UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

POLINA KORCHAGINA, on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated,

Plaintiffs,

-against-

FMA ALLIANCE, LTD.,

Defendant.

CIVIL ACTION

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT AND DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff POLINA KORCHAGINA (hereinafter, "Plaintiff"), a New York resident, brings this class action complaint by and through her attorneys, Daniel Cohen, PLLC, against Defendants FMA ALLIANCE, LTD. (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).
- Upon information and belief, Defendant's principal place of business is located in Houston,
 Texas.
- 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 U.S. Bank National Association (US Bank), 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 POLINA KORCHAGINA

- 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 US Bank.
- 17. On or about July 12, 2017, 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, "Please send all payments or correspondence to:" and then provided a mailing address.

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 "Please send all payments or correspondence 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). ¹

¹ 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, "Please send all payments or correspondence 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, "Please send all payments or correspondence 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 Daniel Cohen, PLLC, 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: <u>/s/ Daniel Cohen</u>
Daniel Cohen, Esq.

Daniel Cohen, PLLC

300 Cadman Plaza W, 12th floor Brooklyn, New York 11201

Phone: (646) 645-8482 Fax: (347) 665-1545 Email: Dan@dccohen.com Attorneys 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/ Daniel Cohen
Daniel Cohen, Esq.

Dated: Brooklyn, New York

November 28, 2017

JS 44 (Rev. 06/17)

Case 1:17-cv-06934 Document 2-1-1-28/17 Page 1 of 2 PageID #: 11

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 de	ocket sheet. (SEE INSTRUC	TIONS ON NEXT PAGE O	F THIS FO	RM.)	, 1				
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS						
PAULA KORCHAGINA, on behalf of herself and all others similarl situated									
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Queens				County of Residence of First Listed Defendant					
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(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, A	Address, and Telephone Numbe	r)		Attorneys (If Known)					
DANIEL COHEN PLLC, ((646) 645-8482	300 Cadman Plz W, 12	2 Fl, Brooklyn, NY 1	11201,						
II. BASIS OF JURISDI	ICTION (Place an "X" in O	ne Box Only)		TIZENSHIP OF P. (For Diversity Cases Only)	RINCIPA	L PARTIES	(Place an "X" in and One Box for	-	
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2 U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)		Citize	Citizen of Another State				□ 5	
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& Enforcement of Judgment 151 Medicare Act	Slander ☐ 330 Federal Employers'	Personal Injury Product Liability			☐ 820 Copy ☐ 830 Pater		 □ 430 Banks ar □ 450 Commer 		
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTION	Brief description of ca	use:							
VII. REQUESTED IN		IS A CLASS ACTION	ı D	EMAND \$		CHECK YES only	if demanded in	complaint	
COMPLAINT:	UNDER RULE 2		, D.	Είντι το ψ		URY DEMAND:		□No	•
VIII. RELATED CASI	E(S)								
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11/28/2017 FOR OFFICE USE ONLY		/3/ Dalliel Colle	<i>/</i> 11						
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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, DANIEL C	counsel for PLAINTIFF, do hereby certify that the above captioned civil action is for compulsory arbitration for the following reason(s):				
	monetary damages sought are in excess of \$150,000, exclusive of interest and costs,				
[☐ the complaint seeks injunctive relief,				
[Question of law rather than question of fact predominates DISCLOSURE STATEMENT - FEDERAL RULES CIVIL PROCEDURE 7.1				
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 the because the same judge case: (A) is	all cases 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) at "A civil case is "related" to another civil case for purposes of this guideline when, because of the similarity of facts and legal issues or e cases arise from the same transactions or events, a substantial saving of judicial resources is likely to result from assigning both cases to the and magistrate judge." Rule 50.3.1 (b) provides that "A civil case shall not be deemed "related" to another civil case merely because the civil avolves identical legal issues, or (B) involves the same parties." Rule 50.3.1 (c) further provides that "Presumptively, and subject to the power to determine 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)				
	s the civil action being filed in the Eastern District removed from a New York State Court located in Nassau or Suffolk County: NO				
	f you answered "no" above:) Did the events or omissions giving rise to the claim or claims, or a substantial part thereof, occur in Nassau or Suffolk County? NO				
	District? YES				
	swer to question 2 (b) is "No," does the defendant (or a majority of the defendants, if there is more than one) reside in Nassau or ounty, or, in an interpleader action, does the claimant (or a majority of the claimants, if there is more than one) reside in Nassau County?				
BAR ADMISSION					
I am curre	ently admitted in the Eastern District of New York and currently a member in good standing of the bar of this court. No				
Are you currently 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/ Daniel Cohen

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Eastern Dis	trict of New York
POLINA KORCHAGINA, on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated,)))
Plaintiff(s) v. FMA ALLIANCE, LTD.	Civil Action No.
Defendant(s))
SUMMONS I	N A CIVIL ACTION
To: (Defendant's name and address) FMA ALLIANCE, LTD. C/O CT CORPORATION 111 EIGHTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NEW YORK	
A lawsuit has been filed against you.	
are the United States or a United States agency, or an off P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an a	VEST
If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be You also must file your answer or motion with the court.	be 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))

was rec	This summons for (neeived by me on (date)	ame of individual and title, if an	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·						
	☐ I personally serve	ed the summons on the ind							
			on (date)	; or					
	☐ I left the summons at the individual's residence or usual place of abode with (name)								
	, a person of suitable age and discretion who resides there, on (date), and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or								
	☐ I served the summons on (name of individual) , v								
	designated by law to accept service of process on behalf of (name of organization)								
			on (date)	; or					
	☐ I returned the sun	nmons unexecuted because			; or				
	☐ Other (specify):								
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a tota	nl of \$().00 .				
	I declare under pena	lty of perjury that this info	rmation is true.						
Date:									
			Server's signature						
		_	Printed name and title	,					
		_	Server's address						

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:



ACCOUNT INFORMATION

Personal & Confidential 07/12/2017

Creditor: U.S. Bank National Association

Account #: XXXXXXXXXXXX3689

File#: 7077 Total Balance Due: \$5774.98

Balance owed as of charge-off: \$5,774.98 Total interest accrued since charge-off: \$0.00

Total non-interest charges or fees accrued since charge-off: \$0.00

Total payments since charge-off: \$0.00

FMA Alliance, Ltd. 12339 Cutten Road, Houston, TX 77066 888-327-9126 A different kind of collection experience!

MA knows - if you had the money to pay off the balance, you would. We understand repaying your debt isn't easy in today's conomy. FMA is here to help create a win-win solution to resolve this debt. Experience the FMA difference!







Simple! Fast! Secure! Available 24 hours/365 days!
Pay on-line at www.PayFma.com
No conversations and no interactions with a live person when online.
us our professionally trained staff is here to assist you on the phone. Our hours of operation are Monday - Saturday 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM Central Time.



Scan here to access www.PayFma.com Mobile data rates may apply.

Pay Online Login Information Username: 356 Pin: 776 Password: 7

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

otice About Electronic Check Conversion: When you provide a check as payment, you authorize us either to use information from our check to make a one-time electronic fund transfer from your account or to process the payment as a check transaction. When a use information from your check to make an electronic fund transfer, funds may be withdrawn from your account as soon as the time day we receive your payment and you will not receive your check back from your financial institution.

See important information on the reverse side.

This has been sent to you by a debt collector.

This is an attempt to collect a debt. Any information obtained will be used for that purpose.

*** Please detach and return lower portion with payment *** 888-327-9126

FMBB1000-0713-891042409-00061-61

DEPT 287 3353723417076 PO BOX 4115 CONCORD CA 94524



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

#BWNFTZF #FMB3353723417076#



POLINA KORCHAGINA



FLUSHING NY 11354-3263

Make your check payable to FMA Alliance, Ltd.

Amount Paid: \$_____

Account #: XXXXXXXXXXXXX3689 Creditor: U.S. Bank National Association

Please send all payments or correspondence to:

FMA Alliance, Ltd. P.O. Box 2409 Houston, TX 77252-2409

ClassAction.org

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: FMA Alliance Accused of Denying Consumers FDCPA Dispute Rights