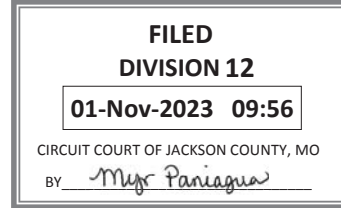


**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI
AT INDEPENDENCE**

REBECCA M. BATCHELLER, *on behalf of*)
herself and all others similarly situated,)
)
 Plaintiffs,)
)
 v.)
)
 WAKEFIELD & ASSOCIATES, INC.,)
)
 Defendant.)

Case No. 2116-CV24281



PRELIMINARY APPROVAL ORDER

WHEREAS, Rebecca M. Batcheller is asserting claims against Wakefield & Associates, Inc. (“Wakefield”) for alleged violations of the Missouri Notary Statute, Missouri Merchandising Practices Act, and common law fraud, and seeks monetary damages and other relief for herself and a class of persons similarly situated.

WHEREAS, the Parties stipulate to a Settlement Class, pending preliminary and final approval by the Circuit Court of Jackson County, Missouri, comprising and defined as:

All persons named as defendants in debt collection actions filed by Wakefield between November 5, 2016 and August 27, 2020, in which an affidavit of assignment from the original creditor was notarized by Deanne M. Pollock. Plaintiff alleged the above conduct violated the version of Missouri’s Notary Act in effect prior to August 28, 2020, including Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 486.355 and 486.360, the Missouri Merchandising Practices Act, Mo. Rev. Stat. § 407.010, et seq., and constituted common law fraud.

Excluded from the Class are persons: (1) whose debts were previously remedied by Wakefield in which the underlying judgment was satisfied, the consumer paid no money, and the account was returned to the original creditor; and/or () who filed for bankruptcy after the date their debt collection lawsuit was filed by Wakefield and whose bankruptcy ended in discharge rather than dismissal.

WHEREAS, Batcheller, as a member and representative of the Settlement Class, and Wakefield have entered into a “Class Action Settlement Agreement and Release” dated October 31, 2023 (the “Agreement”), which memorializes the Parties’ negotiated and agreed-

upon settlement as between them and a proposed Settlement Class, subject to the approval of the Court (“the Settlement”).

WHEREAS, Batcheller has filed a *Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement* with the Court.

NOW THEREFORE, upon careful consideration of the *Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement*, and after reviewing the Agreement and making an independent judicial investigation into the allegations and defenses of the parties, and for good cause shown, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED that:

1. Under Missouri Supreme Court Rule 52.08, the Agreement and the Settlement are approved preliminarily as fair, reasonable, and adequate to the Settlement Class as defined in the Agreement, subject to further consideration at the Fairness Hearing described in Paragraph 13 of this Order.

2. The definitions of capitalized terms in the Agreement are incorporated by reference into this Order.

3. Batcheller and Wakefield have executed the Agreement to settle and resolve the Litigation as between them and the proposed Settlement Class, subject to approval of the Court.

4. Upon review of the *Motion for Preliminary Approval of Proposed Class Action Settlement*, this Court preliminarily certifies, under Missouri Supreme Court Rule 52.08, the following class of persons as a settlement class (the “Settlement Class”):

All persons named as defendants in debt collection actions filed by Wakefield between November 5, 2016 and August 27, 2020, in which an affidavit of assignment from the original creditor was notarized by Deanne M. Pollock. Plaintiff alleged the above conduct violated the version of Missouri’s Notary Act in effect prior to August 28, 2020, including Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 486.355 and 486.360, the Missouri Merchandising Practices Act, Mo. Rev. Stat. § 407.010, et seq., and constituted common law fraud.

Excluded from the Class are persons: (1) whose debts were previously remedied by Wakefield in which the underlying judgment was satisfied, the consumer paid no money, and the account was returned to the original creditor; and/or (2) who filed for bankruptcy after the date their debt collection lawsuit was filed by Wakefield and whose bankruptcy ended in discharge rather than dismissal.

The Court finds as to the Settlement Class that:

a. The Settlement Class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable.

b. There are questions of law or fact common to the Settlement Class that predominate over questions affecting only individual members of the Settlement Class.

c. Batcheller's claims are typical of those of the members of the Settlement Class.

d. Batcheller and Class Counsel will fairly and adequately represent and protect the interests of the members of the Settlement Class.

e. Certification of the Settlement Class as proposed is a superior and appropriate method for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversies between the Settlement Class Members and Wakefield.

5. For this preliminary approval, and for all matters relating to the Settlement and the Litigation, the Court appoints Batcheller as Representative of the Settlement Class. The Court also appoints Timothy J. Wolf, Tyler J. Hamilton, Michael L. Belancio, and the law firm of Watters Wolf Bub & Hansmann, LLC, as Class Counsel until further order of the Court.

6. By this Order, the Court exercises subject-matter and personal jurisdiction over the Settlement Class to evaluate the final certification of the Settlement Class and the fairness and adequacy of the Settlement.

7. The Class Mail Notice and Long-Form Notice, as set forth in **Exhibits A and B** to the Agreement, are approved.

8. The Class Mail Notice in a form substantially the same as that set forth in **Exhibit A** to the Agreement shall be mailed by the Settlement Administrator by first-class mail, postage prepaid, to all members of the Settlement Class (as identified on **Exhibit C** of the Agreement). Such mailing shall be made within the timeframe provided by the Agreement. The Long-Form Notice in a form substantially the same as that set forth in **Exhibit B** to the Agreement shall be provided to members of the Settlement Class on a website and mailed by first-class mail, postage prepaid, to Settlement Class Members upon their request.

9. The Agreement contemplates a notice methodology that protects the interests of the Parties and the Settlement Class, provides the best notice practicable under the circumstances, and is reasonably calculated to apprise the Settlement Class Members of the pendency of the Litigation and proposed Settlement, the Agreement, and their right to opt out and exclude themselves from or object to the proposed Settlement. In addition, the Court finds that the notice methodology is reasonable and constitutes due, adequate, and sufficient notice to all persons entitled to receive notice of the proposed Settlement and meets all requirements of law, including, but not limited to, Missouri Supreme Court Rule 52.08 and the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution and the Missouri Constitution.

10. The Court appoints Atticus Administration as Settlement Administrator.

11. Prior to the Fairness Hearing, Class Counsel shall cause the Settlement Administrator to serve and file the sworn statement of a person with knowledge which evidences compliance with this Order and the Agreement concerning the mailing of the Class Mail Notice.

12. Any member of the Settlement Class shall mail a request to opt out (“Request to Opt Out”) to the Settlement Administrator. To be valid, the Request to Opt Out must be postmarked within 30 days after the date of the mailing of the Class Mail Notice to Class Members. Such Request to Opt Out shall include: (a) the name, address, telephone number, and last four digits of the Social Security Number of the Settlement Class Member; (b) a statement that the Settlement Class Member and all other co-debtors on the Class Member’s debt account with Wakefield or co-defendants named in the Class Member’s debt collection lawsuit filed by Wakefield are seeking exclusion from or opting out of the Settlement; (c) the signature of each person who is and/or was listed as a debtor on the debt account or named as a defendant in the debt collection lawsuit that is the subject of this Litigation (unless any such person shall be deceased, in which case the opt-out submission shall include a copy of such person’s death certificate); and (d) a reference to *Rebecca Batcheller v. Wakefield & Associates, Inc.*, Case No. 2116-CV24281. Any member of the Settlement Class who does not properly and timely request exclusion or to opt out from the Settlement Class shall be included in the Settlement Class and be bound by any judgment entered with respect to the Class.

13. Within five (5) days before the Fairness Hearing (defined below), Class Counsel shall cause the Settlement Administrator to file with the Court a sworn statement listing those persons (by reference to the unique identifier and last four digits of the person’s Social Security Number—as provided on **Exhibit C** to the Agreement) who submitted timely Requests to Opt Out. The originals of all Requests to Opt Out shall be retained by the Parties.

14. A hearing (the “Fairness Hearing”) shall be held before the undersigned at 9:00 a.m. on December 19, 2023, at the Sixteenth Judicial Circuit, Division 12, 308 W. Kansas Ave., Independence, MO 64050. At the Fairness Hearing, the Court will consider: (a) the

fairness, reasonableness, and adequacy of the Settlement; (b) the entry of any final order or judgment with respect to the Settlement Class; (c) the application for an incentive award for the services rendered by Batcheller as Representative of the Settlement Class; (d) the application for attorney's fees and for reimbursement of expenses by Class Counsel; and (e) other related matters. The Fairness Hearing may be postponed, adjourned, or continued by the Court without further notice to the Settlement Class.

15. To be considered at the Fairness Hearing, any person desiring to file an objection or other comment on the Settlement shall file all such objections and comments and all supporting pleadings within thirty (30) days after the date of mailing of the Class Mail Notice, with service upon Class Counsel and Defendant's Counsel postmarked within thirty (30) days after the date of mailing of the Class Mail Notice. Any Settlement Class Member's objection must be in writing and shall specifically include:

- (i) The name, address, telephone number, facsimile number (if available), email address (if available) and last four digits of the Social Security Number of the Settlement Class Member filing the objection;
- (ii) A statement of each objection asserted;
- (iii) A detailed description of the facts underlying each objection;
- (iv) Any debt or court documents in the possession or control of the objector and relied upon by the objector as a basis for the objection;
- (v) If the objector is represented by counsel, the name, address, telephone number, facsimile number (if available) and email address (if available) of the counsel, and a detailed description of the legal authorities supporting each objection;
- (vi) If the objector plans to utilize expert opinion and/or testimony as part of the objection(s), a written expert report from all proposed experts that outlines each of the expert's opinions and the factual and substantive bases thereof;
- (vii) If the objector plans to call a witness or present other evidence at the hearing, the objector must state the identity of the witness and identify any documentary

evidence by attaching the documents to the objection, and the objector must provide any other evidence that the objector intends to present;

- (viii) A statement of whether the objector intends to appear at the hearing;
- (ix) A copy of the exhibits which the objector may offer during the hearing;
- (x) A reference to “Rebecca Batcheller v. Wakefield & Associates, Inc., Case No. 2116-CV24281”; and
- (xi) A certification under 28 U.S.C. § 1746 or similar state law in substantially the following form: “I declare (or certify, verify, or state) under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on (date). (Signature)”.

No objection to or other comment concerning the Settlement shall be hard unless timely filed under the guidelines specified above and in the Agreement. Class Counsel and Wakefield’s Counsel shall promptly furnish each other with copies of all objections or written requests to opt out that come into their possession.

16. Any Settlement Class Member who does not make his or her objection in the manner provided in this Order shall be deemed to have waived any such objection and shall forever be foreclosed from making any objection to the Settlement, including but not limited to, the propriety of class certification, the adequacy of any notice, or the fairness, adequacy, or reasonableness of the Settlement. The procedures and requirements for filing objections to the Agreement and Settlement should ensure the efficient administration of justice and the orderly presentation of any Settlement Class Members’ objections to the Agreement, in accordance with such Settlement Class Members’ due process rights. Objectors who fail to properly or timely file their objections with the Clerk of the Court with the required information and documentation set forth above, or fail to serve them as provided above, shall not be heard during any hearings, nor shall their objections be considered by the Court.

17. Submissions of the Parties relative to the Settlement, including memoranda to support the Settlement, applications for attorney's fees and reimbursement of costs or expenses by Class Counsel, and any applications for the payment of services rendered by Batcheller as Representative of the Settlement Class, shall be filed with the Clerk of the Court at least seven (7) days prior to the Final Fairness Hearing. Any attorney hired by a Settlement Class Member at the Settlement Class Member's expense to object to the Settlement, or to any application for an incentive award or for an award of attorney's fees, costs, or expenses, shall file with the Clerk of Court and serve upon Class Counsel and Wakefield's Counsel a written notice of appearance within thirty (30) days after the date of mailing of the Class Mail Notice.

18. Any Settlement Class Member may appear at the Final Fairness Hearing in-person, or by counsel if an appearance is filed and served as provided in the Long-Form Notice, and such person will be heard to the extent allowed by the Court. No person shall be permitted to be heard unless, at least ten (10) days prior to the Final Fairness Hearing, such person has (a) filed with the Clerk of the Court a notice of such person's intention to appear and (b) served copies of such notice upon Class Counsel and Wakefield's Counsel.

19. All other events contemplated under the Agreement to occur after entry of this Order and before the Fairness Hearing shall be governed by the Agreement and the Class Mail Notice, to the extent not inconsistent with this Order. Class Counsel and Wakefield's Counsel shall take such further actions as required by the Agreement.

20. The Parties shall be authorized to make nonmaterial changes to the Class Mail Notice and Long-Form Notice if Class Counsel and Wakefield's Counsel agree.

21. All claims and motions in the Litigation, other than such as may be necessary to carry out the terms and conditions of the Agreement or the responsibilities related or incidental thereto, are stayed and suspended until further order of this Court.

22. The Released Claims of the Releasers against the Released Persons, other than such as may be necessary to carry out the terms and conditions of the Agreement or the responsibilities related or incidental thereto, are stayed and suspended until further order of this Court.

23. If Final Approval of the Settlement does not occur, or if the Settlement is rescinded or terminated, the Settlement and all proceedings had in connection therewith shall be null and void and without prejudice to the rights of the Parties before the Settlement was executed and made, and all Orders issued for the Settlement shall be vacated.

24. Entering into or carrying out the Agreement, and any negotiations or proceedings related to thereto, shall not be construed as, or deemed evidence of, an admission or concession regarding any claims or defenses alleged or asserted, or any factual or legal assertions in the Litigation, and shall not be offered or received in evidence of any action or proceeding against any party in any court, administrative agency or other tribunal for any purpose, except in a proceeding to enforce this Order and the Agreement, or to prove or show that a compromise in settlement of the Released Claims per the Agreement was reached; provided, however, this Order and the Agreement may be filed in any action filed against or by Wakefield or any Released Person to support a defense of *res judicata*, collateral estoppel, release, waiver, good faith settlement, judgment bar or reduction, full faith and credit, or any other theory of claim preclusion, issue preclusion or similar defense or counterclaim. The Parties expressly reserve all rights and defenses to all claims and causes of action and waive no such rights or defenses if the Agreement is not approved or fails to become effective for any reason.

IT IS SO ORDERED

Date: 31-Oct-2023


Judge Jennifer M. Phillips
Division 12

CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

It is hereby certified that a copy of the forgoing was sent via the E-Filing System on
01-Nov-2023, to all attorneys of record.


Law Clerk