tim Bolin, Division Manager

## Benefits of Paying!

1917

7468

\$432.40

- Save up to \$172.96
- Offer Expiration date: 09-16-2016
- After receiving your that payment, we will consider the account paid.\*

CALL US TODAY! (800) 282-2644

If these options don't work for you, call one of our Account Managers to help you set up a payment plan that does.

\*If you pay your full balance, we will report your account as Paid in Full. If you pay less than your full balance, we will report your account as Paid in Full for less than the full balance.

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Important Disclosure Information:

Please understand this is a communication from a debt collector. This is an attempt to collect a debt. Any information obtained will be used for that purpose.

#### PLEASE SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR IMPORTANT DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

Calls to and/or from this company may be monitored or recorded.

The offer to resolve this account for the discount(s) offered in this letter remains open until 09-16-2016. For further information, please call one of our Account Marlagers at (800) 282-2644.

MAIL PAYMENTS TO: P.O. Box 6578, Los Angeles, CA 96578

MAIL CORRESPONDENCE BUT NO PAYMENTS TO: MCM's business address at 2365 Northside Drive, Suite 300, San Diego, CA 92108

We are required under state law to notify consumers of the following rights. This list does not contain a complete list of the rights consumers have under state and federal law:

IF YOU LIVE IN NEW YORK CITY, THIS APPLIES TO YOU: New York City Department of Consumer Affairs License Number 1140603, 1207829, 1207820, 1227728, 2022587, 2023151, 2023152, 2027429, 2027430, 2027431

## **ADDITIONAL ACCOUNT INFORMATION:**

"Original Creditor:

CAPITAL ONE BANK

(USA), N.A.

Original Account Numbers

1917

Charge-Off Date:

Last Payment Date:

07-04-2014 11-18-2013

**Current Owner:** 

MIDLAND FUNDING LLC

**Current Servicer:** 

Midland Credit

Management Inc.

MCM Account Number:

7468

## **ClassAction.org**

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>Midland Credit Management Illegally Requires Written Debt Disputes</u>, <u>Suit Says</u>