UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA JACKSONVILLE DIVISION

MARY ROSS, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated;

Plaintiff(s),

CASE NO. ろいろージーン・1 - 32コペビン JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

vs.

TEK-COLLECT, INC.,

Defendant.

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, MARY ROSS (hereinafter, "Plaintiff"), a Florida resident, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through the undersigned counsel, against Defendant TEK-COLLECT, INC. (hereinafter "Defendant"), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff's counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff's personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Congress enacted the FDCPA in 1977 in response to the "abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors." 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a). At that time, Congress was concerned that "abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual privacy." *Id.* Congress concluded that "existing laws . . . [we]re inadequate to protect consumers," and that "the effective collection of debts" does not require "misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices." 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).

2. Congress explained that the purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to "insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged." *Id.* § 1692(e). After determining that the existing consumer protection laws were inadequate, *id.* § 1692(b), Congress gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply with the Act. *Id.* § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action under 28 U.S.C. § 1331, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.* and 28 U.S.C. § 2201. If applicable, the Court also has pendent jurisdiction over the state law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).
 - 4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2).

NATURE OF THE ACTION

- 5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of Florida consumers seeking redress for Defendant's actions of using an unfair and unconscionable means to collect a debt.
- 6. Defendants actions violated § 1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA").
 - 7. Plaintiff is seeking damages, and declaratory and injunctive relief.

PARTIES

- 8. Plaintiff is a natural person and a resident of the State of Florida and is a "Consumer" as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692(a)(3).
- 9. Defendant is a collection agency with its registered office located at Corporation Service Company, 50 West Broad Street, Suite 1330, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

- 10. 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.
- 11. Defendant is a "debt collector," as defined under the FDCPA under 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(6).

ALLEGATIONS OF FACT

- 12. 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.
- 13. Some time prior to August 10, 2018, an obligation was allegedly incurred to PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE
- 14. The PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE 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.
- 15. The alleged PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(5).
- 16. PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(4).
- 17. PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE directly or through an intermediary contracted the Defendant to collect the alleged PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE debt.
- 18. 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.

- 19. On or about August 10, 2018, Defendant mailed a Collection Letter (the "Letter") to the Plaintiff regarding the alleged debt owed to PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE See Exhibit A.
 - 20. Plaintiff received the letter on a date after August 10, 2018 and read it.
- 21. Upon information and belief, this was the first correspondence between the Defendant and the Plaintiff regarding the PREMIER PT AND REHABILITATION OF JACKSONVILLE alleged debt.
 - 22. The Letter stated in part:

"BALANCE VERIFICATION"

"Tek-Collect is conducting a balance verification audit to verify the accounts receivable balances for . . ."

- 23. The Letter further stated:
- "Please verify that the amount shown above is correct, sign the balance verification line below and return the notice to us at: P.O. Box 1269, Columbus, OH 43216."
- 24. The Plaintiff, as would any least sophisticated consumer, read the above statement and believed that she was being instructed to write in to the Defendant to verify whether she believed the amount due was correct or not. If the amount of the balance was correct, Plaintiff was instructed to sign and mail the letter to Defendant, if incorrect, Plaintiff instructed to note the same and mail to Defendant.
- 25. The Letter also included a 30-day debt validation notice as follows:

 "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."

- 26. The Plaintiff, as would any least sophisticated consumer, read the above paragraphs and was left unsure as to her rights regarding disputing the alleged debt.
- 27. Plaintiff was left unsure as to whether she had to write and mail the Defendant if she disputed the account balance as instructed in the letter, or whether she can do so by phone.
- 28. It has been well established that a validation notice required by 15 USC § 1692g "must not be overshadowed or contradicted by accompanying messages from the debt collector." See *Wilson v. Quadramed Corp.*, 225 F.3d 350 (3d Cir. 2000).
- 29. To determine if the validation notice was "overshadowed or contradicted" we look to the least sophisticated debtor standard. *Id* at 354.
- 30. A validation notice is overshadowed and/or contradicted if it would make the least sophisticated consumer uncertain as to his or her rights.
- 31. As the statements in the letter left Plaintiff, as it would leave any least sophisticated consumer, uncertain as to her validation rights, the Defendant violated this section of the FDCPA.
- 32. Congress adopted the debt validation provisions of section 1692g to guarantee that consumers would receive adequate notice of their rights under the FDCPA. *Wilson*, 225 F.3d at 354, citing *Miller v. Payco–General Am. Credits, Inc.*, 943 F.2d 482, 484 (4th Cir.1991).
- 33. Congress further desired to "eliminate the recurring problem of debt collectors dunning the wrong person or attempting to collect debts which the consumer has already paid." S.Rep. No. 95–382, at 4 (1977), reprinted in 1977 U.S.C.C.A.N. 1695, 1699.
- 34. The rights afforded to consumers under Section 1692g(a) are amongst the most powerful protections provided by the FDCPA.
 - 35. Defendant's violations of the FDCPA created the risk of real harm that the

Plaintiff and caused the Plaintiff a real information injury.

36. Defendant's actions as described herein are part of a pattern and practice used to collect consumer debts.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

- Plaintiff brings this claim on behalf of the following case, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3) on behalf of the following class: The Class consists of (a) all individuals with addresses in the State of Florida (b) to whom Defendant (c) sent an initial collection letter in an attempt to collect a consumer debt allegedly owed to Premier Pt and Rehabilitation of Jacksonville (d) which contained the statement "Please verify that the amount shown above is correct, sign the balance verification line below and return the notice to us at: P.O. Box 1269, Columbus, OH 43216" (e) within a date of one year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date 21 days after the filing of this action.
- 38. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendant and those companies and entities on whose behalf they attempt to collect and/or have purchased debts.
- 39. Excluded from the Plaintiff Class are the Defendant and all officers, members, partners, managers, directors, and employees of the Defendant and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action and all members of their immediate families.
- 40. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Class, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the form attached as *Exhibit A*, violate 15 U.S.C. § 1692g and § 1692e.

- 41. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories.
- 42. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class 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 the Plaintiff's attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.
- 43. 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 believes, and on that basis alleges, that the Plaintiff Class defined above is 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 Class and those questions predominate over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as *Exhibit A*, violate 15 U.S.C. § 1692g and § 1692e.
 - (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 Class have claims arising out of the Defendant's common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
 - (d) Adequacy: The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are averse 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 his 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.
- 44. 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 Class 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.
- 45. 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).

COUNT I

VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692g et seq.

46. 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.

- 47. 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. § 1692g.
 - 48. Pursuant to 15 USC §1692g, a debt collector:
 - (a) Within five days after the initial communication with a consumer in connection with the collection of any debt, a debt collector shall, unless the following information is contained in the initial communication or the consumer has paid the debt, send the consumer a written notice containing
 - (1) The amount of the debt;
 - (2) The name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed;
 - (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;
 - (4) A statement that the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within thirty-day period that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed, the debt collector will obtain verification of the debt or a copy of a judgment against the consumer and a copy of such verification or judgment will be mailed to the consumer by the debt collector; and
 - (5) A statement that, upon the consumer's written request within the thirty-day period, the debt collector will provide the consumer with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor.
 - 49. The Defendant violated 1692g by overshadowing the validation notice.
- 50. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II

VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692e et seq.

- 51. 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.
- 52. Defendants' 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, 1692e(2), 1692e(5) and 1692e(10).
- 53. Pursuant to Section 15 U.S.C. §1692e of the FDCPA, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.
- 54. The Defendants violated said provision by using false representations and/or deceptive means to collect or attempt to collect any debt in violation of 15 U.S.C. §1692e(10).
- 55. By reason thereof, Defendants are liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendants' conduct violated Section 1692e *et seq*. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

56. 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 demands judgment against Defendant as follows:

- (a) Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Plaintiff's Counsel as Class Counsel;
- (b) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
- (c) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
- (d) Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;
- (e) Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and
- (f) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: October 9, 2018

By: <u>/s/</u>
Jon P. Dubbeld, Esq.

Berkowitz & Myer 4900 Central Avenue St. Petersburg, FL 33707

Tel: (727) 344-0123

Email: jon@berkmyer.com

EXHIBIT A

Case 3:18-cv-01248-TJC-JRK Document 1-1 Filed 10/22/18 Page 2 of 2 PageID 13 P.O. BOX 1269 COLUMBUS, OH 43216

մություն-իկուկիկիցուկիկակիկին ինթույիցութ 21-1-5928 PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL 10570391 Mary Ross 9536 Princeton Square Blvd S Apt 1413 Jacksonville, FL 32256-8352

08/10/2018

Creditor:

Premier Pt And Rehabilitation Of Jac

Reference: 2620469

Balance Due: \$ 212.00

REMIT PAYMENT DIRECTLY TO:

Premier Pt And Rehabilitation Of Jacksonville

13947 Beach Blvd

Suite 109

Jacksonville, FL 32224-1201

PLEASE REMIT THIS PORTION WITH YOUR PAYMENT

Creditor:

Premier Pt And Rehabilitation Of Jacksonville

Amount Due:

Reference: Phone:

2620469

(877) 288-2162

BALANCE VERIFICATION

Tek-Collect is conducting a balance verification audit to verify the accounts receivable balances for:

Your Creditor: Premier Pt And Rehabilitation Of Jacksonville

13947 Beach Blvd

Jacksonville, FL 32224-1201

Our client's records indicate that you have a past due outstanding balance of:

AMOUNT DUE: \$212.00

Please verify that the amount shown above is correct, sign the balance verification line below and return the notice to us at: P.O. Box 1269, Columbus, OH 43216.

Please note: If you have already made payment, please advise TekCollect to cease further contact. If not, send your remittance using the pre-addressed tear-off portion of this letter and the enclosed return envelope.

Tek-Collect is a debt collector attempting to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose. Tek-Collect has been authorized by your creditor to continue the collection process if the full amount due remains unpaid.

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 of 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.

Your prompt response will be appreciated.	
I verify the balance as correct:	
Signature	

Tek-Collect, Inc. P.O. Box 1269 Columbus, OH 43216 (866) 617-4933

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JS 44 (Rev. 08/16)

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 NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANTS		
MARY ROSS, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated		TEK-COLLECT, INC.				
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Duval (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, A JON P. DUBBELD, ESQ. ST. PETERSBURG, FL 3	, BERKOWITZ & MYE		L AVE.	Attorneys (If Known)		
II. BASIS OF JURISDI	CTION (Place an "X" in G	ne Box Only)	III. CI	TIZENSHIP OF P	RINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plain
□ 1 U.S. Government 3 Federal Question			(For Diversity Cases Only) and One Box for Defendant) PTF DEF Citizen of This State \square 1 \square 1 Incorporated or Principal Place \square 4 \square 4 of Business In This State			
2 U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizensh	ip of Parties in Item III)			2	
IV. NATURE OF SUIT	College on "V" in Our Bay On			eign Country	Click here for: Nature of Su	2000, 1 St. 055W 12
CONTRACT		ORTS	FO	RFEITURE/PENALTY	BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES
□ 110 Insurance □ 120 Marine □ 130 Miller Act □ 140 Negotiable Instrument □ 150 Recovery of Overpayment ∞ Enforcement of Judgment □ 151 Medicare Act □ 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excludes Veterans) □ 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits □ 160 Stockholders' Suits □ 190 Other Contract □ 195 Contract Product Liability □ 196 Franchise REAL PROPERTY □ 210 Land Condemnation □ 220 Foreclosure □ 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment □ 245 Tort Product Liability □ 290 All Other Real Property	□ 330 Federal Employers' Liability □ 340 Marine □ 345 Marine Product Liability □ 350 Motor Vehicle □ 355 Motor Vehicle □ 355 Motor Vehicle □ 360 Other Personal Injury □ 362 Personal Injury - Medical Malpractice CIVIL RIGHTS □ 440 Other Civil Rights □ 441 Voting □ 442 Employment □ 443 Housing/ Accommodations □ 445 Amer. w/Disabilities - Employment □ 446 Amer. w/Disabilities - Other □ 448 Education	PERSONAL INJUR 365 Personal Injury - Product Liability 367 Health Care/ Pharmaceutical Personal Injury - Product Liability 368 Asbestos Personal Injury Product Liability PERSONAL PROPEI 370 Other Fraud 371 Truth in Lending 380 Other Personal Property Damage 385 Property Damage 385 Property Damage 463 Alien Detainee 510 Motions to Vacate Safo General 535 Death Penalty Other: 540 Mandamus & Oth 550 Civil Rights 555 Prison Condition 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Confinement	1	LABOR Fair Labor Standards Act Labor/Management Relations Railway Labor Act Family and Medical Leave Act Other Labor Litigation Employee Retirement Income Security Act IMMIGRATION Naturalization Application Other Immigration Actions	422 Appeal 28 USC 158 423 Withdrawal	□ 375 False Claims Act □ 376 Qui Tam (31 USC 3729(a)) □ 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 □ 850 Securities/Commodities/ Exchange □ 890 Other Statutory Actions □ 891 Agricultural Acts □ 893 Environmental Matters □ 895 Freedom of Information Act □ 896 Arbitration □ 899 Administrative Procedure Act/Review or Appeal of Agency Decision □ 950 Constitutionality of State Statutes
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTIO	ON Brief description of ca	ause:	re ming (D	o not cue jurisdictional stat	uues uniess aiversity);	
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	FDCPA VIOLATION CHECK IF THIS UNDER RULE 2	IS A CLASS ACTION	N DE	EMAND \$	CHECK YES only JURY DEMAND	if demanded in complaint:
VIII. RELATED CASE IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE			DOCKET NUMBER	
DATE 10/10/18	3	SIGNATURE OF AT	TORNEY O	F RECORD		
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ClassAction.org

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>Tek-Collect Failed to Clearly Disclose Debt Dispute Rights, Class Action Claims</u>