UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

DANIEL MITTELMARK,
individually and on behalf of all
others similarly situated,

CLASS ACTION

Plaintiff,

JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

v.

SYNERGY MARKETING ASSOCIATES INC. d/b/a NATIONAL PLAN ADVISORS,

De	fendant.	
		/

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Daniel Mittelmark brings this class action against Defendant Synergy Marketing Associates Inc. d/b/a National Plan Advisors, and alleges as follows upon personal knowledge as to himself and his own acts and experiences, and, as to all other matters, upon information and belief, including investigation conducted by his attorneys.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

- 1. This is a putative class action under the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, 47 U.S.C. § 227 *et seq.*, ("TCPA"), arising from Defendant's knowing and willful violations of the TCPA.
- 2. Defendant claims to assist independent insurance professionals across the nation find the right product for their clients' needs, as well as assist insurance carriers increase their distribution channels.¹
 - 3. Defendant serves over 20,000 members, 2000 contracted agents, and 300 carriers in

¹ http://synergynmo.com/; (last visited October 9, 2018).

over 40 states.²

- 4. To promote its business, Defendant engages in unsolicited telemarketing with no regard for consumers' privacy rights.
- 5. Defendant's telemarketing consists of unsolicited prerecorded messages to consumers' cellular telephones.
- 6. Defendant caused thousands of unsolicited prerecorded messages to be sent to the cellular telephones of Plaintiff and Class Members, causing them injuries, including invasion of their privacy, aggravation, annoyance, intrusion on seclusion, trespass, and conversion.
- 7. Through this action, Plaintiff seeks injunctive relief to halt Defendant's illegal conduct. Plaintiff also seeks statutory damages on behalf of herself and Class Members, as defined below, and any other available legal or equitable remedies resulting from the illegal actions of Defendants.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 8. Jurisdiction is proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 as Plaintiff alleges violations of a federal statute. Jurisdiction is also proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1332(d)(2) because Plaintiff alleges a national class, which will result in at least one Class member belonging to a different state than Defendant. Plaintiff seeks up to \$1,500.00 in damages for each call in violation of the TCPA, which, when aggregated among a proposed class numbering in the tens of thousands, or more, exceeds the \$5,000,000.00 threshold for federal court jurisdiction under the Class Action Fairness Act ("CAFA").
- 9. Venue is proper in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b) and (c) because Defendant is deemed to reside in any judicial district in which it is subject to the court's personal jurisdiction, and because Defendant provides and markets its services within this district thereby establishing sufficient contacts to subject it to personal

 $^{^{2}}$ Id.

jurisdiction. Further, Defendant's tortious conduct against Plaintiff occurred within this district and, on information and belief, Defendant has sent the same prerecorded message complained of by Plaintiff to other individuals within this judicial district, such that some of Defendant's acts have occurred within this district, subjecting Defendant to jurisdiction here.

PARTIES

- 10. Plaintiff is a natural person who, at all times relevant to this action, was a resident of Broward County, Florida.
- 11. Defendant is a Florida corporation with its principal address at 3403 Powerline Road, Suite 805, Oakland Park, FL 33309. Defendant directs, markets, and provides business activities throughout the State of Florida.

THE TCPA

- 12. The TCPA prohibits: (1) any person from calling a cellular telephone number; (2) using an automatic telephone dialing system or an artificial or prerecorded message; (3) without the recipient's prior express consent. 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(A).
- 13. The TCPA exists to prevent communications like the ones described within this Complaint. *See Mims v. Arrow Fin. Servs., LLC*, 132 S. Ct. 740, 744 (2012).
- 14. In an action under the TCPA, a plaintiff must show only that the defendant "called a number assigned to a cellular telephone service using an automatic dialing system or prerecorded voice." *Breslow v. Wells Fargo Bank, N.A.*, 857 F. Supp. 2d 1316, 1319 (S.D. Fla. 2012), *aff'd*, 755 F.3d 1265 (11th Cir. 2014).
- 15. The Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") is empowered to issue rules and regulations implementing the TCPA. According to the FCC's findings, calls in violation of the TCPA are prohibited because, as Congress found, automated or prerecorded telephone calls are a greater

nuisance and invasion of privacy than live solicitation calls, and such calls can be costly and inconvenient. The FCC also recognized that wireless customers are charged for incoming calls whether they pay in advance or after the minutes are used.

- 16. In 2012, the FCC issued an order further restricting automated telemarketing calls, requiring "prior express written consent" for such calls to wireless numbers. *See In the Matter of Rules & Regulations Implementing the Tel. Consumer Prot. Act of 1991*, 27 F.C.C.R. 1830, 1838 ¶ 20 (Feb. 15, 2012) (emphasis supplied).
- 17. To obtain express written consent for telemarketing calls, a defendant must establish that it secured the plaintiff's signature in a form that gives the plaintiff a "clear and conspicuous disclosure' of the consequences of providing the requested consent....and [the plaintiff] having received this information, agrees unambiguously to receive such calls at a telephone number the [plaintiff] designates." *In re Rules & Regulations Implementing the Tel. Consumer Prot. Act of 1991*, 27 F.C.C.R. 1830, 1837 ¶ 18, 1838 ¶ 20, 1844 ¶ 33, 1857 ¶ 66, 1858 ¶ 71 (F.C.C. Feb. 15, 2012).
- 18. The TCPA regulations promulgated by the FCC define "telemarketing" as "the initiation of a telephone call or message for the purpose of encouraging the purchase or rental of, or investment in, property, goods, or services." 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200(f)(12). In determining whether a communication constitutes telemarketing, a court must evaluate the ultimate purpose of the communication. *See Golan v. Veritas Entm't, LLC*, 788 F.3d 814, 820 (8th Cir. 2015).
- 19. "Neither the TCPA nor its implementing regulations 'require an explicit mention of a good, product, or service' where the implication of an improper purpose is 'clear from the context." *Id.* (citing *Chesbro v. Best Buy Stores, L.P.*, 705 F.3d 913, 918 (9th Cir. 2012)).
- 20. "Telemarketing' occurs when the context of a call indicates that it was initiated and transmitted to a person for the purpose of promoting property, goods, or services." *Golan*, 788 F.3d at

820 (citing 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200(a)(2)(iii) & 47 C.F.R. § 64.1200(f)(12)); *In re Rules and Regulations Implementing the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991*, 18 F.C.C. Rcd at 14098 ¶ 141, 2003 WL 21517853, at *49).

- 21. The FCC has explained that calls motivated in part by the intent to sell property, goods, or services are considered telemarketing under the TCPA. See In re Rules and Regulations Implementing the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991, 18 FCC Rcd. 14014, ¶¶ 139-142 (2003). This is true whether call recipients are encouraged to purchase, rent, or invest in property, goods, or services during the call or in the future. Id.
- 22. In other words, offers "that are part of an overall marketing campaign to sell property, goods, or services constitute" telemarketing under the TCPA. See In re Rules and Regulations Implementing the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991, 18 FCC Rcd. 14014, ¶ 136 (2003).
- 23. If a call is not deemed telemarketing, a defendant must nevertheless demonstrate that it obtained the plaintiff's prior express consent. *See In the Matter of Rules and Regulaions Implementing the Tel. Consumer Prot. Act of 1991*, 30 FCC Rcd. 7961, 7991-92 (2015) (requiring express consent "for non-telemarketing and non-advertising calls").
- 24. Further, the FCC has issued rulings and clarified that consumers are entitled to the same consent-based protections for text messages as they are for calls to wireless numbers. *See Satterfield v. Simon & Schuster, Inc.*, 569 F.3d 946, 952 (9th Cir. 2009) ("The FCC has determined that a text message falls within the meaning of 'to make any call' in 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(A)").
- 25. Further, the FCC has issued rulings and clarified that consumers are entitled to the same consent-based protections for text messages as they are for calls to wireless numbers. See Satterfield v. Simon & Schuster, Inc., 569 F.3d 946, 952 (9th Cir. 2009) (The FCC has determined that a text message

falls within the meaning of "to make any call" in 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(A)); Toney v. Quality Res., Inc., 2014 WL 6757978, at *3 (N.D. Ill. Dec. 1, 2014) (Defendant bears the burden of showing that it obtained Plaintiff's prior express consent before sending him the text message). (emphasis added).

26. With respect to standing, as recently held by the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit:

Unsolicited telemarketing phone calls or text messages, by their nature, invade the privacy and disturb the solitude of their recipients. A plaintiff alleging a violation under the TCPA "need not allege any *additional* harm beyond the one Congress has identified."

Van Patten v. Vertical Fitness Grp., LLC, 847 F.3d 1037 (9th Cir. 2017) (quoting Spokeo, Inc. v. Robins, 136 S. Ct. 1540 (2016)).

27. Similarly, the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit recently held that the receipt of a telemarketing or unsolicited call "demonstrates more than a bare violation and satisfies the concrete-injury requirement for standing." *Leyse v. Lifetime Entm't Servs., LLC*, Nos. 16-1133-cv, 16-1425-cv, 2017 U.S. App. LEXIS 2607 (2d Cir. Feb. 15, 2017) (citing *In re Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (MTBE) Prods. Liab. Litig.*, 725 F.3d 65, 105 (2d Cir. 2013) ("The injury-in-fact necessary for standing need not be large; an identifiable trifle will suffice."); *Golan v. Veritas Entm't, LLC*, 788 F.3d 814, 819-21 (8th Cir. 2015) (holding that receipt of two brief unsolicited robocalls as voicemail messages was sufficient to establish standing under TCPA); *Palm Beach Golf Ctr.-Boca, Inc. v. John G. Sarris, D.D.S., P.A.*, 781 F.3d 1245, 1252 (11th Cir. 2015) (holding that injury under similar TCPA provision may be shown by one-minute occupation of fax machine)).

FACTS

- 28. On or about September 27, 2018, Defendant called Plaintiff's cellular telephone number ending in 8043 ("8043 Number").
 - 29. Plaintiff did not answer the phone, and so Defendant left Plaintiff a prerecorded message

in his voicemail.

- 30. Plaintiff subsequently had to stop what he was doing at work to listen to the message.
- 31. The prerecorded message stated:

This is Jennifer, I'm calling licensed health agents for an immediate opportunity in our Fort Lauderdale call center, we have full time and part time positions available including nights and weekends. Do you want the best of both worlds? Earn up to \$20 per hour plus bonusses and make full commission on personal production. Call me back at 954-621-3436 to schedule an immediate interview.

- 32. At no point in time did Plaintiff provide Defendant with his express consent to be contacted using a prerecorded message.
- 33. Defendant uses prerecorded messages to recruit people to become agents and/or employees and/or affiliates of Defendant.
- 34. Defendant recruits new agents and/or employees and/or affiliates to grow and promote its business, goods and services.
- 35. Plaintiff received the subject prerecorded message within this judicial district and, therefore, Defendant's violation of the TCPA occurred within this district.
- 36. Upon information and belief, Defendant caused similar prerecorded messages to be sent to individuals residing within this judicial district.
- 37. Plaintiff is the subscriber and sole user of the 8043 Number and is financially responsible for phone service to the 8043 Number.
- 38. Defendant's unsolicited call caused Plaintiff actual harm, including invasion of his privacy, aggravation, annoyance, intrusion on seclusion, trespass, and conversion. Defendant's call also inconvenienced Plaintiff and caused disruption to his daily life. When Defendant received the prerecorded message, he was at work and had to stop what he was doing to listen to it.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

PROPOSED CLASS

- 39. Plaintiff brings this case as a class action pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23, on behalf of himself and all others similarly situated.
 - 40. Plaintiff brings this case on behalf of the below defined Class:

All persons within the United States who, within the four years prior to the filing of this Complaint, were sent a prerecorded message call, from Defendant or anyone on Defendant's behalf, to said person's cellular telephone number, soliciting a position with Defendant.

41. Defendant and its employees or agents are excluded from the Class. Plaintiff does not know the number of members in the Class but believes the Class members number in the several thousands, if not more.

NUMEROSITY

- 42. Upon information and belief, Defendant has placed prerecorded calls to cellular telephone numbers belonging to thousands of consumers throughout the United States without their prior express consent. The members of the Class, therefore, are believed to be so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable.
- 43. The exact number and identities of the Class members are unknown at this time and can be ascertained only through discovery. Identification of the Class members is a matter capable of ministerial determination from Defendants' call records.

COMMON QUESTIONS OF LAW AND FACT

44. There are numerous questions of law and fact common to the Class which predominate over any questions affecting only individual members of the Class. Among the questions of law and fact common to the Class are:

- (1) Whether Defendant made non-emergency calls to Plaintiff and Class members' cellular telephones using prerecorded messages;
- (2) Whether Defendant can meet their burden of showing that they obtained prior express consent to make such calls;
- (3) Whether Defendant's conduct was knowing and willful;
- (4) Whether Defendant is liable for damages, and the amount of such damages; and
- (5) Whether Defendant should be enjoined from such conduct in the future.
- 45. The common questions in this case are capable of having common answers. If Plaintiff's claim that Defendants routinely transmits prerecorded messages to telephone numbers assigned to cellular telephone services is accurate, Plaintiff and the Class members will have identical claims capable of being efficiently adjudicated and administered in this case.

TYPICALITY

46. Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class members, as they are all based on the same factual and legal theories.

PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF THE CLASS MEMBERS

47. Plaintiff is a representative who will fully and adequately assert and protect the interests of the Class and has retained competent counsel. Accordingly, Plaintiff is an adequate representative and will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Class.

PROCEEDING VIA CLASS ACTION IS SUPERIOR AND ADVISABLE

48. A class action is superior to all other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of this lawsuit, because individual litigation of the claims of all members of the Class is economically unfeasible and procedurally impracticable. While the aggregate damages sustained by the Class are in the millions of dollars, the individual damages incurred by each member of the Class

resulting from Defendant's wrongful conduct are too small to warrant the expense of individual lawsuits. The likelihood of individual Class members prosecuting their own separate claims is remote, and, even if every member of the Class could afford individual litigation, the court system would be unduly burdened by individual litigation of such cases.

49. The prosecution of separate actions by members of the Class would create a risk of establishing inconsistent rulings and/or incompatible standards of conduct for Defendant. For example, one court might enjoin Defendant from performing the challenged acts, whereas another may not. Additionally, individual actions may be dispositive of the interests of the Class, although certain class members are not parties to such actions.

COUNT I <u>Violations of the TCPA, 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)</u> (On Behalf of Plaintiff and the Class)

- 50. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates the foregoing allegations as if fully set forth herein.
- 51. It is a violation of the TCPA to make "any call (other than a call made for emergency purposes or made with the prior express consent of the called party) using any automatic telephone dialing system or an artificial or prerecorded voice ... to any telephone number assigned to a ... cellular telephone service" 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(A)(iii)
- 52. Defendant or third parties directed by Defendant transmitted calls using an artificial or prerecorded voice to the cellular telephone numbers of Plaintiff and members of the Class
- 53. These calls were made without regard to whether or not Defendant had first obtained express consent from the called party to make such calls. In fact, Defendant did not have prior express consent to call the cell phones of Plaintiff and the other members of the putative Class when its calls were made.

- 54. Defendant violated § 227(b)(1)(A)(iii) of the TCPA by using a pre-recorded message to make non-emergency telephone calls to the cell phones of Plaintiff and the other members of the putative Class without their prior express consent.
- 55. As a result of Defendant's conduct and pursuant to § 227(b)(3) of the TCPA, Plaintiff and the other members of the putative Class were harmed and are each entitled to a minimum of \$500.00 in damages for each violation. Plaintiff and the class are also entitled to an injunction against future calls.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Daniel Mittelmark, on behalf of himself and the other members of the Class, prays for the following relief:

- a. A declaration that Defendant's practices described herein violate the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, 47 U.S.C. § 227;
- b. A declaration that Defendant's violations of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, 47 U.S.C. § 227, were willful and knowing;
- c. An injunction prohibiting Defendant from using pre-recorded messages to call telephone numbers assigned to cellular telephones without the prior express consent of the called party;
 - d. An award of actual, statutory damages, and/or trebled statutory damages; and
 - e. Such further and other relief the Court deems reasonable and just.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff and Class Members hereby demand a trial by jury.

DOCUMENT PRESERVATION DEMAND

Plaintiff demands that Defendant take affirmative steps to preserve all records, lists, electronic databases or other itemization of telephone numbers associated with Defendant and the calls as alleged herein.

Date: October 9, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

HIRALDO P.A.

/s/ Manuel S. Hiraldo

Manuel S. Hiraldo Florida Bar No. 030380 401 E. Las Olas Boulevard Suite 1400

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33301 Email: mhiraldo@hiraldolaw.com

Telephone: 954.400.4713 Counsel for Plaintiff

JS 44 (Rev. 06 G) as so Q: 1.2 (Rev. 06 G) as

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 Restiled Cases Below

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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: <u>Nature of Suit Code Descriptions</u>.
- 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

DANIEL MITTELMARK, Individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated Plaintiff(s) v. SYNERGY MARKETING ASSOCIATES INC. d/b/a NATIONAL PLAN ADVISORS Defendant(s)))))) Civil Action No.)))
SUMMONS II	N A CIVIL ACTION
by serving its Registered Agent 3215 NW 1 STE 207	SOCIATES INC. d/b/a National Plan Advisors t Jeffrey Franzoni at the address of: 10th Terrace ark, FL 33309
are the United States or a United States agency, or an off	Suite 1400 1
If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be You also must file your answer or motion with the court.	e entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint.
	CLERK OF COURT
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 (1))

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was re	ceived by me on (date)		·					
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				<u> </u>				
		at the individual's reside		e of abode with (name)				
		, a person of suitable age and discretion who resides there,						
	on (date)	on (date), and mailed a copy to the individual's last known address; or						
	☐ I served the summe	ons on (name of individual)			, w	ho is		
	designated by law to	accept service of process	on behalf of (nam	e of organization)				
			on	(date)	; or			
	☐ I returned the sum	nons unexecuted because	e			; or		
	☐ Other (specify):							
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	S	for services, for a total of \$	0.00			
	I declare under penalty of perjury that this information is true.							
Date:								
		_	Server's signature					
		_		Printed name and title				
		_		Server's address				

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

ClassAction.org

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