UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN MILWAUKEE DIVISION

MELISSA HIRTHE, Individually and on Behalf) Case No.: 16-cv-1385
of All Others Similarly Situated,) CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT
Plaintiff,))
VS.	Ś
) Jury Trial Demanded
ALLIANCE ONE RECEIVABLES	
MANAGEMENT, INC.,))
Defendant.))

INTRODUCTION

1. This class action seeks redress for collection practices that violate the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.* (the "FDCPA").

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2. The court has jurisdiction to grant the relief sought by the Plaintiffs pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k and 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1337. Venue in this District is proper in that Defendant directed its collection efforts into the District.

PARTIES

- 3. Plaintiff Melissa Hirthe is an individual who resides in the Eastern District of Wisconsin (Milwaukee County).
- 4. Plaintiff is a "consumer" as defined in the FDCPA, 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3), in that Defendant sought to collect from her a debt allegedly incurred for personal, family or household purposes.
- 5. Defendant Alliance One Receivables Management, Inc. ("AOR") is a debt collection agency with its principal place of business located at 4850 E Street Road, Suite 300, Trevose, PA 19053.

- 6. AOR is engaged in the business of a collection agency, using the mails and telephone to collect consumer debts originally owed to others.
- 7. AOR is engaged in the business of collecting debts owed to others and incurred for personal, family or household purposes. AOR is a debt collector as defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692a.

FACTS

- 8. On or about January 29, 2016, AOR mailed a debt collection letter to Plaintiff regarding an alleged debt, allegedly owed to TD Bank USA, N.A. ("TD Bank"). A copy of this letter is attached to this complaint as <u>Exhibit A</u>.
- 9. The debt referenced in Exhibit A was a personal, Target-branded credit card account that Plaintiff opened and used only for personal, family or household purposes, including but not limited to the purchase of goods and services for personal use.
- 10. Upon information and belief, <u>Exhibit A</u> is a form letter, generated by computer, and with the information specific to Plaintiff inserted by computer.
- 11. Upon information and belief, <u>Exhibit A</u> is a form debt collection letter used by AOR to attempt to collect alleged debts.
- 12. <u>Exhibit A</u> was the first letter that AOR sent to Plaintiff with respect to Plaintiff's alleged TD Bank debt.
- 13. Exhibit A contains multiple contradictory and confusing statements of the amount that AOR was attempting to collect from Plaintiff the "amount of the debt." 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(1).
 - 14. Exhibit A contains the following text:

Our Client, TD Bank USA, N.A., has referred your Target Credit Card account to our office. All further communication should be directed to this office. Any correspondence for this account should be mailed to 4850 Street Rd. Suite 300, Trevose, PA 19053.

The full balance as of January 29, 2016 is \$3190.30.

Payment of \$387.00 by 02/25/2016 will bring your account current and will stop collections on the account.

- 15. However, Exhibit A also contains multiple statements that the unsophisticated consumer would interpret to mean that AOR is collecting the entire balance of the Target credit card, not just the \$387.00 that was allegedly delinquent.
- 16. The section immediately after the language identified in paragraph 14 states as follows:

Alternatively, you may mail the *balance in full* to Target Card Services at the address provided below.

(emphasis added).

- 17. The alleged debt here is an unsecured credit card account. Upon information and belief, TD Bank, the issuer of Target-branded credit cards, would accept any payment of any amount at any time on Plaintiff's account.
 - 18. Exhibit A also states:

As of the date of this letter, you owe \$3190.30. Your account balance may be periodically increased due to the addition of accrued interest or other charges if so provided in your agreement with your original creditor.

- 19. Further, Exhibit A instructs the consumer to "Detach Bottom Portion And Return With Payment", and includes a scissors graphic and a dashed-line to indicate the edge of the "bottom portion."
- 20. The bottom portion of Exhibit A states that the "Balance" of the debt is "\$3190.30."
- 21. The Seventh Circuit held in *Barnes v. Advanced Call Ctr. Techs.*, *LLC*, 493 F.3d 838, 840 (7th Cir. 2007), that "only the past due amount, the amount owed [to the debt collector],

can be the 'amount of the debt' under § 809(a)(1)." If AOR is truly collecting only the past-due amount of \$387.00, it need only state that amount in the letter.

- 22. The different amounts on <u>Exhibit A</u> render <u>Exhibit A</u> confusing to the unsophisticated consumer, who would not be able to determine, or would be confused as to, which amount AOR was actually attempting to collect.
 - 23. Plaintiff was confused by Exhibit A.
- 24. Plaintiff had to spend time and money investigating <u>Exhibit A</u>, and the consequences of any potential responses to Exhibit A.
- 25. Plaintiff had to take time to obtain and meet with counsel, including traveling to counsel's office by car and its related expenses, including but not limited to the cost of gasoline and mileage, to advise Plaintiff on the consequences of <u>Exhibit A</u>.
- 26. The FDCPA creates substantive rights for consumers; violations cause injury to consumers, and such injuries are concrete and particularized. *Quinn v. Specialized Loan Servicing, LLC*, No. 16 C 2021, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 107299 *8-13 (N.D. Ill. Aug. 11, 2016) (rejecting challenge to Plaintiff's standing based upon alleged FDCPA statutory violation); *Lane v. Bayview Loan Servicing, LLC*, No. 15 C 10446, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 89258 *9-10 (N.D. Ill. July 11, 2016) ("When a federal statute is violated, and especially when Congress has created a cause of action for its violation, by definition Congress has created a legally protected interest that it deems important enough for a lawsuit."); *Church v. Accretive Health, Inc.*, No. 15-15708, 2016 U.S. App. LEXIS 12414 *7-11 (11th Cir. July 6, 2016) (same); *see also Mogg v. Jacobs*, No. 15-CV-1142-JPG-DGW, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 33229, 2016 WL 1029396, at *5 (S.D. Ill. Mar. 15, 2016) ("Congress does have the power to enact statutes creating legal rights, the invasion of which creates standing, even though no injury would exist without the statute,"

(quoting *Sterk v. Redbox Automated Retail, LLC*, 770 F.3d 618, 623 (7th Cir. 2014)). For this reason, and to encourage consumers to bring FDCPA actions, Congress authorized an award of statutory damages for violations. 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(a).Moreover, Congress has explicitly described the FDCPA as regulating "abusive practices" in debt collection. 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(a) – 1692(e). Any person who receives a debt collection letter containing a violation of the FDCPA is a victim of abusive practices. *See* 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(e) ("It is the purpose of this subchapter to eliminate abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors, to insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged, and to promote consistent State action to protect consumers against debt collection abuses").

27. Moreover, Congress has explicitly described the FDCPA as regulating "abusive practices" in debt collection. 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(a) – 1692(e). Any person who receives a debt collection letter containing a violation of the FDCPA is a victim of abusive practices. *See* 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(e) ("It is the purpose of this subchapter to eliminate abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors, to insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged, and to promote consistent State action to protect consumers against debt collection abuses").

COUNT I - FDCPA

- 28. Plaintiff incorporates by reference as if fully set forth herein the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs of this Complaint.
- 29. AOR represented the amount of the debt that AOR was attempting to collect in a confusing manner by stating multiple, different amounts that AOR was attempting to collect. Exhibit A.

- 30. The unsophisticated consumer would be confused as to whether AOR was attempting to collect the entire \$3190.30 balance or only \$387.00.
- 31. AOR's conduct violates 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692e(2)(a), 1692e(10), 1692(f) and 1692g(a)(1).

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

- 32. Plaintiff brings this action on behalf of a class consisting of (a) all natural persons in the State of Wisconsin (b) who were sent a collection letter in the form represented by Exhibit A to the complaint in this action, (c) seeking to collect a debt for personal, family or household purposes, (d) between October 14, 2015 and October 14, 2016, inclusive, (e) that was not returned by the postal service.
- 33. The Class is so numerous that joinder is impracticable. On information and belief, there are more than 50 members of the Class.
- 34. There are questions of law and fact common to the members of each class, which common questions predominate over any questions that affect only individual class members. The predominant common question is whether the Defendant complied with 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, 1692f, and 1692g.
- 35. Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class members. All are based on the same factual and legal theories.
- 36. Plaintiff will fairly and adequately represent the interests of the Class members. Plaintiff has retained counsel experienced in consumer credit and debt collection abuse cases.
- 37. A class action is superior to other alternative methods of adjudicating this dispute. Individual cases are not economically feasible.

JURY DEMAND

38. Plaintiff hereby demands a trial by jury.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff requests that the Court enter judgment in favor of Plaintiff and the Class and against Defendant for:

- (a) actual damages;
- (b) statutory damages;
- (c) attorneys' fees, litigation expenses and costs of suit; and
- (d) such other or further relief as the Court deems proper.

Dated: October 14, 2016

ADEMI & O'REILLY, LLP

By: /s/ John D. Blythin
Shpetim Ademi (SBN 1026973)
John D. Blythin (SBN 1046105)
Mark A. Eldridge (SBN 1089944)
Denise L. Morris (SBN 1097911)
3620 East Layton Avenue
Cudahy, WI 53110
(414) 482-8000
(414) 482-8001 (fax)
sademi@ademilaw.com
jblythin@ademilaw.com
meldridge@ademilaw.com
dmorris@ademilaw.com

EXHIBIT A

Telephone: 866-853-5560

January 29, 2016

Name: MELISSA A HIRTHE

Issuer Reference Number:

Issuer: TD Bank USA, N.A.

Your past-due account has been referred to our office for collections.

Our Client, TD Bank USA, N.A., has referred your Target Credit Card account to our office. All further communication should be directed to this office. Any correspondence for this account should be mailed to 4850 Street Rd. Suite 300, Trevose, PA 19053.

The full balance as of January 29, 2016 is \$3190.30.

Payment of \$387.00 by 02/25/2016 will bring your account current and will stop collections on the account.

Alternatively, you may mail the balance in full to Target Card Services at the address provided below. If you are experiencing financial difficulties, call our office (866-853-5560) and a representative will assist you in negotiating a suitable arrangement.

Please note that providing the options in the preceding paragraph does not affect or diminish your rights as stated below, including your right to dispute the validity of all or any portion of the debt and to request information about the original creditor. PLEASE READ CAREFULLY ALL OF THE IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES PROVIDED BELOW.

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

As of the date of this letter, you owe \$3190.30. Your account balance may be periodically increased due to the addition of accrued interest or other charges if so provided in your agreement with your original creditor.

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

This collection agency is licensed by the Division of Banking in the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions, www.wdfi.org.

>< Detach Bottom Portion And Return With Payment ><

S: 114156-L: 3776-O: TNR-VIS3-3776-236

PO Box 1259 Dept. 114164

Oaks, PA 19456

★ Mail return address only; send no letters

To contact us regarding your account, call: 866-853-5560



	Regarding	
TARGET	CARD SERV	ICES
Issuer Reference Number	Balance	Amount Enclosed
1760	\$3190.30	\$.

Please make check or money order payable to:

Ունգերինի «Երևինինի թումինի անգերիկին «Ո



MELISSA A HIRTHE 327 W ARMOUR AVE MILWAUKEE WI 53207-5827 Target Card Services PO Box 660170 Dallas, TX. 75266-0170

լիդոինիսկնուգիիվինիությեինիորիովիկիսուհյլիդուհիդի

TNR 0000**08**

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 docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE REVERSE OF THE FORM.)

Place an X in the appropriate	Box: Green Bay Division	•	☑ Milwaukee Division			
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS			
Melissa Hirthe		Alliar	Alliance One Receivables Management, Inc.			
` '	e of First Listed Plaintiff EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)		Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES) (E: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, ULAND INVOLVED.			
Ademi & O'Reilly, LLP,	2, Address, and Telephone Number) 3620 E. Layton Ave., Cudahy, WI 53110	Attorneys	(If Known)			
	ne (414) 482-8001-Facsimile			~		
II. BASIS OF JURISI	OICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only) 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)	(For Diversity (PTF DEF	and One Box for Defendant) PTF DEF Principal Place		
2 U.S. Government Defendant	4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III	Citizen of Another S	tate 2 2 Incorporated and			
		Citizen or Subject of Foreign Country	a 3 Foreign Nation	6 6		
IV. NATURE OF SUI	T (Place an "X" in One Box Only) TORTS	FORFEITURE/I	PENALTY BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES		
□ 110 Insurance □ 120 Marine □ 130 Miller Act □ 140 Negotiable Instrument □ 150 Recovery of Overpayment Æ Enforcement of Judgment □ 151 Medicare Act □ 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excl. Veterans) □ 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits □ 160 Stockholders' Suits □ 190 Other Contract □ 195 Contract Product Liability 196 Franchise ■ REAL PROPERTY □ 210 Land Condemnation □ 220 Foreclosure □ 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment □ 240 Torts to Land □ 245 Tort Product Liability □ 290 All Other Real Property			Seizure	□ 400 State Reapportionment □ 410 Antitrust □ 430 Banks and Banking □ 450 Commerce □ 460 Deportation □ 470 Racketeer Influenced and □ Corrupt Organizations ☑ 480 Consumer Credit □ 490 Cable/Sat TV □ 810 Selective Service □ 850 Securities/Commodities/ □ Exchange □ 875 Customer Challenge □ 12 USC 3410 □ 890 Other Statutory Actions □ 891 Agricultural Acts □ 892 Economic Stabilization Act □ 893 Environmental Matters □ 894 Energy Allocation Act □ 895 Freedom of Information □ Act □ 900 Appeal of Fee Determination □ Under Equal Access □ to Justice □ 950 Constitutionality of State Statutes		
☑ 1 Original ☐ 2 R	an "X" in One Box Only) emoved from	4 Reinstated or Reopened	(specify) Litigation	on Judgment		
VI. CAUSE OF ACTI	ON Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which y 15 U.S.C. 1692 et seq Brief description of cause: Violation of Fair Debt Collection Practices		purisuictional statutes unless diversity	J.		
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACT UNDER F.R.C.P. 23	ION DEMAND \$	CHECK YES onl JURY DEMANI	y if demanded in complaint: D: ☑ Yes ☐ No		
VIII. RELATED CAS IF ANY	(See instructions): JUDGE		DOCKET NUMBER			
DATE	SIGNATURE O	F ATTORNEY OF RECORD				
October 14, 201	6 s/ John I	D. Blythin				
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY						

- AMOUNT APPLYING IFP JUDGE JUDGE MAG JUDGE AMOUNT 1-2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET FORM JS 44

Authority For Civil Cover Sheet

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and service of pleading 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. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. The attorney filing a case should complete the form as follows:

- I. (a) Plaintiffs-Defendants. Enter names (last, first, middle initial) of plaintiff and defendant. If the plaintiff or defendant is a government agency, use only the full name or standard abbreviations. If the plaintiff or defendant is an official within a government agency, identify first the agency and then the official, giving both name and title.
- (b) County of Residence. For each civil case filed, except U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county where the first listed plaintiff resides at the time of filing. In U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county in which the first listed defendant resides at the time of filing. (NOTE: In land condemnation cases, the county of residence of the "defendant" is the location of the tract of land involved.)
- (c) Attorneys. Enter the firm name, address, telephone number, and attorney of record. If there are several attorneys, list them on an attachment, noting in this section "(see attachment)".
- **II. Jurisdiction**. The basis of jurisdiction is set forth under Rule 8(a), F.R.C.P., which requires that jurisdictions be shown in pleadings. Place an "X" in one of the boxes. If there is more than one basis of jurisdiction, precedence is given in the order shown below.

United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here.

United States defendant. (2) When the plaintiff is suing the United States, its officers or agencies, place an "X" in this box.

Federal question. (3) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1331, where jurisdiction arises under the Constitution of the United States, an amendment to the Constitution, an act of Congress or a treaty of the United States. In cases where the U.S. is a party, the U.S. plaintiff or defendant code takes precedence, and box 1 or 2 should be marked.

Diversity of citizenship. (4) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1332, where parties are citizens of different states. When Box 4 is checked, the citizenship of the different parties must be checked. (See Section III below; federal question actions take precedence over diversity cases.)

- III. Residence (citizenship) of Principal Parties. This section of the JS 44 is to be completed if diversity of citizenship was indicated above. Mark this section for each principal party.
- IV. Nature of Suit. Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If the nature of suit cannot be determined, be sure the cause of action, in Section VI below, is sufficient to enable the deputy clerk or the statistical clerks in the Administrative Office to determine the nature of suit. If the cause fits more than one nature of suit, select the most definitive.
- V. Origin. Place an "X" in one of the seven boxes.

Original Proceedings. (1) Cases which originate in the United States district courts.

Removed from State Court. (2) Proceedings initiated in state courts may be removed to the district courts under Title 28 U.S.C., Section 1441. When the petition for removal is granted, check this box.

Remanded from Appellate Court. (3) Check this box for cases remanded to the district court for further action. Use the date of remand as the filing date.

Reinstated or Reopened. (4) Check this box for cases reinstated or reopened in the district court. Use the reopening date as the filing date.

Transferred from Another District. (5) For cases transferred under Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1404(a). Do not use this for within district transfers or multidistrict litigation transfers.

Multidistrict Litigation. (6) Check this box when a multidistrict case is transferred into the district under authority of Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1407. When this box is checked, do not check (5) above.

Appeal to District Judge from Magistrate Judgment. (7) Check this box for an appeal from a magistrate judge's decision.

VI. Cause of Action. Report the civil statute directly related to the cause of action and give a brief description of the cause. Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity. Example:

U.S. Civil Statute: 47 USC 553

Brief Description: Unauthorized reception of cable service

VII. Requested in Complaint. Class Action. Place an "X" in this box if you are filing a class action under Rule 23, F.R.Cv.P.

Demand. In this space enter the dollar amount (in thousands of dollars) being demanded or indicate other demand such as a preliminary injunction.

Jury Demand. Check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not a jury is being demanded.

VIII. Related Cases. This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases if any. If there are related pending cases, insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judge names for such cases.

Date and Attorney Signature. Date and sign the civil cover sheet.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Eastern District of Wisconsin

MELISSA HIRTHE)
Plaintiff)
v.	Civil Action No. 16-cv-1385
ALLIANCE ONE RECEIVABLES MANAGEMENT, INC.)
Defendant)
SUMM	ONS IN A CIVIL ACTION
To: (Defendant's name and address) ALLIANCE ONE 1 c/o CT CORPORA 8020 Excelsior Dr., Madison, WI 5371	TION SYSTEM , Ste. 200
are the United States or a United States agency, or P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaint	Avenue
If you fail to respond, judgment by defaul You also must file your answer or motion with the	It will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. e court.
	CLERK OF COURT
Date:	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk
	2.6

Civil Action No. 16-cv-1385

PROOF OF SERVICE

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

	This summons for (nan	ne of individual and title, if any)			
was re	ceived by me on (date)	·			
	☐ I personally served	the summons on the individual at	t (place)		
			on (date)	; or	
	☐ I left the summons	at the individual's residence or us	sual place of abode with (name)		
		, a person of	f suitable age and discretion who resid	des there,	
	on (date)	, and mailed a copy to th	ne individual's last known address; or		
	☐ I served the summo	ons on (name of individual)		, wh	o is
	designated by law to a	accept service of process on behal	f of (name of organization)		
			on (date)	; or	
	☐ I returned the summ	nons unexecuted because			; or
	☐ Other (specify):				
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a total of \$	0.00	
	I declare under penalty	y of perjury that this information i	s true.		
Date:					
			Server's signature		
			Printed name and title		
			Server's address		

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

Save As...

ClassAction.org

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>AllianceOne Receivables Management Sued Over Debt Collection Practices</u>