UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

CASSANDRA SANTIAGO, on behalf of herself
and all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff(s),

-against-

DIVERSIFIED CONSULTANTS, INC.; and JOHN DOES 1-25,

Defendant(s).

Civil Case Number: _____

CIVIL ACTION

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT AND DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff, CASSANDRA SANTIAGO, on behalf of herself and all others similarly situated (hereinafter "Plaintiff") by and through her undersigned attorney, alleges against the above-named Defendant, DIVERSIFIED CONSULTANTS, INC. ("DIVERSIFIED), JOHN DOES 1-25 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 Atlantic County, New Jersey, and is a "Consumer" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3).
- 7. DIVERSIFIED maintains a location at 10550 Deerwood Park Boulevard, Suite 309, Jacksonville, Florida 32256.
- 8. Upon information and belief, DIVERSIFIED 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. DIVERSIFIED 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 Defendants 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 DIVERSIFIED concerning a debt owed to VERIZON WIRELESS, 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 Defendants 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 Defendants violated various provisions of the FDCPA including but not limited to:

15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e; 1692e(2)(A); 1692e(2)(B); 1692e(10); and 1692f et seq.

- b. Whether Plaintiff and the Class have been injured by the Defendants' conduct;
- c. Whether Plaintiff and the Class have sustained damages and are entitled to restitution as a result of Defendants' 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 Defendants' conduct is allowed to proceed without remedy, they will continue to reap and retain the proceeds of their ill-gotten gains.
- Defendants have 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 15U.S.C. § 1692a(3).
- 15. Sometime prior to May 27, 2016, Plaintiff allegedly incurred a financial obligation to VERIZON WIRELESS ("VERIZON").

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

18. VERIZON is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(4).

19. On or before May 27, 2016, VERIZON WIRELESS referred the VERIZON

WIRELESS obligation to DIVERSIFIED for the purpose of collections.

20. At the time VERIZON WIRELESS referred the VERIZON WIRELESS

obligation to DIVERSIFIED, the obligation was past due.

21. At the time VERIZON WIRELESS referred the VERIZON obligation to

DIVERSIFIED, the obligation was in default.

22. Defendant caused to be delivered to Plaintiff a letter dated May 27, 2016, which

was addressed to Plaintiff. Exhibit A.

23. The May 27, 2016 letter was sent to Plaintiff in connection with the collection of

the VERIZON obligation.

24. The May 27, 2016 letter is a "communication" as defined by 15 U.S.C. §

1692a(2).

25. Upon receipt, Plaintiff read the May 27, 2016 letter.

26. The May 27, 2016 letter provides the following information regarding the total

balance claimed due on the VERIZON obligation:

Current Balance: \$1,139.77

27. The May 27, 2016 letter also stated in part that: VERIZON WIRELESS has given our company the ability to resolve your account for **50% off the current balance referenced above**. (emphasis added).

- 28. The current balance due stated in the May 27, 2016 letter included an amount for a collection fee and/or interest.
- 29. The May 27, 2016 letter failed to disclose that the current balance included an amount for a collection fee and/or interest.
- 30. The May 27, 2016 letter failed to disclose that the current balance included an amount for a collection fee of 18%.
- 31. At the time that DIVERSIFIED sent the May 27, 2016 letter to Plaintiff, the principal balance was approximately \$965.00.
- 32. All or some portion of the collection fee was included in the \$\$1,139.77 current balance claimed due in the May 27, 2016 letter.
- 33. The \$1,139.77 current balance claimed due in the May 27, 2016 letter contained all or some of the collection fee.
 - 34. Defendant knew or should have known that its actions violated the FDCPA.
- 35. Defendant 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 Defendants' 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;

- (b) Using unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect any debt; and
- (c) Making a false representation of the character or amount of the debt.
- 37. On information and belief, Defendants 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 Defendants, are to be evaluated by the objective standard of the hypothetical "least sophisticated consumer."
- 40. Defendant's collection letters and/or notices would cause the least sophisticated to be confused as to the meaning of "current balance" and as to whether that balance consisted of fees, costs and/or interest.
- 41. Defendant's collection letters and/or notices would cause the least sophisticated consumer to believe that the balance claimed due consisted of only principal.
- 42. Defendant's letters were designed to cause the least sophisticated consumer to believe that the balance claimed due consisted of only principal.
- 43. The content of Defendant's letter was designed to cause the least sophisticated consumer to believe that the balance claimed due consisted of only principal.

- 44. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e of the FDCPA by using any false, deceptive or misleading representation or means in connection with their attempts to collect debts from Plaintiff and others similarly situated.
- 45. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e of the FDCPA in connection with their communications to Plaintiff and others similarly situated.
- 46. Section 1692e(2)(A) of the FDCPA prohibits a debt collector from making a false representation of the character, amount or legal status of a debt.
- 47. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(A) by making false representations of the character and legal status of the debt.
- 48. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(A) by misrepresenting the amount claimed due as principal in the May 27, 2016 letter.
- 49. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(A) by misrepresenting the character of the debt as entirely principal.
- 50. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(A) by representing the "current balance" as principal when in fact it contained fees, costs and/or interest.
- 51. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(B) by misrepresenting that a collection fee was lawfully due.
- 52. Section 1692e(10) prohibits the use of any false representation or deceptive means to collect or attempt to collect any debt.
- 53. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(10) by misrepresenting the amount claimed due as principal in the May 27, 2016 letter.
- 54. Defendants violated 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(10) by misrepresenting that a collection fee was due.

- 55. Defendants' attempt to collect the alleged debt by misrepresenting the nature and amount of the alleged amount due violated various provisions of the FDCPA including but not limited to: 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e; 1692e(2)(A); 1692e(2)(B); 1692e(10); and 1692f et seq.
- 56. Section 1692f *et seq.* of the FDCPA prohibits a debt collector from using unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect any debt.
- 57. Defendants violated Section 1692f *et seq*. of the FDCPA by attempting to collect interest, which it is not authorized or permitted by law to charge or collect.
- 58. Congress enacted the FDCPA in part to eliminate abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors.
- 59. Plaintiff and others similarly situated have a right to free from abusive debt collection practices by debt collectors.
- 60. Plaintiff and others similarly situated have a right to receive proper notices mandated by the FDCPA.
- 61. Plaintiff and others similarly situated were sent letters which would have affected their decision-making with regard to the debt.
- 62. Plaintiff and others similarly situated have suffered harm as a direct result of the abusive, deceptive and unfair collection practices described herein.
- 63. Plaintiff has suffered damages and other harm as a direct result of the Defendants' 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., and Glen H. Chulsky, 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: November 11, 2016

s/ Joseph K. Jones

Joseph K. Jones, Esq.
JONES, WOLF & KAPASI, LLC
375 Passaic Avenue, Suite 100
Fairfield, New Jersey 07004
(973) 227-5900 telephone
(973) 244-0019 facsimile
jkj@legaljones.com

s/ Glen Chulsky

Glen Chulsky, Esq. JONES, WOLF & KAPASI, LLC 375 Passaic Avenue, Suite 100 Fairfield, New Jersey 07004 (973) 227-5900 telephone (973) 244-0019 facsimile **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: November 11, 2016

s/ Joseph K. Jones

Joseph K. Jones, Esq.

Exhibit

A

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PO BOX 1391 SOUTHGATE, MI 48195-0391



Diversified Consultants, Inc. 800-604-0064

Hours of Operation: Monday – Thursday 8AM to 11PM EST Friday 8AM to 10PM EST Saturday 9AM to 4PM EST

05/27/16

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	*** Resolution Op	portunity***				
	VERIZON WIRELESS has given our company the ability to resolve your account for 50% off of the current balance referenced above.					
	If you wish to take advantage of this opportunity, please call our office at the toll free number above. Calls to or from this company may be monitored or recorded.					
	We accept payment via credit card or check. We are not obligated to renew this offer.					
	This is an attempt to collect a debt. Any information obtained will be used for that purpose. This communication is from a debt collector. Sincerely, Diversified Consultants, Inc. PO BOX 551268 JACKSONVILLE, FL 32255-1268 800-604-0064					
Check One Card Numb Expiration	Date: CCV#: Last 3 digits on back of card	Amount Due: \$1,139.77 Amount Submitted:				
Signature of	of Cardholder:					

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DIVERSIFIED CONSULTANTS, INC. PO BOX 551268

JACKSONVILLE, FL 32255-1268

Original Creditor: VERIZON WIRELESS
Current Creditor: VERIZON WIRELESS
Agency Reference Number:

Account Number:

Cardholder Name:

Cardholder Billing Address:

Current Balance: \$1,139.77

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.)

the civil docket sheet. (SEE IN	STRÜCTIONS ÓN THE REVERSE OF THE	E FORM.)	, ,		1 1	
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS			
CASSANDRA SANTIAG	GO, on behalf of herself and all o	others similarly				
(b) County of Residence	of First Listed Plaintiff Atlantic		County of Residence of	f First Listed Defendant	out-of-state	
(E)	CCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)		(IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE LAND INVOLVED.			
(c) Attorney's (Firm Name.	Address, and Telephone Number)		Attorneys (If Known)			
IONES, WOLF & KAPA Joseph K. Jones, Esq.			•			
II. BASIS OF JURISD	ICTION (Place an "X" in One Box On	alv) III CI	TIZENSHIP OF P	RINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff	
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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>Diversified Consultants Facing Lawsuit Over Debt Collection Practices</u>