#### UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA ATLANTA DIVISION

SUNITA PERRO, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

C.A. No:

# CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

-v.-CREDIT BUREAU ASSOCIATES OF GEORGIA d/b/a CREDIT BUREAU ASSOCIATES and John Does 1-25,

Defendants.

Plaintiff Sunita Perro (hereinafter, "Plaintiff" or "Perro"), a Georgia resident, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through her undersigned attorneys, against Defendant Credit Bureau Associates of Georgia d/b/a Credit Bureau Associates (hereinafter "Defendant" or "CBA"), 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**

1. Congress enacted the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act ("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 FDCPA 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, Congress created a private cause of action to provide consumers with a remedy against debt collectors who fail to comply with the FDCPA. Id. § 1692k.

#### JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331, as well as 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. The Court also has pendent jurisdiction over any state law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).

4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) as this is where a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred.

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

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of Georgia consumers under § 1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA"), and

6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory and injunctive relief.

#### **PARTIES**

Plaintiff is a resident of this State, District and Division residing at 2920
 Barnwood Xing, Duluth, County of Gwinnett, Georgia.

8. Defendant Credit Bureau Associates of Georgia is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in <u>15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6)</u> and used in the FDCPA with an address at 64 Sailors Drive #102, Ellijay, GA 30540.

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.

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

11. John Does 1-25, 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 Georgia;
- b. to whom Credit Bureau Associates sent a collection letter attempting to collect a consumer debt;
- c. regarding collection of a debt;
- d. that overshadowed the consumers' rights in an initial communication letter as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692g (known as the "G Notice");

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 officers, 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 form attached as Exhibit A, violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692f and 1692g.

17. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Classes defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex

legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor her 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 Plaintiff is informed and believe, and on that basis alleged, 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 predominance 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 § 1692e and §1692f and § 1692g.
- c. <u>Typicality:</u> The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members. The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Classes have claims arising out of the Defendants' common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- d. <u>Adequacy:</u> The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that

are adverse to the absent class members. The Plaintiff is committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor her 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, Plaintiff may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

#### **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 February 2, 2017, an obligation was allegedly incurred by Plaintiff.

23. The alleged obligation arose out of a transaction involving an alleged medical debt incurred by Plaintiff with Sawnee EMC in which money, property, insurance or services were the subject of the transaction, and were obtained primarily for personal, family or household purposes.

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

25. The owner of the alleged obligation is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C.§ 1692a(4).

26. The owner of the obligation 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 – February 2, 2017 Collection Letter

28. On or about February 2, 2017, Defendant sent the Plaintiff an initial written communication (the "Letter") seeking to collect an alleged debt. See

# February 2, 2017 Collection Letter – Attached hereto as Exhibit A.

29. 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).

30. This is commonly known as the "G-Notice".

31. 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).

32. This letter contains the "G-Notice" but it is completely overshadowed by other statements in the letter.

33. 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 v. EQUIFAX A.R.S.*, 74 F. 3d 30, 35 (2d Cir. 1996) ("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'

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other language informing a consumer of her rights ... violates the Act." *Russell*, 74 F. 3d at 34.

34. First, the letter states "Your account has been listed with CBA for immediate collection; with authority to record this item on your **personal credit file**. The <u>Fair Credit Reporting Act</u> states that this kind of information can remain in your **credit file for 7 years**."(emphasis in original)

35. This language overshadows the "G-Notice" as it threatens to immediately report Plaintiff's account to the credit bureaus if she does not pay which serves to discourage her from disputing the debt.

36. Additionally, this language is false and misleading as a debt can be reported on a credit report for 7 years from the date of default of the debt. Since default on this debt has already passed, it could only be reported by Defendant for less than 7 years.

37. Second, this letter provides a "G-Notice" however in the middle of the paragraph it states "PAYMENT OF THE BALANCE IS DUE NOW."

38. The least sophisticated consumer looks at the "G-Notice" written in small font and only sees that "PAYMENT OF THE BALANCE IS DUE NOW" written in large font and placed in the middle of the Notice.

39. The fact that this sentence is in capital letters, in the middle of the "G-Notice", completely overshadows the Notice.

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40. This phrase overshadows Plaintiff's thirty (30) day right to validate or dispute the debt because all she saw was that she had to pay immediately and that her account was going to be reported to collections.

41. Both of these sentences in the letter only serve to coerce Plaintiff into paying immediately to avoid the threat of credit reporting in lieu of exercising her right to validate or dispute the debt provided her under the "G-Notice."

42. Defendant failed to provide Plaintiff, a consumer, with a proper initial communication letter which overshadowed Plaintiff's rights under the FDCPA.

43. This overshadowing subjected Plaintiff to an informational injury as she was not able to fully ascertain her statutory rights.

44. As a result of Defendant's deceptive misleading and false debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

#### <u>COUNT I</u> VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692e *et seq*.

45. 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.

46. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

47. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

48. Defendant violated said section by making a false and misleading representation in violation of § 1692e(2), 1692e(5) and 1692e(10).

49. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692e et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

## <u>COUNT II</u> VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692f *et seq*.

50. 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.

51. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692f.

52. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692f, a debt collector may not use any unfair or unconscionable means in connection with the collection of any debt.

53. Defendant violated this section by overshadowing Plaintiff's rights to validate or dispute the debt provided her under the FDCPA.

54. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692f et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

## <u>COUNT II</u> VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692g *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 the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692g.

57. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692g(b), the language in a debt collector's letter cannot overshadow a plaintiff's right to validate or dispute the debt afforded him by § 1692g.

58. The false statement regarding credit reporting and the "payment language" interjected into the "G-Notice" served to overshadow Plaintiff's rights under the FDCPA.

59. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

## **DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY**

60. 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 Sunita Perro, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated demands judgment from Defendant Credit Bureau Associates as follows:

1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Jonathan B. Mason, 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: February 1, 2018 Respectfully Submitted,

# MASON LAW GROUP, PC

/s/ Jonathan B. Mason Jonathan B. Mason, Esq. GA Bar No. 475659 1100 Peachtree St NE, Ste 200 Atlanta, GA 30309 Ph: 404-920-8040 Fax: 404-920-8039 jmason@atlshowbizlaw.com *Attorneys For Plaintiff*  Case 1:18-cv-00498-CC-JKL Document 1-1 Filed 02/01/18 Page 1 of 2

# EXHIBIT A

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CBA BUREAU ASSOCIATES P.O. Box 1095 Ellijay, GA 30540 (800) 606-2254

February 2, 2017

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Your account has been listed with CBA for immediate collection; with authority to record this item on your personal credit file.

The Fair Credit Reporting Act states that this kind of information can remain in your credit file for 7 years.

To avoid further contact, and to keep this information out of your credit file, remit the balance in full to our office today.

This is a communication from a debt collector and an attempt to collect a debt; any information obtained will be used for that purpose. Unless you dispute the validity of the debt referred to herein within thirty days of your receipt of this notice, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt collector. This thirty day time period is effective only if you dispute the account. Otherwise, PAYMENT OF THE BALANCE IS DUE NOW. If you advise us in writing within the said thirty day period that the debt or any portion thereof is disputed, we will obtain verification of the debt. Further, upon your written request within the said thirty day period we will provide you with the name and address of the original creditor if different from the current creditor.

(800) 606-2254

www.cbabillpay.com Pay online 24/7 with no transaction fee

#### P.O. Box 1095, Ellijay, GA 30540

Creditor		Account #	Amount Owed	
SAWNEE EMC		5002	372.23	
		Total Amount Owed	\$372.23	
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Ellijay GA 30540-0014 ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED		CARD HOLDER NAME		
February 2, 2017			<b>9621</b> 172.23	
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# JS44 (Rev. 11/16 NDGA) Case 1:18-cv-00498-CC- Kevi Covert Sife Filed 02/01/18 Page 1 of 2

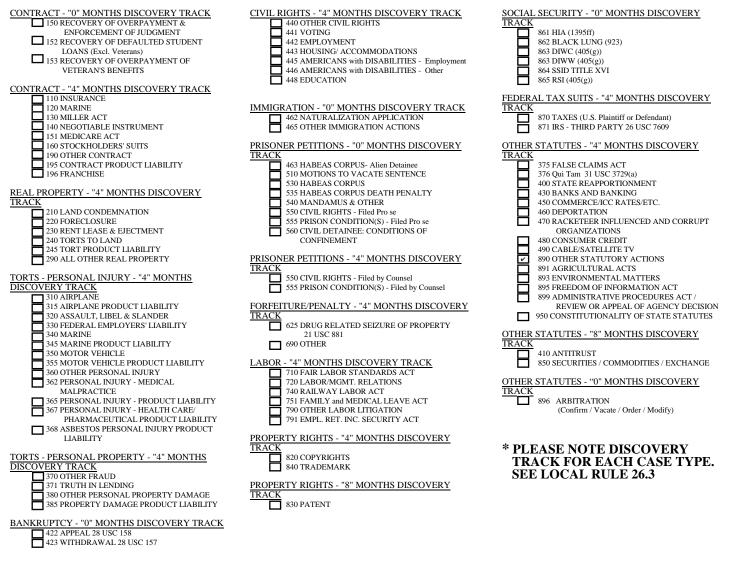
The JS44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket record. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ATTACHED)

I. (a) PLAINTIFF(S)		DEFENDANT(S)		
Sunita Perro, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated		Credit Bureau Associates of Georgia d/b/a Credit Bureau Associates and John Does 1-25		
(b) COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED		COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED		
PLAINTIFF Gwinnett (except in u.s. plaintiff cases)		DEFENDANT		
(EACEF1 IN U.S. FLAIM IFF CASES)		NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND		
		INVOLVED		
(c) ATTORNEYS (FIRM NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER, AND E-MAIL ADDRESS)		ATTORNEYS (IF KNOWN)		
Jonathan B. Mason, Esq.				
Mason Law Group, P.C. 1100 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 200				
Atlanta, GA 30309				
404.920.8040 jmason@atlshowbizlaw.cor	n			
II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES				
(PLACE AN "X" IN ONE BOX ONLY)	(PLACE A	N "X" IN ONE BOX FOR PLAINTIFF AND ONE BOX FOR DEFENDANT) (FOR DIVERSITY CASES ONLY)		
	PLF DEF	PLF DEF		
L1 U.S. GOVERNMENT PLAINTIFF U.S. GOVERNMENT NOT A PARTY)		TIZEN OF THIS STATE 4 INCORPORATED OR PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS IN THIS STATE		
2 U.S. GOVERNMENT 4 DIVERSITY	$\square_2$ $\square_2$ cr	TIZEN OF ANOTHER STATE 5 5 INCORPORATED AND PRINCIPAL		
DEFENDANT (INDICATE CITIZENSHIP OF PARTIES IN ITEM III)		PLACE OF BUSINESS IN ANOTHER STATE		
		REIGN COUNTRY		
IV. ORIGIN (PLACE AN "X "IN ONE BOX ONLY)				
I ORIGINAL PROCEEDING       2 REMOVED FROM STATE COURT       3 REMANDED FROM APPELLATE COURT       4 REINSTATED OR REOPENED       5 ANOTHER DISTRICT (Specify District)       6 LITIGATION - TRANSFER D       7 ROPEAL TO DISTRICT JUDGE (Specify District)				
Multidistrict				
☐8 LITIGATION - DIRECT FILE				
V. CAUSE OF ACTION (CITE THE U.S. CIVIL STATUTE	UNDER WHICH YOU	ARE FILING AND WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF CAUSE - DO NOT CITE		
V. CAUSE OF ACTION (CITE THE U.S. CIVIL STATUTE UNDER WHICH YOU ARE FILING AND WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF CAUSE - DO NOT CITE JURISDICTIONAL STATUTES UNLESS DIVERSITY) 15 U.S.C. 1681 et seq. Fair Credit Reporting ACT ("FCRA") - Defendant sent Plaintiff a deceptive, misleading and				
overshadowing collection letter to Plaintiff.				
(IF COMPLEX, CHECK REASON BELOW)				
□ 1. Unusually large number of parties.	6 Prob	lems locating or preserving evidence		
$\square$ 2. Unusually large number of claims or defenses.		<ul> <li>7. Pending parallel investigations or actions by government.</li> </ul>		
☐ 3. Factual issues are exceptionally complex		ultiple use of experts.		
$\square$ 4. Greater than normal volume of evidence.	_	Need for discovery outside United States boundaries.		
$\Box_{5.}$ Extended discovery period is needed.	0. Exist	kistence of highly technical issues and proof.		
CONTINUED ON REVERSE				
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY           RECEIPT #         AMOUNT \$	APPI VING	3 IFP MAG. JUDGE (IFP)		
JUDGE MAG. JUDGE	NATURE			

(Referral)

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#### VI. NATURE OF SUIT (PLACE AN "X" IN ONE BOX ONLY)



#### VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:

└ CHECK IF CLASS ACTION UNDER F.R.Civ.P. 23 DEMAND \$\_\_\_\_\_\_ JURY DEMAND └ YES □ NO (CHECK YES <u>ONLY</u> IF DEMANDED IN COMPLAINT)

# VIII. RELATED/REFILED CASE(S) IF ANY

JUDGE

#### DOCKET NO.\_

CIVIL CASES ARE DEEMED RELATED IF THE PENDING CASE INVOLVES: (CHECK APPROPRIATE BOX)

- □ 1. PROPERTY INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- □ 2. SAME ISSUE OF FACT OR ARISES OUT OF THE SAME EVENT OR TRANSACTION INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- 3. VALIDITY OR INFRINGEMENT OF THE SAME PATENT, COPYRIGHT OR TRADEMARK INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER NUMBERED PENDING SUIT.
- 4. APPEALS ARISING OUT OF THE SAME BANKRUPTCY CASE AND ANY CASE RELATED THERETO WHICH HAVE BEEN DECIDED BY THE SAME BANKRUPTCY JUDGE,
- ☐ 5. REPETITIVE CASES FILED BY <u>PRO SE</u> LITIGANTS.
- 6. COMPANION OR RELATED CASE TO CASE(S) BEING SIMULTANEOUSLY FILED (INCLUDE ABBREVIATED STYLE OF OTHER CASE(S)):

☐ 7. EITHER SAME OR ALL OF THE PARTIES AND ISSUES IN THIS CASE WERE PREVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN CASE NO. DISMISSED. This case ☐ IS ☐ IS NOT (check one box) SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME CASE.

, WHICH WAS

/s/ Jonathan B. Mason

February 1, 2017

# **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 Associates Facing FDCPA Class Action in Georgia</u>