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

JEFFREY MERKOVICH, Individually and on) Case No.: 17-cv-58) CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT		
Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,			
Plaintiff,			
VS.	ý		
UNITED COLLECTION BUREAU, 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 Jeffrey 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 Defendant sought to collect from him a debt allegedly incurred for personal, family or household purposes, namely a credit card debt.
- 5. Defendant United Collection Bureau, Inc. ("UCB") is a debt collection agency with its principal offices at 5620 Southwyck Blvd., Toledo, OH 43614.
- 6. UCB is engaged in the business of a collection agency, using the mails and telephone to collect consumer debts originally owed to others.

7. UCB is engaged in the business of collecting debts owed to others and incurred for personal, family or household purposes. UCB is a debt collector as defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692a.

FACTS

- 8. On or about September 20, 2016, UCB mailed a debt collection letter to Plaintiff regarding an alleged debt, allegedly owed to "Citibank, N.A.". A copy of this letter is attached to this complaint as Exhibit A.
- 9. The alleged debt identified in <u>Exhibit A</u> is an alleged credit card account used for personal, family or household purposes.
- 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 UCB to attempt to collect alleged debts.
 - 12. <u>Exhibit A</u> contains the following text:

On behalf of CITIBANK, N.A., United Collection Bureau, Inc. will accept a settlement in the amount of \$669.78 for the above referenced account. This settlement offer will save you the sum of \$1,906.28. To take advantage of this offer please ensure the total payment is received in our office by September 30, 2016. We are not obligated to renew this offer and this agreement is contingent upon clearance of funds.

Exhibit A.

- 13. The letter purports to offer a settlement of about 26% of the total alleged debt.
- 14. <u>Exhibit A</u> also contains the following statement:

If you wish to accept this offer, please contact our office to establish a payment method and date, or mail a copy of this letter together with your payment to the remit address below. Please make your check or money order payable to Citibank. When calling our office, please refer to settlement offer number and your reference number

15. The unsophisticated consumer would be confused by the language in Exhibit A.

- 16. The language in paragraph 12 requires that the settlement amount "total payment" of \$669.78 must be received by the deadline of September 30, 2016.
- 17. However, if the unsophisticated consumer broke the payments up into two or more portions, and consequently mailed in a cumulative "total payment" only a few cents higher than \$669.78, it is unclear whether the money would be applied to the settlement amount of \$669.78 or the total amount of \$2576.06.
- 18. It is unclear how "total payment" in excess of the settlement payment amount would be treated.
- 19. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e generally prohibits "any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt."
- 20. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(a) specifically prohibits the "false representation of the character, amount, or legal status" of an alleged debt.
- 21. 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."
- 22. 15 U.S.C. § 1692f generally prohibits "unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect any debt."

COUNT I – FDCPA

- 23. Plaintiff incorporates by reference as if fully set forth herein the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs of this Complaint.
- 24. The language in Exhibit A, "please ensure the total payment is received in our office by September 30, 2016," is confusing to the unsophisticated consumer in that it makes unclear how a payment in an amount greater than one of the "total payment" would be applied to a consumer's account.
 - 25. UCB violated 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692e(2)(a), 1692e(5) and 1692e(10).

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

- 26. 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, (c) seeking to collect a debt for personal, family or household purposes, (d) between January 16, 2016 and January 16, 2017, inclusive, (e) that was not returned by the postal service.
- 27. The Class is so numerous that joinder is impracticable. Upon information and belief, there are more than 50 members of the Class.
- 28. 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 the Defendant complied with 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e.
- 29. Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class members. All are based on the same factual and legal theories.
- 30. 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.
- 31. A class action is superior to other alternative methods of adjudicating this dispute. Individual cases are not economically feasible.

JURY DEMAND

32. 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: January 16, 2017

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

UNITED COLLECTION BUREAU, INC. 5620 SOUTHWYCK BLVD SUITE 206

TOLEDO OH 43614

JEFFREY MERKOVICH 249 N CHICAGO AVE APT 5 S MILWAUKEE WI 53172-1269 1-800-210-3534

September 20, 2016

Creditor:

Regarding:

Last Four Digits of Creditor Account Number: United Collection Bureau, Inc. Reference Number:

Current Account Balance:

CITIBANK, N.A. SEARS GOLD MASTERCARD XXXXXXXXXXXX4672 2263 \$2576.06

Dear JEFFREY MERKOVICH:

On behalf of CITIBANK, N.A., United Collection Bureau, Inc. will accept a settlement in the amount of \$669.78 for the above referenced account. This settlement offer will save you the sum of \$1,906.28. To take advantage of this offer please ensure the total payment is received in our office by September 30, 2016. We are not obligated to renew this offer and this agreement is contingent upon clearance of funds.

If you wish to accept this offer, please contact our office to establish a payment method and date, or mail a copy of this letter together with your payment to the remit address below. Please make your check or money order payable to Citibank. When calling our office, please refer to settlement offer number and your reference number

In the event you are unable to accept this offer, we encourage you to contact our office to establish a payment arrangement toward the full balance of the account.

Please scan the QR code below to be directed to our website to make a payment, or you can go to: www.ucbinc.com, click on make a payment and follow the prompts.



Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely. United Collection Bureau, Inc.

Business Hours:

8:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. ET Monday - Thursday

8:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. ET Friday

This is an attempt to collect a debt by United Collection Bureau, Inc., a debt collector, and any information obtained will be used for that purpose.

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR IMPORTANT INFORMATION

24CU027000CSIF

PLEASE RETURN THIS PORTION WITH PAYMENT, DO NOT ATTACH CHECK TO STUB. PLEASE MAKE YOUR PAYMENT PAYABLE TO CITIBANK

PO BOX 140310 TOLEDO OH 43614

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Creditor: CITIBANK, N.A. Regarding: SEARS GOLD MASTERCARD

Last Four Digits of Creditor Acct. Number: Current Account Balance:

United Collection Bureau, Inc. Reference No: United Collection Bureau, Inc. Telephone No: XXXXXXXXXXXXX4672 2576.06 2263 1-800-210-3534

REMIT TO:

September 20, 2016

UNITED COLLECTION BUREAU, INC. PO BOX 140310 TOLEDO OH 43614

<u> Բոլիգեվիրմելի վիսիրդեսիր վիկթվեն թվական</u> JEFFREY MERKOVICH 249 N CHICAGO AVE APT 5 S MILWAUKEE WI 53172-1269

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

When you provide a check as payment, you authorize us either to use information from your check to make a one-time electronic fund transfer from your account or to process the payment as a check transaction.

If the subject debt of this letter is time-barred, paying any amount on the account may revive the obligation to pay.

CALIFORNIA: The state Rosenthal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and the federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act require that, except under unusual circumstances, collectors may not contact you before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m. They may not harass you by using threats of violence or arrest or by using obscene language. Collectors may not use false or misleading statements or call you at work if they know or have reason to know that you may not receive personal calls at work. For the most part, collectors may not tell another person, other than your attorney or spouse, about your debt. Collectors may contact another person to confirm your location or enforce a judgment. For more information about debt collection activities, you may contact the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-FTC-HELP or www.ftc.gov. Nonprofit credit counseling services may be available in the area.

COLORADO: FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLORADO FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT, SEE WWW.AGO.STATE.CO.US/CADC/CADCMAIN.CFM. A consumer has the right to request in writing that a debt collector or collection agency cease further communication with the consumer. A written request to cease communication will not prohibit the debt collector or collection agency from taking any other action authorized by law to collect the debt. Payments can be made in person at: Colorado Manager, Inc., Building B, 80 Garden Center, Suite 3, Broomfield, Colorado 80020, 303-920-4763.

IDAHO: Toll Free 1-866-209-0622 during normal business hours.

KANSAS: An investigative consumer report, which includes information as to your character, general reputation, personal characteristics and mode of living, has been requested. You have the right to request additional information, which includes the nature and scope of the investigation.

MAINE: Hours of operation (ET): Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.; Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

MASSACHUSETTS: **NOTICE OF IMPORTANT RIGHTS** You have the right to make a written or oral request that telephone calls regarding your debt not be made to you at your place of employment. Any such oral request will be valid for only ten days unless you provide written confirmation of the request postmarked or delivered within seven days of such request. You may terminate this request by writing to the debt collector. Hours of operation (ET): Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.; Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

MINNESOTA: This collection agency is licensed by the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

NEW YORK CITY: New York City Department of Consumer Affairs License Number 1004887.

NORTH CAROLINA: North Carolina Permit Numbers: 101866, 3843, 4022 and 4367.

TENNESSEE: This collection agency is licensed by the Collection Service Board of the Department of Commerce and Insurance.

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

If you have a concern about the way we are collecting this debt, please call our toll-free Consumer Service Hotline at 1-866-209-0622, email us at <u>UCBCompliance@ucbinc.com</u>, or mail us at United Collection Bureau, Inc., Compliance Department, 5620 Southwyck Blvd, Ste 206, Toledo, OH 43614. Please include your account number on all communication.

UCBV12 05 17 16

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	,	V	Milwaukee Division	
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS		
JEFFREY MERKOVICH			UNITED COLLECTION BUREAU, INC.		
•	of First Listed Plaintiff Milwaukee XCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)		·	f First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES OF CONDEMNATION CASES, US	, ,
				NVOLVED.	
(c) Attorney's (Firm Name	, Address, and Telephone Number)		Attorneys (If Known)		
	3620 E. Layton Ave., Cudahy, WI 53110 ae (414) 482-8001-Facsimile				
II. BASIS OF JURISE	OICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)			RINCIPAL PARTIES	Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff
U.S. Government Plaintiff	7 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)		For Diversity Cases Only) of This State	TF DEF 1	
2 U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item		of Another State	2	· –
			or Subject of a ign Country	3 Greign Nation	6 6
	T (Place an "X" in One Box Only)				
CONTRACT	TORTS	_	RFEITURE/PENALTY	BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES
☐ 110 Insurance ☐ 120 Marine ☐ 130 Miller Act ☐ 140 Negotiable Instrument ☐ 150 Recovery of Overpayment		Injury -	Agriculture Other Food & Drug Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881 Liquor Laws R.R. & Truck Airline Regs. Occupational Safety/Health Other LABOR Fair Labor Standards Act Labor/Mgmt. Relations Labor/Mgmt.Reporting & Disclosure Act Railway Labor Act Other Labor Litigation Empl. Ret. Inc. Security Act IMMIGRATION Naturalization Application Habeas Corpus - Alien Detainee Other Immigration Actions	□ 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 □ 423 Withdrawal	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 ate Court	4 Reinsta Reoper	ened anothe (specif	•	
VI. CAUSE OF ACTI	ON Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which 15 U.S.C. 1692 et seq Brief description of cause: Violation of Fair Debt Collection Practice		Oo not cite jurisdiction:	al statutes unless diversity):	
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:			MAND \$	CHECK YES only JURY DEMAND:	if demanded in complaint: Yes No
VIII. RELATED CAS IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions): JUDGE			DOCKET NUMBER	
DATE	SIGNATURE	OF ATTORNEY OF	F RECORD		
January 16, 201	7 s/ John	D. Blythin	1		
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY					

– $\overset{ ext{AMOUNT}}{\text{Case 2:17-cv-00}}$ 058 Filed $\overset{ ext{O1/16/17}}{\text{O1/16/17}}$ Page $\overset{ ext{JUDGE}}{\text{1 of 2}}$ Document $\overset{ ext{MAG,JUDGE}}{\text{1-2}}$

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

	24000111 2 100		
JEFFREY MERK	COVICH)	
)	
v.) Civil Action No. 17-cv-58	Civil Action No. 17-cv-58
UNITED COLLECTION	BUREAU INC))	
	SUMMONS IN	I A CIVII	L ACTION
To: (Defendant's name and address)	UNITED COLLECTION BY c/o CORPORATION SERV 8040 EXCELSIOR DRIVE, MADISON, WI 53717	ICE COM	PANY
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 East Layton Avenue Cudahy, WI 53110 (414) 482-8000-Telephone			
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 COURT
Date:			
			Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

Civil Action No. 17-cv-58

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: FDCPA Class Action Filed Against United Collection Bureau