UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE NASHVILLE DIVISION

TAJUANNA HARPER, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated; Plaintiff,	Civil Action No:		
	JURY DEMAND		
-V			
COAST PROFESSIONAL, INC. and JOHN DOES 1-25,			
Defendant(s).			

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Tajuanna Harper (hereinafter, "Plaintiff" or "Harper"), a Tennessee resident, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through her attorneys, against Defendant Coast Professional, Inc. (hereinafter "Defendant Coast"), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Congress enacted the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (hereinafter "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." ld. § 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 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) 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 Tennessee consumers under §1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to "FDCPA", and
 - 6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory relief.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of Tennessee, County of Rutherford, residing at 3716 Southridge Blvd, Murfreesboro, TN 37128.

- 8. Coast Professional, Inc. 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 214 Expo Cr., #7, West Monroe, LA 71292.
- 9. Upon information and belief, 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.
- 10. 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

- 11. Plaintiff brings this claim on behalf of the following class, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).
 - 12. The Class consists of:
 - a. all individuals with addresses in the State of Tennessee;
 - b. to whom Coast Professional, Inc. sent an initial collection letter attempting to collect a consumer debt;
 - c. that include false disclosures that interest, fees and costs are continuously accruing, or in the alternative, the creditor/and or Defendant has made the decision to waive accruing interest and fees, and would accept the amount stated on the collection letter as payment in full;
 - d. 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.

- 13. 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.
- 14. 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.
- 15. 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 1692g.
- 16. 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 Classes 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.
- 17. 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:
 - a. <u>Numerosity:</u> the Plaintiff Class defined above is so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.

- b. <u>Common Questions Predominate:</u> Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Class and those questions predominate 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 U.S.C. § 1692e and §1692g.
- c. <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.
- d. 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 their counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.
- e. <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.
- 18. 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 predominates 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.

19. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiff 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

- 20. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs 1-19 with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 21. Some time prior to March 22, 2018, an obligation was allegedly incurred to Middle TN State University / Tuition.
- 22. The Middle TN State University / Tuition obligation arose out of a transactions in which money, property, insurance or services, which are the subject of the transaction, are primarily for personal, family or household purposes.
- 23. The alleged Middle TN State University / Tuition obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(5).
- 24. Middle TN State University / Tuition is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(4).
- 25. Middle TN State University or a subsequent owner of the Middle TN State University/ Tuition debt contracted the Defendant to collect the alleged debt.
- 26. 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.

March 22, 2018 Collection Letter

- 27. On or about March 22, 2018, Defendant sent the Plaintiff an initial contact notice (the "Letter") regarding the alleged debt owed to Middle TN State University/Tuition. See Exhibit A.
- 28. When a debt collector solicits payment from a consumer, it shall, within five (5) days of an initial communication, send the consumer a written notice containing:
 - (1) the amount of the debt;
 - (2) the name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed;
 - (3) 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;
 - (4) a statement that if the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within the thirty-day period that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed, the debt collector will obtain verification of the debt or a copy of the judgment against the consumer and a copy of such verification or judgment will be mailed to the consumer by the debt collector; and
 - (5) a statement that, upon the consumer's written request within the thirty-day period, the debt collector will provide the consumer with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor. 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(a).
- 29. The FDCPA further provides that "if the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within the thirty day period . . . that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed . . . the debt collector shall cease collection . . . until the debt collector obtains verification of the debt . . . and a copy of such verification is mailed to the consumer by the debt collector." 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(b).

30. Although a collection letter may track the statutory language, "the collector nevertheless violates the Act if it conveys that information in a confusing or contradictory fashion so as to cloud the required message with uncertainty." Russell v. EQUIFAX A.R.S., 74 F.3d 30, 35 (2d Cir. 1996) ("It is not enough for a debt collection agency to simply include the proper debt validation notice in a mailing to a consumer-- Congress intended that such notice be clearly conveyed."). Put differently, a notice containing "language that 'overshadows or contradicts' other language informing a consumer of her rights . . . violates the Act." Russell, 74 F.3d at 34.

31. The top of the letter states:

 Principal:
 \$5,168.00

 Interest:
 \$0.00

 Other Interest:
 \$0.00

 Other Fee:
 \$0.00

 *Collection Fee:
 \$0.00

 Misc Fees:
 \$0.00

 Balance Due:
 \$5,168.00

32. Two paragraphs later the letter states:

"As of the date of this letter you owe the balance indicated above. Because of interest or other fees that may vary from day to day, the amount due on the day you pay may be greater."

- 33. It is evident from the top portion of the letter that interest or fees are not being added to Plaintiff's alleged debt balance.
- 34. Defendant is aware that during the collection of this debt the balance will not vary at all and stating that it may increase is merely a deceptive collection tactic.
- 35. The threat of a balance increase overshadows the "g-notice" language and coerces the consumer not to exert her rights under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

- 36. This language is confusing to Plaintiff since it is unclear as to whether or not the account was actually currently accruing interest.
- 37. As a result of Defendant's 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.

- 38. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs 1-37 above with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.
- 39. Defendant's debt collection efforts directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.
- 40. 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.
 - 41. Defendant violated §1692e:
 - a. As the Letter it is open to more than one reasonable interpretation, at least one of which is inaccurate.
 - b. By making a false and misleading representation in violation of §1692e(10).
- 42. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's 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. §1692g et seq.

43. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs 1-42 above with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

- 44. Defendant's 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. § 1692g.
- 45. Pursuant to 15 USC §1692g, a debt collector shall, within five (5) days after the initial communication with a consumer in connection with the collection of any debt, unless the following information is contained in the initial communication or the consumer has paid the debt, send the consumer a written notice containing:
 - 1. The amount of the debt;
 - 2. The name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed;
 - 3. 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;
 - 4. A statement that the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within thirty-day period that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed, the debt collector will obtain verification of the debt or a copy of a judgment against the consumer and a copy of such verification or judgment will be mailed to the consumer by the debt collector; and
 - 5. A statement that, upon the consumer's written request within the thirty-day period, the debt collector will provide the consumer with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor.
- 46. The Defendant violated 15 U.S.C. §1692g, threating of a balance increase, which overshadows the "g-notice" language and coerces the consumer not to exert her rights under the FDCPA.

47. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

48. 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 Tajuanna Harper, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, demands judgment from Defendant Coast Professional, Inc., as follows:

- 1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Susan S. Lafferty, 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.

Respectfully Submitted,

LAFFERTY LAW FIRM, P.C.

Dated: May 9, 2018

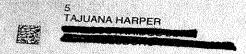
/s/ Susan S. Lafferty
Susan S. LaffertyBPR# 025961
555 Marriott Drive, Ste 315
Nashville, TN 37214
Phone: (615) 878-1926
susanl@laffertylawonline.com
Attorneys For Plaintiff

EXHIBIT A



PO BOX 2876 WEST MONROE, LA 71294-9945

Office Hours:
Monday - Thursday 9:00am to 9:00pm (CST)
Friday 9:00am to 5:30pm (CST) 1 (888) 815-2843



Account Number: 6592

RE: MIDDLE TN STATE UNIVERSITY/TUITIO

\$5,168.00 Principal: \$0.00 Interest: Other Interest: \$0.00 Other Fee: \$0.00

*Collection Fee: \$0.00 Misc Fees: \$0.00 Balance Due: \$5,168.00

TAJUANA HARPER:

Collection Agency Notice

March 22, 2018

notice is from Coast Professional, Inc. (Coast) on behalf of MIDDLE TN STATE UNIVERSITY/TUITION 1ST, the nt holder of your defaulted student debt, who has placed your account with this agency for collection.

the date of this letter you owe the balance indicated above. Because of interest or other fees that may vary from to day, the amount due on the day you pay may be greater. Coast Professional, Inc. is committed to providing stance to you in determining the best resolution to your obligation. Our consumer care staff is trained to discuss

iss you notify this office within 30 days after receiving this notice that you dispute the validity of this debt or portion thereof, this office will assume this debt is valid. If you notify this office in writing within 30 days from ication of the debt or obtain a copy of a judgment and mail you a copy of such judgment or verification. If you ress of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor.

prrespondence and Payment Address:

ast Professional, Inc.

) Box 2876

est Monroe, LA 71294

388-815-2843

Email:

CAMPUSMAIL@coastprofessional.com

Fax:

1-866-413-0904

office hours are:

Monday - Thursday 9:00am to 9:00pm (CST) Friday 9:00am to 5:30pm (CST)

is an attempt to collect a debt; and any information obtained will be used for that purpose. communication is from a debt collector.

u have a concern about the way Coast is collecting this debt, you may contact Coast in writing at the above ess, or call Coast toll-free at 1-800-963-1291.

*** Detach Lower Portion and Return with Payment ***

Balance Due: \$5,168.00 Account Number: 6592

TAJUANA HARPER

COAST PROFESSIONAL, INC. PO BOX 2876 NEST MONROE, LA 71294-9945

88) 815-2843

D 08/11/17

IMPORTANT INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND ON THE NEXT PAGE

CPS5-0019-1007814733-00106-108

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 do	ocket sheet. (SEE INSTRUC	TIONS ON NEXT PAGE O	OF THIS FO	RM.)	, <u>ī</u>		
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS	PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS Coast Professional, Inc. and John Does 1-25			
Tajuanna Harper individu	ally and on behalf of a	all others similarly s	situated	Oddi i Tolcosional	, me. and domin boos 1 2		
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Rutherford (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES) (c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number) Lafferty Law Firm, P.C. 555 Marriott Drive, Ste 315, Nashville, TN 37214 Ph: 615-878-1926				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. Attorneys (If Known)			
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II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)				II. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES (Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintij (For Diversity Cases Only) and One Box for Defendant)			
☐ 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff	t 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)			PTF DEF PTF DEF izen of This State			
☐ 2 U.S. Government Defendant	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		Citize	Citizen of Another State			
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IV. NATURE OF SUIT							
□ 110 Insurance □ 120 Marine □ 130 Miller Act □ 140 Negotiable Instrument □ 150 Recovery of Overpayment	PERSONAL INJURY □ 310 Airplane □ 315 Airplane Product Liability □ 320 Assault, Libel &	PERSONAL INJUR 365 Personal Injury - Product Liability 367 Health Care/ Pharmaceutical Personal Injury Product Liability 368 Asbestos Personal Injury Product Liability 368 Asbestos Personal Injury Product Liability PERSONAL PROPEI 370 Other Fraud 371 Truth in Lending 380 Other Personal Property Damage Product Liability PRISONER PETITIO Habeas Corpus: 463 Alien Detainee 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence 530 General 535 Death Penalty Other: 540 Mandamus & Oth 550 Civil Rights 555 Prison Condition 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of	1	DRFEITURE/PENALTY 5 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881 0 Other LABOR 0 Fair Labor Standards Act 0 Labor/Management Relations 0 Railway Labor Act 1 Family and Medical Leave Act 0 Other Labor Litigation 1 Employee Retirement Income Security Act IMMIGRATION 2 Naturalization Application 5 Other Immigration Actions	BANKRUPTCY □ 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 □ 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157 PROPERTY RIGHTS □ 820 Copyrights □ 840 Trademark SOCIAL SECURITY □ 861 HIA (1395ff) □ 862 Black Lung (923) □ 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) □ 864 SSID Title XVI □ 865 RSI (405(g)) FEDERAL TAX SUITS □ 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant) □ 871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609	OTHER STATUTES □ 375 False Claims Act □ 376 Qui Tam (31 USC	
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VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	D IN			EMAND \$ CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint: JURY DEMAND: Yes □ No			
VIII. RELATED CASI IF ANY	(See instructions):	JUDGE			DOCKET NUMBER		
DATE		SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF RECORD					
05/09/2018	/s/ Susan S. Lafferty						
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