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

LETICIA WOODS, Individually and on Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

ASSET RECOVERY SOLUTIONS, LLC,

Defendant.

Case No.: 17-cv-354

**CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT** 

**Jury Trial Demanded** 

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. This class action seeks redress for collection practices that violate the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1692 *et seq.* (the "FDCPA").

#### JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2. The court has jurisdiction to grant the relief sought by the Plaintiff pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692k and 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, and 1337. Venue in this District is proper in that Defendant directed its collection efforts into the District.

#### **PARTIES**

3. Plaintiff Leticia Woods is an individual who resides in the Eastern District of Wisconsin (Milwaukee County).

4. Plaintiff is a "consumer" as defined in the FDCPA, 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3), in that Defendant sought to collect from her a debt allegedly incurred for personal, family or household purposes, namely a bill for educational services.

5. Defendant Asset Recovery Solutions, LLC ("ARS") is a debt collection agency with its principal offices located at 2200 E Devon Ave Ste 200, Des Plaines, IL 60018.

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6. ARS is engaged in the business of a collection agency, using the mails and telephone to collect consumer debts originally owed to others.

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

#### **FACTS**

On or about February 7, 2017, Plaintiff received debt collection letter from ARS.
 A copy of this letter is attached to this complaint as <u>Exhibit A</u>.

9. Upon information and belief, <u>Exhibit A</u> is a form letter, generated by computer, and with the information specific to Plaintiff inserted by computer.

10. On <u>Exhibit A</u>, ARS represents that the "creditor" is "UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX." ("Phoenix").

11. Upon information and belief, ARS is collecting the debt referred to in <u>Exhibit A</u> on Phoenix's behalf.

12. Upon information and belief, ARS is not the owner of the debt referred to in Exhibit A.

13. The letter ARS sent to Plaintiff (Exhibit A) includes the following text:

We would like to settle your debt for only 35% of your Total Current Balance listed above.

#### Settlement amount \$614.36

To accept this offer, simply make sure that we receive the entire Settlement Amount on or before March 30 2017. If we receive the Settlement Amount on or before March 30 2017, and if your funds clear, we will consider your account to be settled in full and will stop all further collection efforts. **This offer expires on March 30 2017.** 

We are not obligated to renew this offer. Failure to comply with the above mentioned terms will nullify the settlement arrangement.

#### Exhibit A.

14. The above language is confusing and misleading to the unsophisticated consumer.

15. Exhibit A is unclear as to whether payment of the "settlement" amount would

actually settle the account in full with ARS and Phoenix.

16. <u>Exhibit A</u> only addresses the status of the consumer's account with ARS. Nothing in <u>Exhibit A</u> indicates that Phoenix would waive the remaining 65% of the debt if Plaintiff paid the requested amount to ARS. Instead, the letter indicates that payment of the debt will cause ARS to "stop all further collection efforts."

17. Upon information and belief, the relationship between ARS and Phoenix is a nonagent, independent contractor relationship, not an agency relationship. Phoenix does not exercise the type of control over ARS that would establish an agency relationship.

18. Under a reasonable interpretation of <u>Exhibit A</u>, payment of the "settlement" amount would result ARS closing its account and returning the remaining balance (i.e. 65 percent of the balance) to Phoenix, which would be within its rights to continue collection efforts.

19. It is common for debt collectors to collect an account for several months and then return the account to the creditor. It is also common for creditors to recall accounts from debt collectors and place the accounts with different collection agencies.

20. Recall and reassignment of accounts, or even disappearance or repudiation of a settlement agreement, sometimes occurs while the consumer has "settled" with a debt collector or a settlement payment plan is in progress. *See, eg. Lesh v. Allied Interstate, LLC*, et al., No. 15-cv-1426 (E.D. Wis. filed Nov. 30, 2015); *Kleppin v. Estate Information Services LLC*, No. 14-cv-1484 (E.D. Wis. filed Nov. 24, 2014).

21. ARS's unclear language raises the risk that the consumer will complete the terms of the settlement proposal, only to have Phoenix or a new debt collector later seek the entire balance. *Id.* 

22. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e generally prohibits "any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt."

23. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(a) specifically prohibits: "The false representation of – the character, amount, or legal status of any debt.

24. 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(10) specifically prohibits: "The use of any false representation or deceptive means to collect or attempt to collect any debt or to obtain information concerning a consumer.

#### <u>COUNT I – FDCPA</u>

25. Plaintiff incorporates by reference as if fully set forth herein the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs of this Complaint.

26. <u>Exhibit A</u> are confusing and mislead the unsophisticated consumer as to the status of the remaining balance after a "settlement" payment is made.

27. <u>Exhibit A</u> only state that payment of the "settlement" amount would resolve the matter with ARS, and that the payment would cause ARS to stop collection efforts.

28. It is facially unclear whether such payment would actually resolve the entire balance of the alleged debt, or would only result in the remaining 65 percent of the debt being returned to Phoenix for additional collection efforts.

29. Defendant violated 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692e(2)(a) and 1692e(10).

#### **CLASS ALLEGATIONS**

30. Plaintiff brings this action on behalf of a Class, consisting of (a) all natural persons in the State of Wisconsin (b) who were sent a collection letter in the form represented by <u>Exhibit A</u> to the complaint in this action, (c) seeking to collect a debt owed for Phoenix, (d) incurred for personal, family or household purposes, and (e) in which ARS had not acquired an

ownership interest in the debt, (f) between March 9, 2016 and March 9, 2017, (g) that was not returned by the postal service.

31. The Class is so numerous that joinder is impracticable. On information and belief, there are more than 50 members of the Class.

32. There are questions of law and fact common to the members of the class, which common questions predominate over any questions that affect only individual class members. The predominant common question is whether <u>Exhibit A</u> violates the FDCPA.

33. Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class members. All are based on the same factual and legal theories.

34. Plaintiff will fairly and adequately represent the interests of the Class members. Plaintiff has retained counsel experienced in consumer credit and debt collection abuse cases.

35. A class action is superior to other alternative methods of adjudicating this dispute.Individual cases are not economically feasible.

#### JURY DEMAND

36. Plaintiff hereby demands a trial by jury.

#### PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff requests that the Court enter judgment in favor of Plaintiff and the Class and against Defendant for:

- (a) actual damages;
- (b) statutory damages;
- (c) attorneys' fees, litigation expenses and costs of suit; and
- (d) such other or further relief as the Court deems proper.

Dated: March 9, 2017.

#### ADEMI & O'REILLY, LLP

By: /s/Denise L. Morris Shpetim Ademi (SBN 1026973) John D. Blythin (SBN 1046105) Mark A. Eldridge (SBN 1089944) Denise L. Morris (SBN 1097911) 3620 East Layton Avenue Cudahy, WI 53110 (414) 482-8000 (414) 482-8001 (fax) sademi@ademilaw.com jblythin@ademilaw.com meldridge@ademilaw.com

# **EXHIBIT A**

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Statement Date:	02/27/17
ID Number:	4204
Original Creditor:	UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX
Current Creditor:	UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX
Account Number:	XXXXXXXXXXX6007
Total Current Balance:	\$1,755.32



#### 877-558-8338

Leticia A Woods 3540 N 15th St Milwaukee, WI 53206

We would like to settle your debt for only 35% of your Total Current Balance listed above.

#### Settlement amount \$614.36

To accept this offer, simply make sure that we receive the entire Settlement Amount on or before March 30 2017. If we receive the Settlement Amount on or before March 30 2017, and if your funds clear, we will consider your account to be settled in full and will stop all further collection efforts. **This offer expires on March 30 2017**.

We are not obligated to renew this offer. Failure to comply with the above mentioned terms will nullify the settlement arrangement.

We encourage you to call prior to making a payment intended to pay your account in full. Please contact us at 877-558-8338.

This is an attempt to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose. This communication is from a debt collector.

Sincerely, Asset Recovery Solutions 877-558-8338, Ext. 741

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

Asset Recovery Solutions, LLC Contacts						
	Hours of Operation: Monday- Thursday 8 AM- 9 PM CT Friday: 8 am – 5 pm CT Saturday: 8 AM-12 CT	http://payment	YOU CAN MAKE YOUR PAYMENT ONLINE AT: http://payments.arsllc.com/			
Detach and Return 2200 E. Devon Ave Ste 200 Des Plaines, IL 60018-4501			CREDIT CARD, FILL (	DUT BELOW.		
		SIGNATURE ID NUMBER 4204 ACCOUNT NUMBER XXXXXXXXXXXXXX6007		AMOUNT PAID S CREDITOR Y OF PHOENIX		
	<b>    </b>	ןיןן	Please send payments and correspondence to: 			

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### **CIVIL COVER SHEET**

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE REVERSE OF THE FORM.)

Place an X in the appropriate	Box: Green	Bay Division		Milwaukee Division		
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS			
LETICIA WOODS			ASSET R	ASSET RECOVERY SOLUTIONS, LLC		
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Milwaukee (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)			ence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, U			
				AND INVOLVED.		
(c) Attorney's (Firm Name	, Address, and Telephone Numbe	r)	Attorneys (If Kno	wn)		
	3620 E. Layton Ave., Cudahy, WI e (414) 482-8001-Facsimile	53110				
II. BASIS OF JURISD	DICTION (Place an "X" i	n One Box Only)	III. CITIZENSHIP C	<b>DF PRINCIPAL PARTIES</b>	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff	
□ 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff 2 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)			(For Diversity Cases Only)     and One Box for Defendant)       PTF     DEF       Citizen of This State     1       1     1       1     1       0     1       1     1       0     1       1     1       1     1       1     1       1     1       1     1       1     1       1     1       1     1			
2 U.S. Government Defendant	4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship	4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)		Citizen of Another State 2 2 Incorporated and Principal Place 5 5 5 of Business In Another State		
			Citizen or Subject of a Foreign Country	3 3 Foreign Nation		
IV. NATURE OF SUI CONTRACT	T (Place an "X" in One Box Or TOF		FORFEITURE/PENAL	TY BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES	
196 Franchise         REAL PROPERTY         210 Land Condemnation         220 Foreclosure         230 Rent Lease & Ejectment         240 Torts to Land         245 Tort Product Liability	PERSONAL INJURY         310 Airplane         315 Airplane Product         Liability         320 Assault, Libel &         Slander         330 Federal Employers'         Liability         340 Marine         345 Marine Product         Liability         350 Motor Vehicle         355 Motor Vehicle         Product Liability         360 Other Personal         Injury         CIVIL RIGHTS         441 Voting         442 Employment         443 Housing/         Accommodations         444 Welfare         445 Amer. w/Disabilities -         Employment	PERSONAL INJURY 362 Personal Injury - Med. Malpractice 365 Personal Injury - Product Liability PERSONAL PROPER 370 Other Fraud 371 Truth in Lending 380 Other Personal Property Damage 385 Property Damage Product Liability PRISONER PETITION 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence Habeas Corpus: 530 General 535 Death Penalty 540 Mandamus & Oth 550 Civil Rights 555 Prison Condition	Y       610 Agriculture         620 Other Food & Drug         625 Drug Related Seizur         of Property 21 USC         630 Liquor Laws         640 R.R. & Truck         650 Airline Regs.         660 Occupational         TV         Safety/Health         690 Other         10 Fair Labor Standard:         Act         730 Labor/Mgmt. Relatiti         730 Labor/Mgmt. Report         & Disclosure Act         790 Other Labor Litigatio         791 Empl. Ret. Inc.         Security Act         IMHIGRATION	a       422 Appeal 28 USC 158         423 Withdrawal       28 USC 157         881 <b>PROPERTY RIGHTS</b> 820 Copyrights       830 Patent         840 Trademark       840 Trademark         SOCIAL SECURITY         8       861 HIA (1395ff)         862 Black Lung (923)       863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g))         9       864 SSID Title XVI         865 RSI (405(g)) <b>FEDERAL TAX SUITS</b> or Defendant)         870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant)         871 IRS—Third Party       26 USC 7609	<ul> <li>400 State Reapportionment</li> <li>410 Antitrust</li> <li>430 Banks and Banking</li> <li>450 Commerce</li> <li>460 Deportation</li> <li>470 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations</li> <li>480 Consumer Credit</li> <li>490 Cable/Sat TV</li> <li>810 Selective Service</li> <li>850 Securities/Commodities/ Exchange</li> <li>875 Customer Challenge 12 USC 3410</li> <li>890 Other Statutory Actions</li> <li>891 Agricultural Acts</li> <li>892 Economic Stabilization Act</li> <li>895 Freedom of Information Act</li> <li>900 Appeal of Fee Determination Under Equal Access to Justice</li> <li>950 Constitutionality of State Statutes</li> </ul>	
☑ 1 Original □ 2 R	ate Court	Appellate Court	Reopened	Transferred from another district	n Judgment	
VI. CAUSE OF ACTI	15 U.S.C. 1692 et seq	-	re filing (Do not cite jurisd	ictional statutes unless diversity):	:	
	1	Collection Practices Act				
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	CHECK IF THIS UNDER F.R.C.P.	IS A CLASS ACTION 23	DEMAND \$	CHECK YES only JURY DEMAND	y if demanded in complaint: P:	
VIII. RELATED CAS IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE		DOCKET NUMBER		
March 9, 2017		signature of att s/ John D.	forney of record Blythin			
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY RECEIPT #A	моимт Ca <del>se 2:17-сv-(</del>	00354 Filed 0	<del>3/09/17 P</del> age <sup>110</sup>	of <del>-2 Docume</del> nt 1-2	DGE	

#### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET FORM JS 44**

#### Authority For Civil Cover Sheet

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and service of pleading or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. The attorney filing a case should complete the form as follows:

I. (a) Plaintiffs-Defendants. Enter names (last, first, middle initial) of plaintiff and defendant. If the plaintiff or defendant is a government agency, use only the full name or standard abbreviations. If the plaintiff or defendant is an official within a government agency, identify first the agency and then the official, giving both name and title.

(b) County of Residence. For each civil case filed, except U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county where the first listed plaintiff resides at the time of filing. In U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county in which the first listed defendant resides at the time of filing. (NOTE: In land condemnation cases, the county of residence of the "defendant" is the location of the tract of land involved.)

(c) Attorneys. Enter the firm name, address, telephone number, and attorney of record. If there are several attorneys, list them on an attachment, noting in this section "(see attachment)".

**II.** Jurisdiction. The basis of jurisdiction is set forth under Rule 8(a), F.R.C.P., which requires that jurisdictions be shown in pleadings. Place an "X" in one of the boxes. If there is more than one basis of jurisdiction, precedence is given in the order shown below.

United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here.

United States defendant. (2) When the plaintiff is suing the United States, its officers or agencies, place an "X" in this box.

Federal question. (3) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1331, where jurisdiction arises under the Constitution of the United States, an amendment to the Constitution, an act of Congress or a treaty of the United States. In cases where the U.S. is a party, the U.S. plaintiff or defendant code takes precedence, and box 1 or 2 should be marked.

Diversity of citizenship. (4) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1332, where parties are citizens of different states. When Box 4 is checked, the citizenship of the different parties must be checked. (See Section III below; federal question actions take precedence over diversity cases.)

**III.** Residence (citizenship) of Principal Parties. This section of the JS 44 is to be completed if diversity of citizenship was indicated above. Mark this section for each principal party.

**IV.** Nature of Suit. Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If the nature of suit cannot be determined, be sure the cause of action, in Section VI below, is sufficient to enable the deputy clerk or the statistical clerks in the Administrative Office to determine the nature of suit. If the cause fits more than one nature of suit, select the most definitive.

V. Origin. Place an "X" in one of the seven boxes.

Original Proceedings. (1) Cases which originate in the United States district courts.

Removed from State Court. (2) Proceedings initiated in state courts may be removed to the district courts under Title 28 U.S.C., Section 1441. When the petition for removal is granted, check this box.

Remanded from Appellate Court. (3) Check this box for cases remanded to the district court for further action. Use the date of remand as the filing date.

Reinstated or Reopened. (4) Check this box for cases reinstated or reopened in the district court. Use the reopening date as the filing date.

Transferred from Another District. (5) For cases transferred under Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1404(a). Do not use this for within district transfers or multidistrict litigation transfers.

Multidistrict Litigation. (6) Check this box when a multidistrict case is transferred into the district under authority of Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1407. When this box is checked, do not check (5) above.

Appeal to District Judge from Magistrate Judgment. (7) Check this box for an appeal from a magistrate judge's decision.

 

 VI.
 Cause of Action. Report the civil statute directly related to the cause of action and give a brief description of the cause. Do not cite jurisdictional statutes

 unless diversity.
 Example:
 U.S. Civil Statute: 47 USC 553 Brief Description: Unauthorized reception of cable service

VII. Requested in Complaint. Class Action. Place an "X" in this box if you are filing a class action under Rule 23, F.R.Cv.P.

Demand. In this space enter the dollar amount (in thousands of dollars) being demanded or indicate other demand such as a preliminary injunction.

Jury Demand. Check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not a jury is being demanded.

VIII. Related Cases. This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases if any. If there are related pending cases, insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judge names for such cases.

Date and Attorney Signature. Date and sign the civil cover sheet.

## UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Eastern District of Wisconsin

LETICIA WOODS
Plaintiff
v.
ASSET RECOVERY SOLUTIONS, LLC
Defendant

Civil Action No. 17-cv-354

SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address) ASSET RECOVERY SOLUTIONS, LLC c/o C T CORPORATION SYSTEM 8020 EXCELSIOR DR., SUITE 200 MADISON, WI 53717

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are: John D. Blythin

Ademi & O'Reilly, LLP 3620 East Layton Avenue Cudahy, WI 53110 (414) 482-8000-Telephone

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

CLERK OF COURT

Date:

Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

Civil Action No. 17-cv-354

#### **PROOF OF SERVICE**

#### (This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))

	This summons for (nam	ne of individual and title, if any)				
was ree	ceived by me on (date)					
	□ I personally served the summons on the individual at ( <i>place</i> )					
		; or				
	□ I left the summons a	at the individual's residence or us	ual place of abode with (name)			
, a person of suitable age and discretion who resides there						
	on (date), and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or					
	□ I served the summons on (name of individual), where the summons on (name of individual)					
	designated by law to a	ccept service of process on behalf		; or		
		On (date)				
	$\Box$ I returned the summ	; or				
	<b>Other</b> ( <i>specify</i> ):					
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a total of \$	0.00		
	I declare under penalty	of perjury that this information is	s true.			
Date:			Server's signature			
			server s signature			
			Printed name and title	<u> </u>		
			Server's address			

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

# **ClassAction.org**

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>Asset Recovery Solutions Facing Lawsuit Over Debt Settlement Language</u>