Case 1:20-cv-01274-DAD-JLT Document 1-1 Filed 09/08/20 Page 2 of 20 **ELECTRONICALLY FILED** Todd M. Friedman (SBN 216752) 8/6/2020 1:19 PM 1 **Kern County Superior Court** Adrian R. Bacon (SBN 280332) By Candice Rocha, Deputy 2 Meghan E. George (SBN 274525) Thomas E. Wheeler (SBN 308789) 3 LAW OFFICES OF TODD M. FRIEDMAN, P.C. 21550 Oxnard St. Suite 780, 4 Woodland Hills, CA 91367 5 Phone: 323-306-4234 Fax: 866-633-0228 6 tfriedman@toddflaw.com 7 abacon@toddflaw.com 8 mgeorge@toddflaw.com twheeler@toddflaw.com 9 Attorneys for Plaintiff, and all others similarly situated 10 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA 11 FOR THE COUNTY OF KERN UNLIMITED JURISDICTION 12 13 THOMAS MORRISON, Case No. BCV-20-101826 individually, and on behalf of all others similarly situated, 14 CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT 15 Plaintiff, Violation of the California False (1) Advertising Act (Cal. Business & Professions Code §§ 17500 et seq.) 16 VS. 17 HARTFORD UNDERWRITERS **(2)** Violation of Unfair Competition INSURANCE COMPANY, and Law (Cal. Business & Professions 18 DOES 1-10, inclusive, Code §§ 17200 et seq.) 19 Defendant. **Jury Trial Demanded** 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

Plaintiff THOMAS MORRISON ("Plaintiff"), individually and on behalf of all other members of the public similarly situated, allege as follows:

NATURE OF THE ACTION

- 1. Plaintiff brings this class action Complaint against Defendant HARTFORD UNDERWRITERS INSURANCE COMPANY (hereinafter "Defendant") to stop Defendant's practice of falsely representing the price of its automobile insurance plans and to obtain redress for a California class of consumers ("Class Members") who changed position, within the applicable statute of limitations period, as a result of Defendant's false and misleading advertisements.
- 2. Defendant is an insurance company with principal place of business and state of incorporation in Connecticut.
- 3. Defendant represents that certain automobile insurance policies will be provided at a particular price when this is in fact false. Defendant misrepresented and falsely advertised to Plaintiff and others similarly situated consumers these automobile insurance policies (hereinafter "Class Products").
- 4. Plaintiff and others similarly situated purchased these automobile insurance policies.
- 5. Defendant's misrepresentations to Plaintiff and others similarly situated caused them to purchase these automobile insurance policies, which Plaintiff and others similarly situated would not have purchased or attempted to purchase absent these misrepresentations by Defendant and its employees. In so doing, Defendant has violated California consumer protection statutes, including the Unfair Competition Law and the False Advertising Law.

NATURE OF THE CASE & COMMON ALLEGATIONS OF FACT

6. Consumers purchase automobile insurance policies advertised to be a certain price.

- 7. Consumers rely on the representations and advertisements of insurance companies in order to know which automobile insurance policy to purchase. Price is important and material to consumers at the time they sign up for services with a particular automobile insurance provider, as consumers are sensitive to the costs they pay for these policies, compared to what they could purchase from a competitor service provider.
- 8. Defendant is engaged in the sale of automobile insurance policies at a higher priced than advertised and including additional increases in premiums that are not disclosed at the time consumers sign up for the insurance policies.
- 9. When consumers purchase an automobile insurance policy from an insurance company, they reasonably believe that they will be billed at a rate that is equal to the price that was advertised and disclosed at the time they agree to initiate a relationship with the insurance company.
- 10. Defendant profits from the sale of the automobile insurance policies. At a higher price, many of the consumers would not have purchased or attempted to purchase these insurance policies, or would have chosen to purchase services from a competitor.
- 11. In the case of Plaintiff, the premium for the automobile insurance policy purchased was increased to double the advertised price that was communicated to Plaintiff at the time he agreed to purchase said policy.
- 12. Defendant conceals the fact that the premiums for automobile insurance policies will be increased to double the advertised price, in order to deceive consumers into paying more than they agreed to for the same level of service.
- 13. Defendant makes written and oral representations to consumers which contradict the actual price of the automobile insurance premiums that will be billed after the consumer purchases the insurance.

- 14. The aforementioned written and oral representations are objectively false, and constitute false advertising under Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 17500 et. seq. and unlawful, unfair, or deceptive business practices under Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 17200 et. seq..
- 15. Defendant's violations of the law include, but not limited to, the false advertising, marketing, representations, and sale of the falsely advertised Class Products to consumers in California.
- 16. On behalf of the class, Plaintiff seeks an injunction requiring Defendant to cease advertising and selling the Class Products in a manner that is deceptive, to disclose all increases in premiums in a conspicuous manner at or prior to the point of sale, and an award of damages to the Class Members, together with costs and reasonable attorneys' fees.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 17. This class action is brought pursuant to California Code of Civil Procedure § 382. All claims in this matter arise exclusively under California law. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendant because Defendant does business to such an extent within and throughout California as to demonstrate its purposeful availment of the protection and obligations of the laws of the State of California.
- 18. This matter is properly venued in the Superior Court of California for the County of Kern in that Plaintiff purchased the automobile insurance from Kern County and Defendant provided the services to Plaintiff in that location.

THE PARTIES

- 19. Plaintiff THOMAS MORRISON is a citizen and resident of the State of California, County of Kern.
- 20. Defendant HARTFORD UNDERWRITERS INSURANCE COMPANY is an insurance company with its principle place of business and State

of Incorporation in Connecticut.

- 21. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that each and all of the acts and omissions alleged herein were performed by, or is attributable to, Defendant and/or its employees, agents, and/or third parties acting on its behalf, each acting as the agent for the other, with legal authority to act on the other's behalf. The acts of any and all of Defendant's employees, agents, and/or third parties acting on its behalf, were in accordance with, and represent, the official policy of Defendant.
- 22. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that said Defendant is in some manner intentionally, negligently, or otherwise responsible for the acts, omissions, occurrences, and transactions of each and all its employees, agents, and/or third parties acting on its behalf, in proximately causing the damages herein alleged.
- 23. At all relevant times, Defendant ratified each and every act or omission complained of herein. At all relevant times, Defendant, aided and abetted the acts and omissions as alleged herein

PLAINTIFF'S FACTS

- 24. In or around 2016, Plaintiff purchased an an automobile insurance policy from Defendant. Defendant represented to Plaintiff that the premium for the automobile insurance plan would cost approximately two-hundred dollars (\$200) per month, paid every six (6) months.
- 25. Upon renewal of the insurance plan the following year, Defendant doubled the cost of Plaintiff's insurance premium to approximately four-hundred dollars (\$400) per month.
- 26. Plaintiff immediately contacted Defendant about the increased premium, and was told that the premium was doubled because the parts of Plaintiff's vehicle were becoming more expensive for Defendant to replace.

- 27. Plaintiff's vehicle is a 2002 Mercedes SLK320. Plaintiff had not had any accidents, had not received any tickets, and had not filed any claims.
- 28. Shocked by the increase of the insurance premium, Plaintiff filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau ("BBB"). Following Plaintiff's complaint, Defendant reversed their decision to increase Plaintiff's premium and changed the premium to its initially represented price.
- 29. The following year, in or around 2018, Plaintiff's premium was doubled by Defendant once again. This time, Defendant told Plaintiff that the rate increase was due to Plaintiff's automobile service records showing that Plaintiff had been driving more than he stated he would be driving.
- 30. Plaintiff, knowing that Defendant was using another fabricated story to increase Plaintiff's insurance premium, filed another complaint with the BBB.
- 31. Defendant refused to reduce the price of Plaintiff's insurance premium. Plaintiff cancelled the policy, which had been paid in full, and asked for a refund for the remaining balance of the policy.
- 32. After canceling the policy with Defendant, Plaintiff obtained an insurance policy with Progressive Insurance.
- 33. Defendant sent Plaintiff a bill for sixty dollars (\$60) for failing to properly cancel his insurance policy, and failed to refund the remaining balance of Plaintiff's cancelled insurance policy.
- 34. In reliance on Defendant's representations, Plaintiff purchased an insurance policy from Defendant. Incredibly, Defendant twice attempted to increase Plaintiff's automobile insurance premium, despite their representations.
- 35. For the automobile insurance plan, Plaintiff paid more than valuable consideration. Plaintiff relied on the fact that the insurance policy was being advertised for a particular price. Plaintiff was never informed, in writing, orally, or in any conspicuous manner, that the insurance premium would be doubled and

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he would be charged a fee for canceling the policy after Defendant failed to honor the pricing they promised him.

- When purchasing Defendant's insurance policy Defendant informed 36. Plaintiff that he would be charged a premium of approximately \$200 per month. Plaintiff relied on Defendant's statements about the cost of the insurance premium in deciding to purchase insurance from Defendant over other competitors. Plaintiff felt assured that since Defendant provided him with a cost of service and failed to disclose that the price of the premium would double, that he would be charged the price that was advertised. Plaintiff would not have agreed to sign up for service with Defendant if he had known that Defendant would charge her a higher price than was represented for the insurance policy.
- Defendant never informed Plaintiff that they would drastically 37. increase the price of Plaintiff's insurance premium.
- 38. The failure to honor the initial cost of the insurance premium that was offered to Plaintiff, had Plaintiff known these representations would not be honored, would have impacted his decision to purchase services from Defendant over other insurance companies. Plaintiff would have found it important to his purchase decision to know exactly what she was going to be charged for the insurance premium, and believed that he knew that amount to be \$200 per month.
- Plaintiff felt ripped off and cheated by Defendant suddenly 39. attempting to double his insurance premium for fabricated reasons, and for Defendant duping him into signing a contract by making false representations of the price of the insurance premium. Plaintiff believes that Defendant will continue its action of duping customers into purchasing insurance policies, only to then raise the price of the insurance premiums, unless Defendant's practices are halted by way of an injunction.
 - 40. As a result of Defendant's fraudulent practices, described herein,

Plaintiff has suffered emotional distress, wasted time, and anxiety.

- 41. Plaintiff alleges on information and belief that Defendant makes misleading representations regarding insurance costs in order to obtain customers, without conspicuously disclosing to consumers that the cost of their initial insurance premium will eventually double. Plaintiff asserts that this practice constitutes a fraudulent omission of a material fact relating to the cost of services, that would be important to a reasonable consumer to know at the time they purchase insurance policies from Defendant.
- 42. Plaintiff alleges on information and belief that Defendant's policy and practice is to materially misrepresent the price of its insurance premiums, through said fraudulent omissions and misrepresentations, to induce consumers to reasonably rely on the price of insurance premiums, in order to induce their purchase of insurance policies from Defendant over law abiding competitors.
- 43. Defendant has a duty to disclose the full cost of services and other related charges, to consumers, prior to the time that they agree to purchase services from Defendant. Defendant has a duty to disclose these material terms, because such terms would be highly important to a reasonable consumer, because a failure to disclose such terms would have the effect of drastically and unexpectedly elevating the price of Defendant's services for consumers, and because Defendant binds consumers to contracts of terms, thereby preventing consumers from easily getting out of their obligations with Defendant.
- 44. Upon learning that the insurance premium was twice the price of what Plaintiff anticipated, and higher than Defendant clearly represented that it would be, Plaintiff felt ripped off and cheated by Defendant.
- 45. Such sales tactics rely on falsities and have a tendency to mislead and deceive a reasonable consumer.
 - 46. Defendant expressly represented to Plaintiff, through written

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statements, the price of its insurance premium.

- 47. Plaintiff alleges that such representations were part of a common scheme to mislead consumers and incentivize them to purchase insurance policies.
- 48. In purchasing the Class Products, Plaintiff relied upon Defendant's representations.
- 49. Such representations were clearly false because the prices of the insurance policies offered by Defendant were at a higher rate than represented.
- 50. Plaintiff would not have purchased the products and services if she knew that the above-referenced statements made by Defendant were false.
- Had Defendant properly marketed, advertised, and represented the 51. Class Products, Plaintiff would not have purchased the products and services.
- 52. Plaintiff agreed to give his money, attention and time to Defendant because of the price that the internet service was advertised. Defendant benefited from falsely advertising the prices of the service. Defendant benefited on the loss to Plaintiff and provided nothing of benefit to Plaintiff in exchange.
- 53. Had Defendant properly marketed, advertised, and represented the Class Products, no reasonable consumer who purchased or attempted to purchase the insurance policies would have believed that it was the price it actually was.
- 54. Defendant's conduct is inherently deceptive and misleads the leastsophisticated consumer, as it is plausible that an unsophisticated consumer would believe that their insurance premium was being doubled for a legitimate reason, even though such rate increases were never conspicuously disclosed at the point of sale, and even though Defendant makes representations to consumers that would lead a consumer to believe that such rate increases would not occur.
- 55. Defendant's acts and omissions were intentional, and resulted from Defendant's desire to mislead debtors and consumers into making payments on debts that are not owed.

CLASS ACTION ALLEGATIONS

- 56. Plaintiff brings this action, on behalf of himself and all others similarly situated, and thus, seeks class certification under California Code of Civil Procedure § 382.
- 57. The class Plaintiff seeks to represent (the "Class") is defined as follows:

All consumers, who, between the applicable statute of limitations and the present, purchased one or more Class Products in the State of California, and whose insurance premiums were increased excessively to a price higher than advertised or represented by Defendant.

- 58. As used herein, the term "Class Members" shall mean and refer to the members of the Class described above.
- 59. Excluded from the Class is Defendant, its affiliates, employees, agents, and attorneys, and the Court.
- 60. Plaintiff reserves the right to amend the Class, and to add additional subclasses, if discovery and further investigation reveals such action is warranted.
- 61. Upon information and belief, the proposed class is composed of thousands of persons. The members of the class are so numerous that joinder of all members would be unfeasible and impractical.
- 62. No violations alleged in this complaint are contingent on any individualized interaction of any kind between Class members and Defendant.
- 63. Rather, all claims in this matter arise from the identical, false, affirmative representations of the services, when in fact, such representations were false
- 64. There are common questions of law and fact as to the Class Members that predominate over questions affecting only individual members, including but not limited to:
 - (a) Whether Defendant engaged in unlawful, unfair, or deceptive

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Plaintiff will thoroughly and adequately protect the interests of the 70. Class, having retained qualified and competent legal counsel to represent herself and the Class.

71. Common questions will predominate, and there will be no unusual manageability issues.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

Violation of the California False Advertising Act (Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 17500 et seq.)

- 72. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each allegation set forth above.
- Pursuant to California Business and Professions Code section 17500, 73. et seq., it is unlawful to engage in advertising "which is untrue or misleading, and which is known, or which by the exercise of reasonable care should be known, to be untrue or misleading . . . [or] to so make or disseminate or cause to be so made or disseminated any such statement as part of a plan or scheme with the intent not to sell that personal property or those services, professional or otherwise, so advertised at the price stated therein, or as so advertised."
- California Business and Professions Code section 17500, et seq.'s 74. prohibition against false advertising extends to the use of false or misleading written statements.
- Defendant misled consumers by making misrepresentations and 75. untrue statements about the Class Products, namely, Defendant suddenly increased the cost of auto insurance premiums to a higher rate than advertised, and made false representations to Plaintiff and other putative class members in order to solicit these transactions.
- Defendant knew that its representations and omissions were untrue 76. and misleading, and deliberately made the aforementioned representations and omissions in order to deceive reasonable consumers like Plaintiff and other Class

Members.

77. As a direct and proximate result of Defendant's misleading and false advertising, Plaintiff and the other Class Members have suffered injury in fact and have lost money or property, time, and attention. Plaintiff reasonably relied upon Defendant's representations regarding the Class Products. In reasonable reliance on Defendant's false advertisements, Plaintiff and other Class Members purchased the Class Products. In turn Plaintiff and other Class Members ended up with insurance policies that turned out to actually be more expensive than advertised, and therefore Plaintiff and other Class Members have suffered injury in fact.

- 78. Plaintiff alleges that these false and misleading representations made by Defendant constitute a "scheme with the intent not to sell that personal property or those services, professional or otherwise, so advertised at the price stated therein, or as so advertised."
- 79. Defendant advertised to Plaintiff and other putative class members, through written representations and omissions made by Defendant and its employees, that the Class Products would be of a particular price. Thus, Defendant knowingly sold Class Products to Plaintiff and other putative class members.
- 80. The misleading and false advertising described herein presents a continuing threat to Plaintiff and the Class Members in that Defendant persists and continues to engage in these practices, and will not cease doing so unless and until forced to do so by this Court. Defendant's conduct will continue to cause irreparable injury to consumers unless enjoined or restrained. Plaintiff is entitled to preliminary and permanent injunctive relief ordering Defendant to cease its false advertising, as well as disgorgement and restitution to Plaintiff and all Class Members Defendant's revenues associated with their false advertising, or such portion of those revenues as the Court may find equitable.

SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

Violation of Unfair Business Practices Act (Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 17200 et seq.)

- 81. Plaintiff incorporates by reference each allegation set forth above.
- 82. Actions for relief under the unfair competition law may be based on any business act or practice that is within the broad definition of the UCL. Such violations of the UCL occur as a result of unlawful, unfair or fraudulent business acts and practices. A plaintiff is required to provide evidence of a causal connection between a defendants' business practices and the alleged harm--that is, evidence that the defendants' conduct caused or was likely to cause substantial injury. It is insufficient for a plaintiff to show merely that the Defendant's conduct created a risk of harm. Furthermore, the "act or practice" aspect of the statutory definition of unfair competition covers any single act of misconduct, as well as ongoing misconduct.

UNFAIR

83. California Business & Professions Code § 17200 prohibits any "unfair . . . business act or practice." Defendant's acts, omissions, misrepresentations, and practices as alleged herein also constitute "unfair" business acts and practices within the meaning of the UCL in that its conduct is substantially injurious to consumers, offends public policy, and is immoral, unethical, oppressive, and unscrupulous as the gravity of the conduct outweighs any alleged benefits attributable to such conduct. There were reasonably available alternatives to further Defendant's legitimate business interests, other than the conduct described herein. Plaintiff reserves the right to allege further conduct which constitutes other unfair business acts or practices. Such conduct is ongoing and continues to this date.

84. In order to satisfy the "unfair" prong of the UCL, a consumer must show that the injury: (1) is substantial; (2) is not outweighed by any countervailing benefits to consumers or competition; and, (3) is not one that consumers themselves could reasonably have avoided.

- 85. Here, Defendant's conduct has caused and continues to cause substantial injury to Plaintiff and members of the Class. Plaintiff and members of the Class have suffered injury in fact due to Defendant's decision to sell them falsely described Class Products. Thus, Defendant's conduct has caused substantial injury to Plaintiff and the members of the Class.
- 86. Moreover, Defendant's conduct as alleged herein solely benefits Defendant while providing no benefit of any kind to any consumer. Such deception utilized by Defendant convinced Plaintiff and members of the Class that the Class Products were a certain price, in order to induce them to spend money on said Class Products. In fact, knowing thy were going to substantially increase the price of the Class Products, Defendant unfairly profited from their sale. Thus, the injury suffered by Plaintiff and the members of the Class is not outweighed by any countervailing benefits to consumers.
- 87. Finally, the injury suffered by Plaintiff and members of the Class is not an injury that these consumers could reasonably have avoided. After Defendant falsely represented the Class Products, Plaintiff and class members suffered injury in fact due to Defendant's sale of Class Products to them. Defendant failed to take reasonable steps to inform Plaintiff and class members that the Class Products would suddenly and substantially increase in price, and were not advertised at the price that would actually be charged to consumers. As such, Defendant took advantage of Defendant's position of perceived power in order to deceive Plaintiff and the Class members to purchase insurance policies for a higher price. Therefore, the injury suffered by Plaintiff and members of the

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Class is not an injury which these consumers could reasonably have avoided.

Thus, Defendant's conduct has violated the "unfair" prong of 88. California Business & Professions Code § 17200.

FRAUDULENT

- California Business & Professions Code § 17200 prohibits any 89. "fraudulent ... business act or practice." In order to prevail under the "fraudulent" prong of the UCL, a consumer must allege that the fraudulent business practice was likely to deceive members of the public.
- 90. The test for "fraud" as contemplated by California Business and Professions Code § 17200 is whether the public is likely to be deceived. Unlike common law fraud, a § 17200 violation can be established even if no one was actually deceived, relied upon the fraudulent practice, or sustained any damage.
- 91. Here, not only were Plaintiff and the Class members likely to be deceived, but these consumers were actually deceived by Defendant. deception is evidenced by the fact that Plaintiff agreed to purchase Class Products under the basic assumption that they cost a certain price when in fact they became more expensive. Plaintiff's reliance upon Defendant's deceptive statements is reasonable due to the unequal bargaining powers of Defendant and Plaintiff. For the same reason, it is likely that Defendant's fraudulent business practice would deceive other members of the public.
- As explained above, Defendant deceived Plaintiff and other Class 92. Members by representing the Class Products as being a certain price when in reality they became a significantly higher price, and thus falsely represented the Class Products.
- 93. Thus, Defendant's conduct has violated the "fraudulent" prong of California Business & Professions Code § 17200.

UNLAWFUL

- 94. California Business and Professions Code Section 17200, et seq. prohibits "any unlawful...business act or practice."
- 95. As explained above, Defendant deceived Plaintiff and other Class Members by representing the Class Products as being a lower price than they were.
- 96. Defendant used false advertising, marketing, and misrepresentations to induce Plaintiff and Class Members to purchase the Class Products, in violation of California Business and Professions Code Section 17500, et seq. Had Defendant not falsely advertised, marketed or misrepresented the Class Products, Plaintiff and Class Members would not have purchased the Class Products. Defendant's conduct therefore caused and continues to cause economic harm to Plaintiff and Class Members.
- 97. These representations by Defendant is therefore an "unlawful" business practice or act under Business and Professions Code Section 17200 *et seq.*
- 98. Defendant has thus engaged in unlawful, unfair, and fraudulent business acts entitling Plaintiff and Class Members to judgment and equitable relief against Defendant, as set forth in the Prayer for Relief. Additionally, pursuant to Business and Professions Code section 17203, Plaintiff and Class Members seek an order requiring Defendant to immediately cease such acts of unlawful, unfair, and fraudulent business practices and requiring Defendant to correct its actions.

MISCELLANEOUS

99. Plaintiff and Class Members allege that they have fully complied with all contractual and other legal obligations and fully complied with all conditions precedent to bringing this action or that all such obligations or conditions are excused.

1			REQUEST FOR JURY TRIAL
2	100.	Plain	tiff requests a trial by jury as to all claims so triable.
3			PRAYER FOR RELIEF
4	101.	Plain	tiff, on behalf of himself and the Class, requests the following
5	relief:		
6		(a)	An order certifying the Class and appointing Plaintiff as
7			Representative of the Class;
8		(b)	An order certifying the undersigned counsel as Class Counsel;
9		(c)	An order requiring HARTFORD UNDERWRITERS
10			INSURANCE COMPANY, at its own cost, to notify all Class
11			Members of the unlawful and deceptive conduct herein;
12		(d)	An order requiring HARTFORD UNDERWRITERS
13			INSURANCE COMPANY to engage in corrective advertising
14			regarding the conduct discussed above;
15		(e)	Actual damages suffered by Plaintiff and Class Members as
16			applicable or full restitution of all funds acquired from Plaintif
17			and Class Members from the sale of misbranded Class Products
18			during the relevant class period;
19		(f)	Punitive damages, as allowable, in an amount determined by
20			the Court or jury;
21		(g)	All reasonable and necessary attorneys' fees and costs provided
22			by statute, common law or the Court's inherent power;
23		(h)	Pre- and post-judgment interest; and
24		(i)	All other relief, general or special, legal and equitable, to which
25			Plaintiff and Class Members may be justly entitled as deemed
26			by the Court.
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Dated: August 6, 2020 Respectfully submitted, LAW OFFICES OF TODD M. FRIEDMAN, PO By: /s/ Todd M. Friedman TODD M. FRIEDMAN, ESQ. Attorney for Plaintiff Attorney for Plaintiff 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23	
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Attorney for Plaintiff	
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CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT