UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

Yvonne Metelus aka Yvonne Orr, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated;

Plaintiff,

Civil Action No: \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT
DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

-V.-

Credit Bureau of St. Croix, Inc., and John Does 1-25,

Defendant.

Plaintiff Yvonne Metelus aka Yvonne Orr (hereinafter, "Plaintiff"), a Florida resident, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through her attorneys, RC Law Group, PLLC, against Credit Bureau of St. Croix, 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 pursuant to <u>28 U.S.C.</u> § 1331, <u>15 U.S.C.</u> § 1692 et. seq. and <u>28 U.S.C.</u> § 2201. If applicable, the Court also has pendant jurisdiction over the State law claims in this action pursuant to <u>28 U.S.C.</u> § 1367(a).
  - 4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to <u>28 U.S.C.</u> § <u>1391(b)(2)</u>.

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

- 5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of Florida consumers under § 1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA").
- 6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory and injunctive relief.

#### **PARTIES**

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of Florida, County of Broward, residing at 4191 NW 48<sup>th</sup> Ave, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 33319.

- 8. Credit Bureau of St. Croix, Inc. is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in <u>15</u> <u>U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6)</u> and used in the FDCPA with an address at 2 Hospital Street, Christiansted, VI, 00821.
- 9. Upon information and belief, Defendant is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.
- 10. Defendant is a "debt collector" as defined under the FDCPA under 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(6).
- 11. John Does l-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

#### **CLASS ALLEGATIONS**

- 12. Plaintiffs bring this claim on behalf of the following case, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).
  - 13. The Class consists of:
    - a. all individuals with addresses in the State of Florida;
    - b. to whom Credit Bureau of St. Croix, Inc. sent a collection letter attempting to collect a consumer debt;
    - c. sent an initial collection that failed to properly identify the creditor;
    - d. and made threats which overshadowed the ability to invoke consumers rights;
    - e. which letter was sent on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.

- 14. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendants and those companies and entities on whose behalf they attempt to collect and/or have purchased debts.
- 15. Excluded from the Plaintiff Classes are the Defendants and all officer, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendants and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.
- 16. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Classes, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms attached **as Exhibit A**, violate 15 U.S.C. §1692g.
- 17. The Plaintiffs' claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiffs will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Classes defined in this complaint. The Plaintiffs have retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiffs nor their attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.
- 18. 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 Plaintiffs are informed and believe, and on that basis allege, that the Plaintiff Classes defined above are so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.

- b. <u>Common Questions Predominate:</u> Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Classes and those questions predominai:e over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is \whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibit A violate 15 U.S.C. §1692f.
- c. **Typicality:** The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members. The Plaintiffs and all members of the Plaintiff Classes have claims arising out of the Defendants' common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- d. Adequacy: The Plaintiffs will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiffs have no interests that are adverse to the absent class members. The Plaintiffs are committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiffs have also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiffs nor their 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.

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

#### **FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS**

- 21. 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.
- 22. Some time prior to September 14, 2016, an obligation was allegedly incurred to Bank of Nova Scotia.
- 23. The Bank of Nova Scotia obligation arose out of transactions in which money, property, insurance or services, which are the subject of the transaction, are primarily for personal, family or household purposes.
- 24. The alleged Bank of Nova Scotia obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(5).
  - 25. Bank of Nova Scotia is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(4).
- 26. Bank of Nova Scotia or a subsequent owner of the Bank of Nova Scotia debt contracted the Defendant to collect the alleged debt.

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

#### *Violation I – September 14, 2016 Collection Letter*

- 28. On or about September 14, 2016, Defendant caused to be delivered to the Plaintiff an initial contact notice (the "Collection Letter") regarding the alleged debt owed to Bank of Nova Scotia. See Exhibit A.
- 29. The September 14, 2016 Collection Letter is a "communication" as defined by 15. U.S.C. §1692a(2).
  - 30. The September 14, 2016 Collection Letter was an initial communication letter.
- 31. When a debt collector solicits payment from a consumer, it must, within five days of an initial communication, provide the consumer with a written validation notice which must include the following information:
  - (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 if the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within the 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 the 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. 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(a).
- 32. The FDCPA further provides that if the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within the thirty day period . . . that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed . . . the debt collector shall cease collection . . . until the debt collector obtains verification of the debt . . . and a copy of such verification is mailed to the consumer by the debt collector. 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(b).
  - 33. This letter did not contain all the requirements of "G Notice."
- 34. The letter fails to clearly and effectively identify Defendant's role in connection with the debt.
  - 35. The letter fails to identify Plaintiff's current creditor.
  - 36. Defendant's letter fails to identify any entity or individual as a "creditor."
  - 37. Defendant's letter merely states, "Client Name- Bank of Nova Scotia."
- 38. The letter fails to indicate whether the "client name" refers to the Plaintiff's creditor.
- 39. A debt collector has the obligation not just to convey the name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed, but also to state such explicitly.
- 40. Defendant failed to explicitly state the name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed.
  - 41. Defendant failed to clearly state the name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed.
- 42. The least sophisticated consumer would likely be confused as to the creditor to whom the debt is owed.

- 43. It is deceptive to not clearly state who the creditor is on any letter sent. Mere allusions are not enough but the letter must specifically and clearly state who the creditor is.
- 44. As a result of Defendant's deceptive, misleading and unfair debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.
- 45. Defendant's actions as described herein are part of a pattern and practice used to collect consumer debts.
- 46. 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
- 47. This letter from Defendant to Plaintiff was a collection communications in violation of numerous and multiple provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692g, 1692e, 1692e(2), 1692e(5), 1692e(10), 1692f, and 1692f(1).

#### **Violation II**

- 48. Defendant also threatened Plaintiff during the validation period.
- 49. Defendant's letter states to the Plaintiff, "You are expected to pay your outstanding bills, otherwise further collection efforts will continue against you."
- 50. Although a collection letter may track the statutory language, "the collector nonetheless violates the Act if it conveys that information in a confusing or contradictory fashion so as to cloud the required message with uncertainty." Russell, 74 F.3d at 35 ("It is not enough for a debt collection agency simply to include the proper debt validation notice in a mailing to a consumer-- Congress intended that such notice be clearly conveyed."). Put differently, a notice containing "language that 'overshadows or contradicts' other language informing a consumer of her rights ... violates the Act." Russell, 74 F.3d at 34.

- 51. Defendant threatened Plaintiff during the validation period without explaining that such demand does not override the Plaintiff's right to demand validation of the debt.
- 52. This statement is threatening and overshadowing as it does not truly afford the consumer their proper rights and ability to dispute the debt,
- 53. Defendant's threat in this circumstance would likely make the least sophisticated consumer uncertain as to his rights
- 54. As a result of Defendant's deceptive, misleading and unfair debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

# COUNT I VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692f et seq.

- 55. 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.
- 56. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards Plaintiff violate various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692g, 1692e, 1692e(2), 1692e(5), 1692e(10), 1692f, and 1692f(1).
- 57. As a result of the Defendant's violations of the FDCPA, Plaintiff has been damaged and is entitled to damages in accordance with the FDCPA.

#### **DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY**

58. 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 Yvonne Metelus aka Yvonne Orr, individually and on behalf of all

others similarly situated, demands judgment from Credit Bureau of St. Croix, Inc. and John Does

1-25, as follows:

1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying

Plaintiff as Class representative, and Michael Jay Ringelheim, Esq. as Class Counsel;

2. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;

3. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;

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

expenses;

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

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

deem just and proper.

Dated: Hackensack, New Jersey

September 14, 2017

/s/Michael Jay Ringelheim

RC Law Group, PLLC

By: Michael Jay Ringelheim, Esq.

Florida Bar No.: 93291 285 Passaic Street Hackensack, NJ 07601

Phone: 201.282.6500 Ext. 254

Fax: 201.282.6501

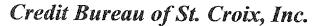
mjringelheim@rclawgroup.com

Attorneys for Plaintiff

Y1C03140A7

Christiansted VI 00821
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

September 14, 2016



2 Hospital Street • PO Box 1024 Christiansted, VI 00821 (340) 778-8997

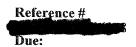


24-20 YVONNE Y ORR

Illialla India IIII IIII IIII Credit Bureau of St. Croix, Inc. PO Box 1024 Christiansted VI 00821-1024

\*\*\* Please detach the upper portion and return with your payment \*\*\*

Client Name BANK OF NOVA SCOTIA



20-CTCROX10-24-01/07/13



Total may include other accounts. Please call for details.

This is to inform you that your delinquent account has been assigned to us for collection. You are expected to pay your outstanding bills, otherwise further collection efforts will continue against you.

#### SEND YOUR PAYMENT IN FULL TO US AT THE ABOVE ADDRESS.

Yours truly,

COLL DEPT Your Account Manager

Unless you dispute the validity of this debt or any portion thereof within thirty (30) days after receipt of this notice, we will assume the debt to be valid. If you notify this office in writing within thirty days, we will obtain verification of the debt or obtain a copy of a judgment, if any, and mail you a copy of such debt or verification. If you request in writing within 30 days after receiving this notice, we will provide you with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor. This is an attempt to collect a debt, and any information obtained will be used for that purpose.

#### JS 44 (Rev. 6 a se. 6 in 1.797-KMW Docume of VIZ (RON-EROSHNETED Docket 09/14/2017 Page 1 of 2

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.) NOTICE: Attorneys MUST Indicate All Re-filed Cases Below.

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(c)	<ul> <li>(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Broward         (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)</li> <li>(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)</li> <li>Michael Jay Ringelheim- RC Law Group</li> </ul>			County of Residen  NOTE:  Attorneys (If Know	(IN U.S IN LAND THE TRA	of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.				
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JS 44 (Rev. 06/17) FLSD Revised 06/01/2017

#### 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. Nature of Suit. Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If there are multiple nature of suit codes associated with the case, pick the nature of suit code that is most applicable. Click here for: Nature of Suit Code Descriptions.
- **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.

Refiled (3) Attach copy of Order for Dismissal of Previous case. Also complete VI.

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.

Remanded from Appellate Court. (8) Check this box if remanded from Appellate Court.

- VI. Related/Refiled Cases. This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases or re-filed cases. Insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judges name for such cases.
- VII. 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

VIII. 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.

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

### UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Southern District of Florida

Southern Di	Strict of Florida							
Yvonne Metelus aka Yvonne Orr, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated;	) ) ) )							
Plaintiff(s)	)							
V.	Civil Action No.							
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Credit Bureau of St. Croix, Inc.,	)							
and John Does 1-25,	)							
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Defendant(s)	)							
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SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION								
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	To: (Defendant's name and address) Credit Bureau of St. Croix, Inc.,							
2 Hospital St	000							
Christiansted, VI 00820-40	030							
St. Croix County								
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:  Michael Jay Ringelheim, Esq.  RC Law Group, PLLC  285 Passaic Street  Hackensack, NJ 07601  Ph: 201-282-6500 x254  Email: mjringelheim@rclawgroup.com								
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							
	CELIM OF COUNT							
Data								
Date:								
	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk							

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

#### PROOF OF SERVICE

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

was re	This summons for (na ceived by me on (date)	me of individual and title, if any)								
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		on (date)		; or						
	☐ I left the summons at the individual's residence or usual 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)									
	designated by law to	accept service of process o	n behalf of (name of organization)							
			on (date)	; or						
	☐ I returned the sum	ne summons unexecuted because		; or						
	☐ Other ( <i>specify</i> ):									
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a total of \$	0.00						
	I declare under penalt	y of perjury that this inform	nation is true.							
Date:		_								
			Server's signature							
			Printed name and title							
			Server's address							

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

Print Save As... Reset

## **ClassAction.org**

This complaint is part of ClassAction.org's searchable class action lawsuit database and can be found in this post: <u>Credit Bureau of St. Croix Facing Debt Collection Lawsuit</u>