# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

MELISSA REYNOLDS, on behalf of herself and	d
all others similarly situated,	

Plaintiff(s),

-against-

ENCORE RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT, INC., and JOHN DOES 1-25,

Defendant(s).

Civil Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## **CIVIL ACTION**

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT AND DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff, MELISSA REYNOLDS, on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated (hereinafter "Plaintiff") by and through her undersigned attorney, alleges against the abovenamed Defendant, ENCORE RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT, INC., ("ENCORE"), JOHN DOES 1-25 ("Defendants") their employees, agents, and successors (collectively "Defendants") the following:

## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

1. Plaintiff brings this action for damages and declaratory relief arising from the Defendants' violation of 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.*, the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (hereinafter "FDCPA"), which prohibits debt collectors from engaging in abusive, deceptive and unfair practices.

## **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

- 2. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331. This is an action for violations of 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq*.
- 3. Venue is proper in this district under 28 U.S.C. §1391(b)(2) because the acts of the Defendant that give rise to this action, occurred in substantial part, in this district.

## **DEFINITIONS**

4. As used in reference to the FDCPA, the terms "creditor," "consumer," "debt," and "debt collector" are defined in § 803 of the FDCPA and 15 U.S.C. § 1692a.

### **PARTIES**

- 5. The FDCPA, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.*, which prohibits certain debt collection practices provides for the initiation of court proceedings to enjoin violations of the FDCPA and to secure such equitable relief as may be appropriate in each case.
- 6. Plaintiff is a natural person and a resident of Union County, New Jersey, and is a "Consumer" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3).
  - 7. ENCORE maintains a location at 400 North Rogers Rd, Olathe, Kansas 66063.
- 8. Upon information and belief, ENCORE 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.
  - 9. ENCORE is a "Debt Collector" as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6).
- 10. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and business 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 ACTION ALLEGATIONS**

11. Plaintiff brings this action as a state wide class action, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (hereinafter "FRCP"), on behalf of herself and all New Jersey consumers and their successors in interest (the "Class"), who were sent debt collection letters and/or notices from the Defendant which are in violation of the FDCPA, as described in this Complaint.

- 12. This Action is properly maintained as a class action. The Class is initially defined as:
  - All New Jersey consumers who were sent letters and/or notices from ENCORE concerning a debt owed to Synchrony Bank for an account with PC Richard & Son, which contained at least one of the alleged violations of 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et seq. herein.
  - The class definition may be subsequently modified or refined.
  - 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 may be hundreds and/or thousands of persons who were sent debt collection letters and/or notices from the Defendant that violate specific provisions of the FDCPA. Plaintiff is complaining of a standard form letter and/or notice. (*See Exhibit A*, except that the undersigned attorney has, in accordance with Fed. R. Civ. P. 5.2 redacted the financial account numbers and/or personal identifiers 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 the Defendant violated various provisions of the FDCPA including but not limited to:

- 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692g et seq., and 1692e et seq.
- b. Whether Plaintiff and the Class have been injured by the 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, it 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.

## **STATEMENT OF FACTS**

- 14. Plaintiff is at all times to this lawsuit, a "consumer" as that term is defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3).
- 15. On or before March 13, 2017, Plaintiff allegedly incurred a financial obligation to Synchrony Bank ("SYNCHRONY").
- 16. The SYNCHRONY obligation arose out of a transaction, in which money, property, insurance or services, which are the subject of the transaction, are primarily for personal, family or household purposes.
  - 17. The SYNCHRONY obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(5).
  - 18. SYNCHRONY is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(4).
- 19. On or before March 13, 2017, the SHELL obligation was referred to ENCORE for the purpose of collection.
- 20. At the time the SYNCHRONY obligation was referred to ENCORE the SYNCHRONY obligation was past due.

- 21. At the time the SYNCHRONY obligation was referred to ENCORE the SYNCHRONY obligation was in default pursuant to the terms of the agreement creating the obligation.
- 22. ENCORE caused to be delivered to Plaintiff a letter dated March 13, 2017, which was addressed to Plaintiff. A copy of said letter is annexed hereto as **Exhibit A**.
- 23. The March 13, 2017 letter was sent to Plaintiff in connection with the collection of the SYNCHRONY obligation.
- 24. The March 13, 2017 letter is a "communication" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(2).
  - 25. Upon receipt, Plaintiff read the March 13, 2017 letter.
- 26. The March 13, 2017 letter provided a Toll Free telephone number of 866-247-1087.
- 27. The March 13, 2017 letter provided a mailing address of 400 N. Rogers Rd., P.O. Box 3330, Olathe, KS 66063-3330.
  - 28. The March 13, 2017 stated in part:

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.

29. The March 13, 2017 letter stated in part:

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.

30. Section 1692g(a)(1), (3)of the FDCPA requires to debt collector to:

Within five days after the initial communication with a consumer in connection with the collection of any debt... send the consumer a written notice containing ---

(1) the amount of the debt;

- (3) 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.
- 31. A dispute of a debt, to be effective, in the Third Circuit, must be in writing. <u>Graziano v. Harrison</u>, 950 F.2d 107, 112 (3d Cir. 1991). <u>Caprio v. Healthcare Revenue</u> <u>Recovery Group</u>, 709 F.3d 142 (3d Cir. March 1, 2013).
  - 32. The March 13, 2017 letter stated on top right side:

Creditor: Synchrony Bank
Re: P C RICHARD & SON
For Account Ending in: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx5482
Encore Account #: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx2870

Total Account Balance: \$1,602.00 Total Amount Due: \$209.00

33. The March 13, 2017 letter further stated:

The Above reference account has been referred to our office for collection. Previous attempts have been by the creditor to payment on 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 \$1,602.00 of which \$209.00 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 finances charges, late fees imposed on your account from day to day as outlined in the terms of your account agreement.

- 34. ENCORE knew or should have known that its actions violated the FDCPA.
- 35. ENCORE could have taken the steps necessary to bring its actions within compliance with the FDCPA, but neglected to do so and failed to adequately review its actions to ensure compliance with the law.

## POLICIES AND PRACTICES COMPLAINED OF

- 36. It is ENCOREs policy and practice to send written collection communications, in the form annexed hereto as **Exhibit A**, which violate the FDCPA, by *inter alia*:
  - (a) Using false, deceptive or misleading representations or means in connection with the collection of a debt; and
  - (b) Failing to provide the consumer with a proper notice pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692g(a)(1); and
  - (c) Failing to provide the consumer with a proper notice pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692g(a)(3);
- 37. On information and belief, ENCORE sent written communications in the form annexed hereto as **Exhibit A**, to at least 50 natural persons in the state of New Jersey with one year of this Complaint.

## **COUNT I**

# FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et seq. VIOLATIONS

- 38. Plaintiff, on behalf of herself and others similarly situated, repeats and realleges all prior allegations as if set forth at length herein.
- 39. Collection letters and/or notices, such as those sent by ENCORE, are to be evaluated by the objective standard of the hypothetical "least sophisticated consumer."
- 40. The March 13, 2017 letter fails to properly inform the least sophisticated consumer that to effectively dispute the alleged debt, such dispute *must* be in writing.
- 41. The least sophisticated consumer upon reading the March 13, 2017 letter would be confused as to what she must do to effectively dispute the alleged debt.
- 42. The least sophisticated consumer upon reading the instructions in the March 13, 2017 letter would be mislead into believing that if she wished to effectively dispute the alleged,

debt or any portion thereof, because payment had already been made, she may (1) notify ENCORE by calling the toll free telephone number of 866-247-1087 or (2) write to Encore at the address listed near the bottom of the letter.

- 43. ENCORE's instructions will lead the March 13, 2017 letter would least sophisticated consumer to be unsure as to what she must do to effectively dispute the alleged debt.
- 44. A dispute of a debt, to be effective, in the Third Circuit, must be in writing. Graziano v. Harrison, 950 F.2d 107, 112 (3d Cir. 1991). Caprio v. Healthcare Revenue Recovery Group, 709 F.3d 142 (3d Cir. March 1, 2013).
- 45. ENCORE violated 15 U.S.C. §1692g(a)(3) by failing to effectively inform Plaintiff in the March 13, 2017 letter, what she must do in order to dispute the alleged debt.
- 46. ENCORE violated 15 U.S.C. §1692g(a)(1) by failing to effectively inform Plaintiff in the March 13, 2017 letter, the amount of the debt.
- 47. The least sophisticated consumer upon reading the March 13, 2017 letter would be unsure of how much she must pay.
- 48. The least sophisticated consumer upon reading the March 13, 2017 letter would be confused as to whether the amount of the debt she is being asked to paid is the Total Account Balance of \$1,602.00 or the Total Amount Due: of \$209.
- 49. ENCORE violated 15 U.S.C. §1692e(10) by falsely representing and misleading Plaintiff into believing that if she wished to dispute the alleged debt or any portion thereof, because payment had already been made, that she may (1) notify ENCORE by calling the toll free telephone number of 866-247-1087 or (2) write to Encore at the address listed near the bottom of the letter.

- 50. The March 13, 2017 letter is misleading because the instructions can be read to have two or more meaning, which one is inaccurate.
- 51. The March 13, 2017 letter can be read to mean that the least sophisticated consumer may dispute the alleged debt by calling ENCORE the toll free number provided.
- 52. The March 13, 2017 letter can be read to mean that the least sophisticated consumer may dispute the alleged debt by notify ENCORE in writing at the address provided.
- 53. ENCORE violated 15 U.S.C. §1692e(10) by misleading Plaintiff as to the amount of the debt she is being asked pay.
- 54. The March 13, 2017 letter can be read to mean that ENCORE is attempting to collect the Total Account Balance.
- 55. The March 13, 2017 letter can be read to mean that ENCORE is attempting to collect the Total Account Due.
- 56. Congress enacted the FDCPA in part to eliminate abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors.
- 57. Plaintiff and others similarly situated have a right to free from abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors.
- 58. Plaintiff and others similarly situated have a right to receive proper notices mandated by the FDCPA.
- 59. Plaintiff and others similarly situated were sent letters, which would have affected their decision-making with regard to the debt.
- 60. Plaintiff and others similarly situated have suffered harm as a direct result of the abusive, deceptive and unfair collection practices described herein.

61. Plaintiff has suffered damages and other harm as a direct result of ENCORE's actions, conduct, omissions and violations of the FDCPA described herein.

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 the attorneys, Joseph K. Jones, Esq., as Class Counsel;
  - (b) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
  - (c) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
  - (d) Awarding pre-judgment interest;
  - (e) Awarding post-judgment interest.
- (f) Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses; and
- (g) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as the Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: April 1, 2017

s/ Joseph K. Jones

Joseph K. Jones, Esq.
JONES, WOLF & KAPASI, LLC
375 Passaic Avenue
Fairfield, New Jersey 07004
(973) 227-5900 telephone
(973) 244-0019 facsimile
iki@legaljones.com

## **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/ Joseph K. Jones
Joseph K. Jones, Esq.

## **CERTIFICATION PURSUANT TO LOCAL RULE 11.2**

I, Joseph K. Jones, the undersigned attorney of record for Plaintiff, do hereby certify to my own knowledge and based upon information available to me at my office, the matter in controversy is not the subject of any other action now pending in any court or in any arbitration or administrative proceeding.

Dated: April 1, 2017

/s/ Joseph K. Jones
Joseph K. Jones, Esq.

# Exhibit

A

P. Cassa 233-aw-022017-JDVbcuMFenD265ib3enFiledF01460 Oak Park, MI 48237

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Management, Inc. С

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

March 13 2017

Creditor:

Re:

For Account Ending in: Encore Account #:

Total Account Balance: Total Amount Duc:

Synchrony Bank

P C RICHARD & SON XXXXXXXXXXXX5482

2870

\$1,602,00 \$209.00

MELISSA REYNOLDS

ի Այնգնոնի իրև փոսի փիրը «Արևը ինկրանին նոր հոլի Միրիի

#### Dear MELISSA REYNOLDS:

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 \$1,602.00 of which \$209.00 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 dobt 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.

EIVABLE MANAGEMENT, INC. • 400 N Rogers Rd. • PO Box 3330 • Olathe KS 66063-3330 • 866-247-1087

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

Creditor:

Re:

For Account Ending in: Encore Account #:

Total Account Balance:

Total Amount Due:

Synchrony Bank

P C RICHARD & SON XXXXXXXXXXXX5482

2870

\$1,602.00 \$209.00

**CONV0400** 

MELISSA REYNOLDS

P C RICHARD & SON P.O. Box 960061 Orlando FL 32696-0061

## SJS 44 (Rev. 11/04) Casse: 2:337-aw-0222017-JDVX:UMTen D265103-bt/Eile G7144010/4/01/PagePage 2:1969-19geB28B30

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

I. (a)	PLAINTIFFS	STRUCTIONS ON THE REVERSE OF THE	,	DEFENDANTS			
MELISSA REYNOLDS, on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated				ENCORE RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT, INC., and JOHN DOES 1-25			
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Union (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)				County of Residence of NOTE: IN LANGE LAND	ONLY) SE THE LOCATION OF THE		
(c) Attorney's (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)				Attorneys (If Known)			
	offices of Joseph I h K. Jones, Esq.	K. Jones, LLC					
II. B	ASIS OF JURISD	ICTION (Place an "X" in One Box On			RINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff	
<b>1</b>	U.S. Government Plaintiff	■ 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)			TF DEF  □ 1 □ Incorporated or Pr  of Business In Thi		
□ 2	U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity  (Indicate Citizenship of Parties i		en of Another State	2 Incorporated and I of Business In A	•	
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VI. C	CAUSE OF ACTIO	ON  15 U.S.C. 1692  Brief description of cause: Violations of the Fair Deb			are surveys unless diversity).		
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#### 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.

# **ClassAction.org**

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>Consumer Argues Encore Receivable Management Violated FDCPA</u>