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

PATRICIA MERKOVICH, Individually and on) Case No.: 16-cv-1408
Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,) CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT
Plaintiff,))
V.)
ENCORE RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT, INC.,) Jury Trial Demanded)))
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 Plaintiff 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 Patricia Merkovich 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 Defendants sought to collect from Plaintiff a debt allegedly incurred for personal, family or household purposes, namely a personal credit card account.
- 5. Defendant Encore Receivable Management, Inc. ("Encore") is a foreign corporation with its principal place of business located at 400 N Rogers Rd, Olathe, KS 66062.
 - 6. Encore does substantial business in Wisconsin.

- 7. Encore is engaged in the business of a collection agency, using the mails and telephone to collect consumer debts originally owed to others.
- 8. Encore is engaged in the business of collecting debts owed to others and incurred for personal, family or household purposes. Encore is a debt collector as defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692a and Wis. Stat § 427.103(3).

FACTS

- 9. On or about November 30, 2015, Encore mailed a debt collection letter to Plaintiff regarding an alleged debt owed to Synchrony Bank ("Synchrony"). A copy of this letter is attached to this complaint as Exhibit A.
- 10. The alleged debt Encore was collecting from Plaintiff was a Steinhafels credit account, originated and serviced by Synchrony.
- 11. 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.
- 12. Exhibit B identifies both a "TOTAL ACCOUNT BALANCE" of \$1,024.00 and a "TOTAL AMOUNT DUE" of \$434.00.
 - 13. Exhibit B also states:

The above referenced account has been referred to our office for collection. Previous attempts have been made by the creditor to obtain payment of this debt. As of this date, those attempts have not been successful.

Note: As of the date of this letter, your Total Account Balance is \$1,024.00 of which \$434.00 represents the Total Amount Due. Your Total Account Balance and Total Amount Due on the day you pay may be greater than the current balance listed above as a result of finance charges, late fees or other fees imposed on your account from day to day as outlined in the terms of your account and your account agreement. For further information, call or write us.

- 14. The two different amounts on Exhibit A render Exhibit A confusing to the unsophisticated consumer, who would not be able to determine which amount Encore was actually attempting to collect.
- 15. The unsophisticated consumer would be confused as to whether the debt had been accelerated.

- 16. 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 Encore is truly collecting only the "Total Amount Due" of \$434.00, it need only state that amount in the letter.
- 17. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e generally prohibits "any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt."
- 18. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(a) specifically prohibits "The false representation of the character, amount, or legal status of any debt."
- 19. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(10) specifically prohibits the "use of any false representation or deceptive means to collect or attempt to collect any debt."
- 20. 15 U.S.C. § 1692f generally prohibits a debt collector from using "unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect any debt."
 - 21. Plaintiff was confused by Exhibit A.
- 22. Plaintiff had to spend time and money investigating <u>Exhibit A</u>, and the consequences of any potential responses to <u>Exhibit A</u>.
- 23. 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>.
- 24. 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).

25. 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

- 26. Plaintiff incorporates by reference as if fully set forth herein the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs of this Complaint.
- 27. Encore represented the amount of the debt that Encore was attempting to collect in a confusing manner by stating both the "Total Account Balance" and a "Total Amount Due" and stating the "account" had been referred to Encore. Exhibit A.

- 28. The unsophisticated consumer would not be able to determine whether the entire balance had been accelerated, or whether Encore was attempting to collect only the "amount due."
- 29. Encore's attempts to collect the class members' accounts were false, misleading and confusing representations, and were also an unfair and unconscionable means of collecting a debt.
 - 30. Encore's conduct violates 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692e(10) and 1692(f).

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

- 31. 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 of Exhibit A, (c) for an alleged debt incurred for personal, family or household purposes, (d) on or after October 19, 2015, and up to and including October 19, 2016, (g) that were not returned by the postal service.
- 32. The Class is so numerous that joinder is impracticable. Upon information and belief, there are more than 50 members of the Class.
- 33. There are questions of law and fact common to the members of the class, which common questions predominate over any questions that affect only individual class members. The predominant common question is whether Exhibit A violates the FDCPA.
- 34. Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class members. All are based on the same factual and legal theories.
- 35. 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.

36. A class action is superior to other alternative methods of adjudicating this dispute. Individual cases are not economically feasible.

JURY DEMAND

37. 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 19, 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

P.O. Box 48458 Oak Park, MI 48237

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



400 N Rogers Rd * PO Box 3330 * Olathe KS 66063-3330 Telephone: 866-247-1087

November 30 2015

Creditor:

Re:
For Account Ending in:
Encore Account #:
Total Account Balance:
Total Amount Due:

Synchrony Bank STEINHAFEL'S

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX0073

9360 \$1,024.00 \$434.00

CONV0400-WI 102069090319210

PATRICIA A MERKOVICH 249 N CHICAGO AVE APT 5 SOUTH MILWAUKEE WI 53172-1269

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Dear PATRICIA A MERKOVICH:

The above referenced account has been referred to our office for collection. Previous attempts have been made by the creditor to obtain payment of this debt. As of this date, those attempts have not been successful.

Note: As of the date of this letter, your Total Account Balance is \$1,024.00 of which \$434.00 represents the Total Amount Due. Your Total Account Balance and Total Amount Due on the day you pay may be greater than the current balance listed above as a result of finance charges, late fees or other fees imposed on your account from day to day as outlined in the terms of your account and your account agreement. For further information, call or write us.

Please detach the lower portion of this notice and return with your payment in the enclosed envelope or call us at the above number if you would like to make a payment using a check by telephone. You can also log on and pay at www.mysynchrony.com.

Note: If payment has already been made, please notify this office at 866-247-1087 or by writing to Encore at the address listed 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 the validity of 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.

This communication is from a debt collector and is an attempt to collect a debt. 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

(QESP)40:T012:003184:001:1000:15334:CL58:CONV117:01:

*** Detach Lower Portion and Return With Payment ***

Creditor:

Re:

For Account Ending in:

Encore Account #:
Total Account Balance:

Total Amount Due:

Synchrony Bank STEINHAFEL'S

9360

\$1,024.00 \$434.00

CONV0400-WI

PATRICIA A MERKOVICH 249 N CHICAGO AVE APT 5 SOUTH MILWAUKEE WI 53172-1269

STEINHAFEL'S P.O. Box 960061 Orlando FL 32896-0061

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		DEFE	DEFENDANTS		
Patricia Merkovich		Enc	Encore Receivable Management, Inc.		
•	e of First Listed Plaintiff Milwaukee EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)		of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CAS NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES LAND INVOLVED.		
Ademi & O'Reilly, LLP,	e, Address, and Telephone Number) 3620 E. Layton Ave., Cudahy, WI 53110 ne (414) 482-8001-Facsimile	Attorne	eys (If Known)		
II. BASIS OF JURISI	OICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)	III. CITIZENS	SHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTI	ES(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff	
U.S. Government Plaintiff	3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)	(For Diversi	ity Cases Only) PTF DEF tate 1 1 Incorporated a of Business In	and One Box for Defendant) PTF DEF or Principal Place	
2 U.S. Government Defendant	4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)	Citizen of Anothe	<u> </u>	and Principal Place 5 5 5 s In Another State	
		Citizen or Subject Foreign Countr		n 6 6 6	
IV. NATURE OF SUI	T (Place an "X" in One Box Only)				
CONTRACT	TORTS	FORFEITUR		OTHER STATUTES	
☐ 110 Insurance ☐ 120 Marine ☐ 130 Miller Act ☐ 140 Negotiable Instrument ☐ 150 Recovery of Overpayment				890 Other Statutory Actions 891 Agricultural Acts 892 Economic Stabilization Act	
☑ 1 Original ☐ 2 R	an "X" in One Box Only) emoved from	4 Reinstated or Reopened	(specify) Litiga	ition — Magistrate Judgment	
VI. CAUSE OF ACTI	ON Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you 15 U.S.C. 1692 et seq Brief description of cause: Violation of Fair Debt Collection Practices Ad	-	te jurisdictional statutes unless diversi	ity):	
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION UNDER F.R.C.P. 23	ON DEMAND S	\$ CHECK YES O JURY DEMA	only if demanded in complaint: ND: Yes No	
VIII. RELATED CAS IF ANY	(See instructions): JUDGE		DOCKET NUMBER		
DATE		ATTORNEY OF RECOR	.D		
October 19, 2016 s/ John D. Blythin					
TOR OFFICE USE UNLI					

- Case 2:16-cv-01408-JPS Filed 10/19/16 Page 1 of 2 Document 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

		`	
PATRICIA MERI	KOVICH))	
Plaintiff)	16 1400
V.) Civil Action No.	16-cv-1408
ENCORE RECEIVABLE MA	NAGEMENT, INC.)	
Defendant)	
	SUMMONS IN A	A CIVIL ACTION	
To: (Defendant's name and address)	ENCORE RECEIVABLE MA c/o C T CORPORATION SY 8020 Excelsior Dr. Ste. 200 Madison, WI 53717		
A lawsuit has been filed against you. Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are: John D. Blythin ADEMI & O'REILLY, LLP 3620 E. LAYTON AVE. CUDAHY, WI 53110			
If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.			
		CLERK OF C	COURT
Date:			
<u> </u>		Sig	nature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

Civil Action No. 16-cv-1408

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...

Reset

ClassAction.org

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: FDCPA Lawsuit Filed Against Encore Receivable Management