# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA NEWNAN DIVISION

VERLANDA PRATHER, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

C.A. No:

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

-v.-ALLIED INTERSTATE, LLC and JOHN DOES 1-25,

Defendants.

Plaintiff Verlanda Prather (hereinafter, "Plaintiff" or "Prather"), a Georgia resident, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through her attorneys, Mason Law Group, P.C., against Defendant Allied Interstate, LLC (hereinafter "Defendant Allied"), 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**

1. Congress enacted the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act ("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 FDCPA 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, Congress created a private cause of action to provide consumers with a remedy against debt collectors who fail to comply with the FDCPA. Id. § 1692k.

#### JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331, as well as 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. The Court also has pendent jurisdiction over any state law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).

4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) as this is where a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred.

#### **NATURE OF THE ACTION**

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of Georgia consumers under § 1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA"), and

6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory and injunctive relief.

#### **PARTIES**

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of Georgia, County of Spalding, residing at 535 Jordan Hill Road, Griffin, GA 30223.

8. Defendant Allied Interstate, LLC is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in <u>15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6)</u> and used in the FDCPA with an address 12755 Highway 55, Suite 300, Plymouth, MN 55441.

9. Upon information and belief, Defendant is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.

10. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

# **CLASS ALLEGATIONS**

11. Plaintiff brings this claim on behalf of the following case, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).

12. The Class consists of:

a. all individuals with addresses in the State of Georgia;

- b. to whom Defendant Allied. sent a collection letter attempting to collect a consumer debt;
- c. regarding collection of a debt;
- d. that deceptively included a statement that the creditor may be required to report the forgiveness of debtof \$600 or more to the IRS;
- e. which letter was sent on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.

13. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendants and those companies and entities on whose behalf they attempt to collect and/or have purchased debts.

14. Excluded from the Plaintiff Classes are the Defendants and all officer, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendants and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.

15. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Classes, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibits A, violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e and 1692f.

16. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Classes defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor her attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.

17. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- a. <u>Numerosity:</u> The Plaintiff is informed and believe, and on that basis alleged, that the Plaintiff Classes defined above are so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.
- b. <u>Common Questions Predominate:</u> Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Classes and those questions predominance over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibit A violate 15 § 1692e and §1692f.
- c. <u>Typicality:</u> The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members. The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Classes have claims arising out of the Defendants' common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- d. <u>Adequacy:</u> The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are adverse to the absent class members. The Plaintiff is

committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor her counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.

e. <u>Superiority:</u> A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

18. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff Classes predominate over any questions affecting an individual member, and a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy. 19. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiff may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

# **FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS**

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

21. Some time prior to January 15, 2108, an obligation was allegedly incurred by Plaintiff.

22. The alleged obligation arose out of a transaction involving a First Third Bank debt incurred by Plaintiff in which money, property, insurance or services, which are the subject of the transaction, were used to purchase goods that were primarily for personal, family or household purposes.

23. The alleged obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(5).

24. The owner of the alleged obligation is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(4).

25. The owner of the obligation contracted the Defendant to collect the alleged debt.

26. Defendant collects and attempts to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of creditors using the United States Postal Services, telephone and internet.

# Violation I – January 15, 2018 Collection Letter

27. On or about January 15, 2018, Defendant sent the Plaintiff a collection
letter (the "Letter") seeking to collect an alleged debt. See January 15, 2018
Collection Letter – Attached hereto as Exhibit A.

28. The letter stated "Please be advised that, except in limited circumstances, First Third Bank may be required to report the forgiveness of any debt of \$600 or more to the Internal Revenue Service.

29. The total balance due on the debt being collected was \$329.78 and the proposed settlement amount was \$148.40.

30. The amount of debt forgiven in this settlement offer was \$181.38.

31. The Notice in the Letter stating that the IRS may be notified of Plaintiff's debt forgiveness in this case is false as there is no way that the amount of debt forgiveness could reach \$600.00.

32. The invocation of the Internal Revenue Service in the Letter only served to scare Plaintiff for fear of tax repercussions and served to overshadow the settlement offer.

33. A statement that serves to confuse a consumer, and can never apply during this collection is clearly deceptive.

34. Plaintiff incurred a financial risk of harm as she was afraid to take advantage of the settlement amount for fear of tax consequences which were falsely threatened to her.

35. The Defendant's false statement invoking the Internal Revenue Service was, further, misleading and deceptive in that it was materially confusing to Plaintiff who was unaware that she could not possibly incur tax consequences in this instance.

36. As a result of Defendant's deceptive, misleading and false debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

# <u>COUNT I</u> VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692e *et seq*.

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

38. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

39. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

40. Defendant violated said section by making a false and misleading representation in violation of §§ 1692e(2), 1692e(5) and 1692e(10).

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

# <u>COUNT II</u> VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692f *et seq*.

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

43. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692f.

44. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692f, a debt collector may not use any unfair or unconscionable means in connection with the collection of any debt.

45. Defendant violated this section by unfairly and falsely scaring Plaintiff into believing she would be investigated by the IRS if she accepted the settlement offer.

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

# **DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY**

47. Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby requests a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

#### PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Verlanda Prather, individually, and on behalf of all others similarly situated demands judgment from Defendant Allied Interstate, LLC as follows:

1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Jonathan B. Mason, Esq. as Class Counsel;

- 2. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
- 3. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;

4. Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;

5. Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and

6. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

# **Certificate of Complaince With Local Rule 7.1D**

Pursuant to Local Rule 7.1D, the undersigned counsel certifies that this document has been prepared using Times New Roman 14-point font.

Dated: April 30, 2018

Respectfully Submitted,

# MASON LAW GROUP, P.C.

<u>/s/ Jonathan B. Mason</u> Jonathan B. Mason, Esq. GA Bar No. 475659 1100 Peachtree St. NE, Ste 200 Atlanta, GA 30309 (404) 920-8040 (404) 920-8039 jmason@atlshowbizlaw.com *Counsel for Plaintiff Verlanda Prather*  Case 3:18-cv-00043-TCB-RGV Document 1-1 Filed 04/30/18 Page 1 of 2

# EXHIBIT A

Case 3:18-cv-00043-TCB-RGV Document 1-1 Filed 04/30/18 Page 2 of 2

**Allied**Interstate.

877-488-6438

January 15, 2018

Verlanda M Prather

Re: Fifth Third Bank Account No. \*\*\*\*\*\*8675 Amount Owed: \$329.78 Reference No.: 551098280056

Verlanda M Prather:

We are a debt collection company and our client, Fifth Third Bank, has contracted with us to collect the debt noted above. This is an attempt to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose.

Our client is willing to accept payment in the amount of \$148.40 in settlement of this debt. You can take advantage of this settlement offer if we receive payment of this amount or if you make another mutually acceptable payment arrangement within 30 days from the date of this letter. We are not obligated to renew this offer.

To make a payment, please telephone us at 877-488-6438 or mail your payment to us using the coupon on the reverse side of this letter. We process checks electronically and your checking account will be debited on the day we receive your payment. Your check will not be returned.

Please be advised that, except in certain limited circumstances, Fifth Third Bank may be required to report the forgiveness of any debt of \$600 or more to the Internal Revenue Service. You should consult your tax advisor to learn how this might affect you.

We look forward to receiving your payment.

Sincerely, Allied Interstate LLC

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

# JS44 (Rev. 11/16 NDGA) ase 3:18-cv-00043-TCB-ROVIL DOGWERS HEEF iled 04/30/18 Page 1 of 2

The JS44 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 is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket record. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ATTACHED)

I. (a) PLAINTIFF(S)		DEFENDANT(S)	
Verlanda Prather, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated,		Allied Interstate, LLC and John Does 1-25	
(b) COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED PLAINTIFF Spalding (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)		COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED DEFENDANT	
		(IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)	
		NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED	
(c) ATTORNEYS (FIRM NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER, AND E-MAIL ADDRESS)		ATTORNEYS (IF KNOWN)	
Jonathan B. Mason, Esq.			
Mason Law Group, P.C. 1100 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 200			
Atlanta, GA 30309			
404.920.8040 jmason@atlshowbizlaw.com	n		
II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION (PLACE AN "X" IN ONE BOX ONLY)		ZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES N "X" IN ONE BOX FOR PLAINTIFF AND ONE BOX FOR DEFENDANT) (FOR DIVERSITY CASES ONLY)	
	PLF DEF	PLF DEF	
1 U.S. GOVERNMENT PLAINTIFF U.S. GOVERNMENT NOT A PARTY)	$\square_1$ $\square_1$ cr	TIZEN OF THIS STATE 4 INCORPORATED OR PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS IN THIS STATE	
2 U.S. GOVERNMENT 4 DIVERSITY		FIZEN OF ANOTHER STATE 5 5 INCORPORATED AND PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS IN ANOTHER STATE	
DEFENDANT (INDICATE CITIZENSHIP OF PARTIES IN ITEM III)		TIZEN OR SUBJECT OF A $6$ $6$ FOREIGN NATION REIGN COUNTRY	
IV. ORIGIN (PLACE AN "X "IN ONE BOX ONLY)			
I ORIGINAL PROCEEDING       2 REMOVED FROM STATE COURT       3 REMANDED FROM APPELLATE COURT       4 REINSTATED OR REOPENED       5 ANOTHER DISTRICT (Specify District)       MULTIDISTRICT 6 LITIGATION - TRANSFER       APPEAL TO DISTRICT JUDGE 10 STRICT JUDGE			
MULTIDISTRICT 8 LITIGATION - DIRECT FILE			
V. CAUSE OF ACTION (CITE THE U.S. CIVIL STATUTE OF JURISDICTIONAL STATUTES UNIT	UNDER WHICH YOU FSS DIVERSITY)	ARE FILING AND WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF CAUSE - DO NOT CITE	
	actices Act ("I	FDCPA") - Defendant sent a false, deceptive and misleading	
(IF COMPLEX, CHECK REASON BELOW)			
1. Unusually large number of parties.	6. Prob	lems locating or preserving evidence	
$\Box$ 2. Unusually large number of claims or defenses.	7. Pend	ing parallel investigations or actions by government.	
3. Factual issues are exceptionally complex	🗌 8. Mult	iple use of experts.	
4. Greater than normal volume of evidence.	9. Nee	d for discovery outside United States boundaries.	
☐ 5. Extended discovery period is needed.	10. Exist	ence of highly technical issues and proof.	
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY			
RECEIPT # AMOUNT \$	APPLYING	G IFP MAG. JUDGE (IFP)	

1.5	AFTLINOIT
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(Referral)	

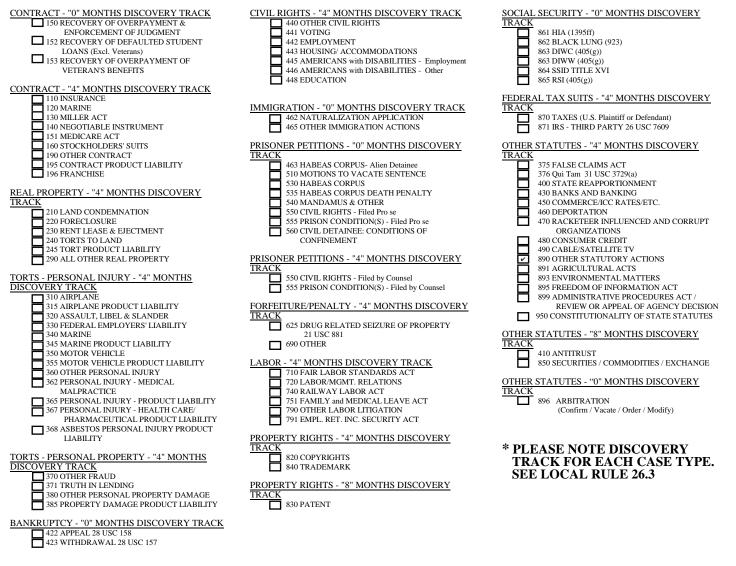
MAG. JU

JUDGE

CAUSE OF ACTION

#### Case 3:18-cv-00043-TCB-RGV Document 1-2 Filed 04/30/18 Page 2 of 2

#### VI. NATURE OF SUIT (PLACE AN "X" IN ONE BOX ONLY)



# VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:

└ CHECK IF CLASS ACTION UNDER F.R.Civ.P. 23 DEMAND \$\_\_\_\_\_\_ JURY DEMAND └ YES □ NO (CHECK YES <u>ONLY</u> IF DEMANDED IN COMPLAINT)

# VIII. RELATED/REFILED CASE(S) IF ANY

JUDGE\_

#### DOCKET NO.\_

CIVIL CASES ARE DEEMED RELATED IF THE PENDING CASE INVOLVES: (CHECK APPROPRIATE BOX)

- □ 1. PROPERTY INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- □ 2. SAME ISSUE OF FACT OR ARISES OUT OF THE SAME EVENT OR TRANSACTION INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- □ 3. VALIDITY OR INFRINGEMENT OF THE SAME PATENT, COPYRIGHT OR TRADEMARK INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- 4. APPEALS ARISING OUT OF THE SAME BANKRUPTCY CASE AND ANY CASE RELATED THERETO WHICH HAVE BEEN DECIDED BY THE SAME BANKRUPTCY JUDGE,
- **5.** REPETITIVE CASES FILED BY <u>PRO SE</u> LITIGANTS.
- 6. COMPANION OR RELATED CASE TO CASE(S) BEING SIMULTANEOUSLY FILED (INCLUDE ABBREVIATED STYLE OF OTHER CASE(S)):

□ 7. EITHER SAME OR ALL OF THE PARTIES AND ISSUES IN THIS CASE WERE PREVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN CASE NO. DISMISSED. This case

, WHICH WAS

/s/ Jonathan B. Mason

# **ClassAction.org**

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>Allied Interstate Named in Lawsuit Over Mention of Possible Tax Consequences in Collection Letter</u>