1	Relief Department;)	
2	CHRISTOPHER E. LYEL, an individual)	
3	BRADLEY K. HANSEN, an individual;)	
4	and)	
5 6	EQUITABLE ACCEPTANCE)	
7	CORPORATION, a corporation,)	
8	Defendants.	
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1	Practices Act, Minn. Stat. §§ 325D.4348e Minnesota Prevention of Consume
2	Fraud Act, Minn. Stat. §§ 325F.68–.694; Debt Settlement Services Act, Minn.
3	Stat. §§ 332B.0214; the Minnesota RetendaLoan Act, Minn. Stat. §§ 56.0001-
4	.26; the Telemarketing Act, 15 U.S.C.
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- Defendant EAC received from MBV custors to whom EAC had extended credit to pay for MBV's services. Lyell partipated in MBV's day-to-day business operations. At all times material to this Complain acting alone or in concert with others, Lyell formulated, directed, contend, had the authority to control, or participated in the acts and practices MBV, including the acts and practices set forth in this Complaint. Lyell resides this District and, in connection with the matters alleged herein, transs or has transacted business in this District and throughout the United States, including in Minnesota.
- 14. Defendant Bradley K. Hansen ("Hansen"as, at all times relevant to this Complaint, a member of DefendamBV, held himself out as MBV's Chief Financial Officer and Vice President dawas responsible for MBV's payroll, accounts receivable and human resourchesnsen was a signatory on MBV's depository bank accounts and emed agreements on MBV's hoed f as a "manager." Hansen received consumer complaints MBV, and was also alerted to consumer complaints that Defendant Execeived from MBV customers to whom EAC had extended credit to pay for MB\services. Hansen also responded to consumer complaints received by MBV rimostate attorneys general. Hansen participated in MBV's day-to-day business cations. At all times material to this Complaint, acting alone or in concertition there, Hansen for ulated, directed, controlled, had the authority to control, poarticipated in the acts and practices of MBV, including the acts and praces set forth in this Complaint. Hansen resides in this District and, in connection with the threaters alleged heine transacts or has transacted business in this District ahrobughout the United States, including in Minnesota.
- 15. Defendant Equitable Acceptance **Gor**ation ("EAC") is a Minnesota corporation whose principal place of **Incess** is 1200 Ford Road, Minnetonka, MN, 55305. EAC transacts or has transacted in this District and throughout the United States, including in Minnesot AC has been continuously licensed under

balances, when, inact, all or part of the quoted amounts would go toward paying MBV's \$1,300–1,400 fee.

- 20. MBV advised consumers to take adtage of these loan forgiveness programs to reduce their student loan dabt also offered to act and did act as an intermediary between consumers and the fall government and its representatives for the same purpose by, among other db, completing and submitting certain paperwork on consumers' behalf.
- 21. MBV engaged in a pattern and ptiae of deceptive telemarketing resulting in injury to consumeras described further below.
 - 22. MBV charged illegal advance fees for purported debt relief services.
- 23. Defendant EAC provided substantibles sistance to MBV by extending credit in the form of a high-interest loaten many of MBV's customers to pay for MBV's services. EAC extended credit NABV customers who met EAC's criteria for creditworthiness, and EAC collected on the payments from those customers.
- 24. While assisting MBV, EAC knew, or consciously avoided knowing, that MBV was making the deceptive representationscribed in this Complaint. EAC also knew, or consciously avoided known that MBV was requesting and receiving fees from its credit customers prior to the thirm that consums that received the promised debt relief serve and had made at least or promise under a new payment plan.
- 25. In extending loans to MBV custome SAC failed to include essential disclosures in the credit contracts that summers signed, such as the amount financed, the finance charge (the dollaroaumt that the credit was going to cost the consumer), and the total of payments (almonount that consumers would have to pay in total for MBV's service combine with the price of the credit).

- Background on Student Loan Repayment and Forgiveness Programs
- 26. Student loan debt is the second latgess of consumer debt; more than 42 million Americans collectively owe approxites \$1.5 trillion. The student loan market shows elevated levels of distressive to other types of consumer debt.
- 27. To address this mounting level of striessed debt, the U.S. Department of Education ("ED") and state government growings. Most consumers, however, are not eligible for these programs because of striggibility requirements. For example, one program requires the consumer to collectrate total and permanent disability; another applies to consumers whose school closed in the consumer was still enrolled. A third program, the Borrow Defense to Repayent ("BDR"), may provide a loan discharge if the school, they an act or omission, violated state law directly related to the borrow of federal student loan to the educational services for which the loan was provided.
- 28. Other forgiveness programs require working in certain professions for a period of years. Teacher **an** Forgiveness applies **teachers** who have worked full-time for five years in a low-income elem**tery** or secondary school or educational service agency. Public Secret Loan Forgiveness ("PSLFäpplies to employees of governmental units or non-profit organizatis who make timely monthly payments for a period of ten years while employed in the public sector.
- 29. The federal government also offers potential loan forgiveness through income-driven repayment ("IDR") progrants at enable borrowers to reduce their monthly payments. IDR programs allowing to borrowers to limit their monthly payments based on a pentage of their discretionary monthly income. To remain in an IDR program, borrowers must recertify the come and family size each year. Obtaining forgiveness through IDR programe quires a minimum of 20 to 25 years of qualifying payments.

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1	typically lasting 30 minutes to over an houroward the beginning of the call, MB\
2	told consumers that it could providetexact amount of the new reduced paymen
3	and/or loan forgiveness the consumer wingsibble to receive undefiederal law.
4	36. During the sales call, MBV quotemonsumers a new reduced monthly
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49. EAC paid to MBV consumers'efes shortly after EAC received consumers' electronically signed Credi9PI

cancel that they were outside of the the day cancellation period, and often directing these consumers back to MBV. MBV often divised consumers who wanted to cancel that they owed EAC antitlat MBV could not cancel that obligation.

MBV was receiving its fee prior to compline the debt relief services for the consumer, as well as any admittal services that MBV agreed provide. In light of EAC's billing policy, EAC also knew, or or sciously avoided knowing, that, when it sent its first loan bill to consumers, witas billing consumers for MBV's fees before the consumer had madeles to one payment pursuant to a new payment plan from ED and before MBV had fully performed itself relief services and any additional services that it agreed provide.

Cash Payment

- 54. Throughout 2016, MBV also took payment by cash, or cash equivalent, up front from consumers who did not emitted a Credit Plan with EAC.
- 55. Under this "cash" model, MB\(\formall\) imposed upon and charged consumers an initial fee of as much\(\formall\) as 9, which MBV required consumers to pay in two to four installments. MBV required least some portion of this fee be paid before it started work on the consumer\(\formall\) because the cation, and MBV repeatedly collected this upfront fee. MBV then collected the remainder of its fee through monthly 0 TD .durecteTw [(tha0343ad fully perform)6.el

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- 70. Pursuant to the terms of the Credian, the credit was extended for the purchase of a single prodt, MBV's service.
 - 71. The Credit Plan also required mblyt payments of equal amounts.
- 72. EAC did not reasonably contemplatespeat transactions under the purported "revolving" Creit Plan. No MBV customes have ever made any additional purchases using EAC's Creditan. And MBV itself—the only seller from which consumers were authorized to purchases under the Credit Plandid not contemplate that consumers web related future purchases from MBV under the Credit Plan. Neither MBV nor EAC ertised, marketed, or sold any other goods or services that could be purchased under the Credit Plan.
- 73. In its communications with customs, EAC referred to the credit provided under the Credit Plan as "loans."
 - 74. And the amount of credit that was av

conduct, they did so only after they werentacted by the State of Minnesota and were informed of the State of Minesota's investigation.

THE FTC ACT

- 77. Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 1.5.S.C. § 45(a), prohibits "unfair or deceptive acts or practices on affecting commerce."
- 78. Misrepresentations or deceptive **ssio**ns of material fact constitute deceptive acts or practices prohibitedSection 5(a) of the FTC Act.

VIOLATIONS OF THE FTC ACT

COUNT I

Deceptive Student Loan DebRelief Representation

(By Plaintiff FTC against MBV Defendants)

- 79. In numerous instances in connection with the advertising, marketing, promotion, offering for sale, or sale stitudent loan debt relief services, MBV Defendants have represed, directly or indirectly, expessly or by implication, that:
 - a. consumers had qualified for, where approved to receive, loan forgiveness or other programs at thwould permanently lower or eliminate their loan payments or balances; and
 - b. consumers' monthly payments Defendants would be applied toward consumers' student loans.
- 80. In truth and in fact, in numerous instances in which MBV Defendants made the representations set fort Paragraph 79 of this Complaint, such representations were false or not subtistated at the time MBV Defendants made them.
- 81. Therefore, MBV Defendant representations set forth in Paragraph 79 of this Complaint are false or misleading aconstitute deceptive acts or practices in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

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95. EAC's acts or practices, as described in Paragraph 94 of this Complaint, are deceptive telemarketing acts or practices that violate the TSR, 16 C.F.R. § 310.3(b).

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TILA AND REGULATION Z

- The purpose of the Truth in Lending Act is to "assure a meaningful 96. disclosure of credit terms so that the consumer will be able to compare more readily the various credit terms available to him and avoid the uninformed use of credit, and to protect the consumer against inaccurate and unfair credit billing and credit card practices." 15 U.S.C. § 1601(a).
- 97. Under TILA, 15 U.S.C. §§ 1601-1666j, and its implementing Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. § 1026, creditors who extend "closed-end credit," as defined in 12 C.F.R. § 1026.2(a)(10), must comply with the applicable disclosure provisions of TILA and Regulation Z, including but not limited to, Sections 1026.17 and 1026.18 of Regulation Z, 12 C.F.R. §§ 1026.17 and 1026.18.
- 98. "Creditor" means a person who regularly extends consumer credit that is subject to a finance charge or is payable by written agreement in more than four installments (not including a down payment), and to whom the obligation is initially payable, either on the face of the note or contract, or by agreement when there is no contract. 12 C.F.R. §§ 1026.2 (a)(17). EAC is a creditor under TILA and Regulation Z because it extends consumer credit subject to a finance charge and the obligation is initially payable to EAC.
- 99. "Closed-end credit" means consumer credit other than open-end credit, and "[o]pen-end credit" is defined as "consumer credit extended by a creditor under a plan in which: (i) the creditor reasonably contemplates repeated transactions; (ii) the creditor may impose a finance charge from time to time on an outstanding unpaid balance; and (iii) the amount of credit that may be extended to the consumer during the term of the plan (up to any limit set by the creditor) is generally made available to the extent that any outstanding balance is repaid." 12 C.F.R. §§ 1026.2(a)(10) and

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with the intent that others rely thereon in connection with the sale of its services, including by making false, deceptive, and/or unsubstantiated representations to Minnesota residents regarding, among other things, that:

- a. consumers have qualified for, or are approved to receive, loan forgiveness or other programs that will permanently lower or eliminate their loan payments or balances; and
- b. consumers' monthly payments to Defendants will be applied toward consumers' student loans.
- 108. Lyell is individually liable for violating section 325F.69 based on the unlawful conduct described in this Complaint because he had authority to control and participated in MBV's business affairs, had authority to control and acquiesced to the unlawful conduct, and/or personally participated in the unlawful conduct.
- 109. Hansen is individually liable for violating section 325F.69 based on the unlawful conduct described in this Complaint because he had authority to control and participated in MBV's business affairs, had authority to control and acquiesced to the unlawful conduct, and/or personally participated in the unlawful conduct.
- 110. Due to the false and deceptive conduct described in this Complaint, Minnesota residents have purchased services from MBV that they otherwise would not have purchased, thereby causing harm to these persons and enriching MBV.
- 111. MBV Defendants' conduct, practices, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple, separate violations of Minnesota Statutes section 325F.69.

COUNT VII

DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES

(By Plaintiff State of Minnesota against MBV, Lyell, and Hansen)

- 112. The State of Minnesota re-alleges all prior paragraphs of this Complaint.
- 113. Minnesota Statues section 325D.44, subdivision 1 provides, in part that:

A person engages in a deceptive trade practice when, in the course of business, vocation, or occupation, the person:

(13) engages in any other conduct which similarly creates a likelihood of confusion or misunderstanding.

- 114. MBV has repeatedly violated Minnesota Statues section 325D.44, subdivision 1, by engaging in deceptive conduct that caused a likelihood of confusion or of misunderstanding among consumers in connection with its sales of student loan debt relief services. Those practices include, but are not limited to, the following false, deceptive, and/or unsubstantiated representations to consumers in connection with the promotion or sale of MBV's services:
 - a. consumers have qualified for, or are approved to receive, loan forgiveness or other programs that will permanently lower or eliminate their loan payments or balances; and
 - b. consumers' monthly payments to Defendants will be applied toward consumers' student loans.
- 115. Lyell is individually liable for violating section 325D.44 based on the unlawful conduct described in this Complaint because he had authority to control and participated in MBV's business affairs, had authority to control and acquiesced to the unlawful conduct, and/or personally participated in the unlawful conduct.
- 116. Hansen is individually liable for violating section 325D.44 based on the unlawful conduct described in this Complaint because he had authority to control and participated in MBV's business affairs, had authority to control and acquiesced to the unlawful conduct, and/or personally participated in the unlawful conduct.
- 117. Due to the false and deceptive conduct described in this Complaint, Minnesota residents purchased MBV services that they otherwise would not have purchased, thereby causing harm to these persons and enriching MBV.

118. MBV's conduct, practices, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple, separate violations of Minnesota Statutes section 325D.44.

COUNT VIII

VIOLATIONS OF THE DEBT SETTLEMENT SERVICES ACT

(Plaintiff State of Minnesota against MBV)

- 119. The State of Minnesota re-alleges all prior paragraphs of this Complaint.
- 120. Minnesota Statutes section 332B.03 provides, in part, as follows:

it is unlawful for any person, whether or not located in this state, to operate as a debt settlement services provider or provide debt settlement services including, but not limited to, offering, advertising, or executing or causing to be executed any debt settlement services or debt settlement services agreement, except as authorized by law, without first becoming registered as provided in this chapter.

121. Minnesota Statutes section 332B.09, subdivision 3, provides, in part, as follows:

A debt settlement services provider may not impose or collect any payment pursuant to a debt settlement services agreement before the debt settlement service provider has fully performed all of the following:

- (1) the debt settlement services contained in the agreement; and
- (2) any additional services the debt settlement services provider has agreed to perform. . . .
- 122. Minnesota Statutes section 332B.02, subdivision 10, defines "debt settlement services," in part, as:

offering to provide advice, or offering to act or acting as an intermediary between a debtor and one or more of the debtor's creditors, where the primary purpose of the advice or action is to obtain a settlement for less than the full amount of debt, whether in principal, interest, fees, or other charges, incurred primarily for personal, family, or household purposes including, but not limited to, offering debt negotiation, debt reduction, or debt relief services[.]

123. Minnesota Statutes section 332B.02, subdivision 11, defines "debt settlement services agreement" as:

the written contract between the debt settlement services provider and the debtor.

124. Minnesota Statutes section 332B.02, subdivision 13, defines a "debt settlement services provider," in part, as:

any person offering or providing debt settlement services to a debtor domiciled in this state, regardless of whether or not a fee is charged for the services and regardless of whether the person maintains a physical presence in the state. The term includes any person to whom debt settlement services are delegated.

- 125. Minnesota Statutes section 332B.13 provides that a violation of the Debt Settlement Services Act is an unfair and deceptive practice under Minnesota Statutes section 8.31, and that the Attorney General may enforce the act under section 8.31.
- 126. MBV is a debt settlement services provider because it provided debt settlement services by (a) offering to act and actually acting as an intermediary between Minnesota debtors and the U.S. Department of Education, where the primary

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- a. Operating as a debt settlement services provider or a provider debt settlement services without first becoming registered with the Minnesota Commissioner of Commerce, in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 332B.03, including by offering to and actually advising Minnesota debtors on how to settle their student loan debt for less than the full amount of the debt, and separately, by offering to and actually acting as an intermediary between Minnesota debtors and their creditor;
- b. Imposing and/or collecting payment pursuant to debt settlement services agreements entered into with Minnesota debtors before fully performing all of the debt settlement services contained in the agreements and any additional services that MBV agreed to perform, in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 332B.09, subdivision 3.
- 129. Due to MBV's violations of the Debt Settlement Services Act, Minnesota debtors had unlawful advance payment obligations imposed upon them and also made unlawful advance payments prior to MBV fully performing the debt settlement services and any additional services it had agreed to perform, thereby causing harm to these debtors and enriching MBV.
- 130. MBV's conduct, practices, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple, separate violations of the Debt Settlement Services Act.

COUNT IX

FAILURE TO MAKE REQUIRED LOAN DISCLOSURES

(Plaintiff State of Minnesota against Defendant EAC)

- 131. The State of Minnesota re-alleges all prior paragraphs of this Complaint.
- 132. Minnesota Statutes section 56.01(a) provides as follows:

Except as authorized by this chapter and without first obtaining a license from the commissioner, no person shall engage in the business of making loans of money, credit, goods, or things in action, in an amount or of a value not exceeding that specified in section 56.131, subdivision

1, and charge, contract for, or receive on the loan a greater rate of interest, discount, or consideration than the lender would be permitted by law to charge if not a licensee under this chapter.

133. Minnesota Statutes section 56.14(1) provides as follows:

Every licensee shall . . . deliver to the borrower (or if there are two or more borrowers to one of them) at the time any loan is made a statement making the disclosures and furnishing the information required by the federal Truth-in-Lending Act, United States Code, title 15, sections 1601 to 1667e, as amended from time to time, with respect to the contract of loan. A copy of the loan contract may be delivered in lieu of a statement if it discloses the required information[.]

- 134. EAC became licensed under Minnesota Statutes section 56.01(a) in May 2016 and has continuously and without interruption been a licensee under chapter 56 since this time.
- 135. EAC made loans to Minnesota borrowers as a licensee under chapter 56. As such, EAC was required to provide to Minnesota borrowers the disclosures required by TILA pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 56.14(1).
- 136. TILA requires creditors of closed-end consumer credit transactions to clearly and conspicuously disclose in writing, among other things, the following about the loan: the identity of the creditor making the disclosures; the "amount financed" (using that term); the "finance charge" (using that term); the "total of payments" (the sum of the amount financed and the finance charge); and the payment schedule (number, amount, and due dates or period of payments scheduled to repay the total of payments). *See* 15 U.S.C. § 1638. Accordingly, Minnesota Statutes section 56.14(1) separately requires EAC to disclose this information to its Minnesota borrowers pursuant to the statute's terms.
- 137. EAC has repeatedly violated Minnesota Statutes section 56.14(1) by failing to clearly and conspicuously disclose in writing, among other things, the identity of the creditor making the disclosures, the amount financed, the finance charge, the payment schedule, and the total of payments as described in Paragraph 25.

138. EAC's conduct, practices, and actions described in this Complaint constitute multiple, separate violations of Minnesota Statutes section 56.14(1).

CONSUMER INJURY

139. Consumers throughout the United States, including those in the state of Minnesota, have suffered and will continue to suffer substantial injury as a result of MBV Defendants' violations of the FTC Act, the MN DTPA, the MN CFA, the MN DSSA, and the TSR, and EAC's violations of the TSR, the MN RLA, and TILA. In addition, MBV Defendants and EAC have been unjustly enriched as a result of their unlawful acts or practices. Absent injunctive relief by this Court, MBV Defendants and EAC are likely to continue to injure consumers, reap unjust enrichment, and harm the public interest.

THE COURT'S POWER TO GRANT RELIEF

140. Section 13(b) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 53(b), empowers this Court to grant injunctive and such other relief as the Court may deem appropriate to halt and redress violations of any provision of law enforced by the FTC. The Court, in the exercise of its equitable jurisdiction, may award ancillary relief, including rescission

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authorize this Court to grant such relief as the Court finds necessary to redress injury to consumers resulting from violations of these statutes, including injunctive relief, rescission or reformation of contracts, restitution, the refund of monies paid, and the disgorgement of ill-gotten monies.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Wherefore, Plaintiff FTC, pursuant to Sections 13(b) and 19 of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 53(b) and 57b, and Section 6(b) of the Telemarketing Act, 15 U.S.C. § 6105(b), and the Court's own equitable powers, and Plaintiff State of Minnesota, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes sections 8.31, 325D.45, 325F.70, and 332B.13, and as authorized by the Court's own equitable powers, request that the Court:

- A. Award Plaintiffs such preliminary injunctive and ancillary relief as may be necessary to avert the likelihood of consumer injury during the pendency of this action and to preserve the possibility of effective final relief, including a temporary and preliminary injunction, asset freeze, appointment of a receiver, an evidence preservation order, and expedited discovery;
- B. Enter a permanent injunction to prevent future violations of the FTC Act, the TSR, TILA and its implementing Regulation Z, the MN DTPA, the MN CFA, the MN DSSA, and the MN RLA by Defendants;
- C. Award such relief as the Court finds necessary to redress injury to consumers resulting from Defendants' violations of the FTC Act, the TSR, TILA and its implementing Regulation Z, the MN DTPA, the MN CFA, the MN DSSA, and the MN RLA, including rescission or reformation of contracts, restitution, the refund of monies paid, and the disgorgement of ill-gotten monies;
- D. Award Plaintiff FTC the cost of bringing this action; and

