

THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

THOMAS DONNELLY,)	
On behalf of himself and others)	Case No. 4:13-CV-10017-TGB-RSW
similarly situated,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
v.)	
)	
EQUITYEXPERTS.ORG, LLC)	
)	
)	
Defendant.)	
_____)	

ORDER OF PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT

WHEREAS, the Court has been advised that the parties to this action, Thomas Donnelly (hereinafter referred to as “Plaintiff” or “Class Representative”), and EquityExperts.org, LLC (hereinafter referred to as “Defendant”), through their respective counsel, have agreed, subject to Court approval following notice to the Class Members and a Hearing, to settle the above-captioned lawsuit (hereinafter referred to as the “Lawsuit”) upon the terms and conditions set forth in the Class Action Settlement Agreement (hereinafter referred to as the “Settlement Agreement”), which has been filed with the Court, and the Court deeming that the definitions set forth in the Settlement Agreement are hereby incorporated by reference herein (with capitalized terms as set forth in the Settlement Agreement);

NOW, THEREFORE, based upon the Settlement Agreement and all of the files, records, and proceedings herein, and it appearing to the Court that, upon preliminary examination, the proposed settlement appears fair, reasonable, and adequate, and that a Hearing should and will be

EXHIBIT A

held on January 14, 2015, after Notice to the Class Members, to confirm that the proposed settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate, and to determine whether a Final Order and Judgment should be entered in this Lawsuit:

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED:

1. The Court has jurisdiction over the subject matter of the Lawsuit and over all settling parties hereto.

2. In compliance with the Class Action Fairness Act of 2005, 28 U.S.C. §§ 1332(D), 1453, AND 1711-1715, Defendant will cause to be served written Notice of the proposed class settlement on the United States Attorney General and the Attorney General of the State of Michigan by October 27, 2014.

3. **CLASS MEMBERS** – Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(3), the Lawsuit is hereby preliminarily certified, for settlement purposes only, as a class action on behalf of the following class of plaintiffs (hereinafter referred to as the “Class Members”) with respect to the claims asserted in the Lawsuit:

All persons located in the State of Michigan who, between January 4, 2012 and January 3, 2013, were sent an initial written communication by EquityExperts.org, LLC in connection with an attempt to collect a consumer debt (the “Class Members”).

4. The Parties believe that there are 413 Class Members.

5. **CLASS REPRESENTATIVE AND CLASS COUNSEL APPOINTMENT** – Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23, the Court preliminarily certifies Plaintiff Thomas Donnelly as the Class Representative and Michael L. Greenwald of Greenwald Davidson PLLC as Class Counsel. Ronald S. Weiss is appointed as Liaison Counsel.

6. **PRELIMINARY CLASS CERTIFICATION** – The Court preliminarily finds that the Lawsuit satisfies the applicable prerequisites for class action treatment under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23, namely:

- A. The Class Members are so numerous that joinder of all of them in the Lawsuit is impracticable;
- B. There are questions of law and fact common to the Class Members, which predominate over any individual questions;
- C. The claims of the Plaintiff are typical of the claims of the Class Members;
- D. The Plaintiff and Class Counsel have fairly and adequately represented and protected the interests of all of the Class Members; and
- E. Class treatment of these claims will be efficient and manageable, thereby achieving an appreciable measure of judicial economy, and a class action is superior to other available methods for a fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy.

7. The Court preliminarily finds that the settlement of the Lawsuit, on the terms and conditions set forth in the Settlement Agreement is in all respects fundamentally fair, reasonable, adequate, and in the best interest of the Class Members, especially in light of the benefits to the Class Members; the strength of the Plaintiff's case; the complexity, expense, and probable duration of further litigation; the risk and delay inherent in possible appeals; the risk of collecting any judgment obtained on behalf of the class; and, the limited amount of any potential total recovery for the class.

8. ADMINISTRATION – A third party class administrator acceptable to the parties will administer the settlement and notification to Class Members. The class administrator will be responsible for mailing the approved class action notice and settlement checks to the Class Members. All costs of administration shall be paid out of the Settlement Fund. Upon the recommendation of the parties, the court hereby appoints the following class administrator: KCC Class Action Services, LLC.

9. WRITTEN NOTICE – The Court approves the form and substance of the Notice of Class Action Settlement, attached to the Settlement Agreement as Exhibit B. The proposed form and method for notifying the Class Members of the settlement and its terms and conditions meet the requirements of Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(2)(B) and due process, constitute the best notice practicable under the circumstances, and shall constitute due and sufficient notice to all persons and entities entitled to the notice. The Court finds that the proposed notice is clearly designed to advise the Class Members of their rights. In accordance with the Settlement Agreement, the class administrator shall cause the completed notice to be mailed to the Class Members as expeditiously as possible, but in no event later than 30 days after the Court’s entry of this order, *i.e.*, **no later than October 27, 2014**. The class administrator shall confirm, and if necessary, update the addresses for the Class Members through standard methodology that the class administrator currently uses to update addresses.

10. EXCLUSIONS – Any Class Member who desires to be excluded from the class must send a written request for exclusion to Class Counsel with a postmark date no later than 60 days after the Court’s entry of this order, *i.e.*, **no later than November 26, 2014**. To be

effective, the written request for exclusion must state the Class Member's full name, address, telephone number, and email address (if available), along with a statement that the Class Member wishes to be excluded. Any Class Member who submits a valid and timely request for exclusion shall not be bound by the terms of the Settlement Stipulation.

11. **OBJECTIONS** – Any Class Member who intends to object to the fairness of this settlement must file a written objection with the Court within 60 days after the Court's entry of this order, *i.e.*, **no later than November 26, 2014**. Further, any such Class Member must, within the same time period, provide a copy of the written objection to Class Counsel, Attention: Donnelly v. EquityExperts Settlement, Greenwald Davidson PLLC, 5550 Glades Road, Suite 500, Boca Raton, FL 33431; and Counsel for Defendant, Attention: Donnelly v. EquityExperts Settlement, Norman Yatooma & Associates, P.C., 1900 South Telegraph Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302.

12. To be effective, a notice of intent to object to the Proposed Settlement must:
- (a) Contain a heading which includes the name of the case and case number;
 - (b) Provide the name, address, telephone number and signature of the Class Member filing the objection;
 - (c) Be filed with the Clerk of the Court no later than 60 days after the Court preliminarily approves the settlement;
 - (d) Be sent to Class Counsel and Defendants at the addresses designated in the Notice by first-class mail, postmarked no later than 60 days after the Court preliminarily approves the settlement;
 - (e) Contain the name, address, bar number and telephone number of the objecting Class Member's counsel, if represented by an attorney. If the Class Member is represented by an attorney, he/she or it must comply with all applicable laws and rules for filing pleadings and documents in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

- (f) A detailed statement of the specific legal and factual basis for each and every objection; and
- (g) A list of any legal authority the objector will present at the Final Approval Hearing.

13. Any Class Member who has timely filed an objection shall appear at the Settlement Approval Hearing, in person or by counsel, and be heard to the extent allowed by the Court, applying applicable law, in opposition to the fairness, reasonableness and adequacy of the Proposed Settlement, and on the application for an award of attorneys' fees and costs. The right to object to the Proposed Settlement must be exercised individually by an individual Class Member, not as a member of a group or subclass and, except in the case of a deceased, minor, or incapacitated Class Member, not by the act of another person acting or purporting to act in a representative capacity.

14. **SETTLEMENT PAYMENTS** – The class administrator will mail a settlement check to each Class Member who does not exclude himself or herself from the class. The settlement checks to the class members shall be sent via U.S. mail no later than 30 days after Final Judgment Day.

15. **CLASS REPRESENTATIVE AWARD TO THOMAS DONNELLY** – Plaintiff, Thomas Donnelly, will petition the Court to receive the sum of \$3,000 as acknowledgement of his role in prosecuting this case on behalf of the Class Members.

16. **FINAL APPROVAL** – The Court shall conduct a hearing (hereinafter referred to as the “final approval hearing”) on January 14, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. at the United States District

Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse, 600 Church Street, Flint, Michigan 48502 to review and rule upon the following issues:

- A. Whether this action satisfies the applicable prerequisites for class action treatment for settlement purposes under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23;
- B. Whether the proposed settlement is fundamentally fair, reasonable, adequate, and in the best interest of the Class Members and should be approved by the Court;
- C. Whether the Final Order and Judgment, as provided under the Settlement Agreement, should be entered, dismissing the Lawsuit with prejudice and releasing the Released Claims against the Released Parties; and
- D. To discuss and review other issues as the Court deems appropriate.

17. Attendance at the Final Approval Hearing is not necessary. Class Members need not appear at the hearing or take any other action to indicate their approval of the proposed class action settlement. Class Members wishing to be heard are, however, required to appear at the Final Approval Hearing. The Final Approval Hearing may be postponed, adjourned, transferred, or continued without further notice to the Class Members.

18. Submissions by the Parties, including memoranda in support of the proposed settlement, responses to any objections, petitions for attorney's fees and reimbursement of costs and expenses by Class Counsel, shall be filed with the Court no later than 14 days prior to the Final Approval Hearing, *i.e.*, **no later than *January 1, 2015***.

19. The Settlement Agreement and this Order shall be null and void if any of the following occur:

- A. The Settlement Agreement is terminated by any of the Parties for cause, or any

specified material condition to the settlement set forth in the Settlement Agreement is not satisfied and the satisfaction of such condition is not waived in writing by the Parties;

- B. The Court rejects, in any material respect, the Final Order and Judgment substantially in the form and content attached to the Settlement Agreement and/or the Parties fail to consent to the entry of another form of order in lieu thereof;
- C. The Court rejects any material component of the Settlement Agreement, including any amendment thereto approved by the Parties; or
- D. The Court approves the Settlement Agreement, including any amendment thereto approved by the Parties, but such approval is reversed on appeal and such reversal becomes final by lapse of time or otherwise.

20. If the Settlement Agreement and/or this order are voided per ¶ 19 of this order, then the Settlement Agreement shall be of no force and effect and the Parties' rights and defenses shall be restored, without prejudice, to their respective positions as if the Settlement Agreement had never been executed and this order never entered.

21. The Court retains continuing and exclusive jurisdiction over the action to consider all further matters arising out of or connected with the settlement, including the administration and enforcement of the Settlement Agreement.

22. The Court sets the following schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
September 26, 2014	Preliminary Approval Order Entered
October 27, 2014	Notice Sent

November 26, 2014	Deadline to Send Exclusion or File Objection
January 1, 2014	Motion for Final Approval and Attorney Fees Papers Filed
JANUARY 14, 2015 @ 2:00 P.M.	Final Approval Hearing Held

ORDER

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/Terrence G. Berg
The Honorable Terrence G. Berg
United States District Court Judge

DATED: September 26, 2014
Flint, Michigan

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that this Order was electronically submitted on September 26, 2014, using the CM/ECF system, which will send notification to each party.

s/A. Chubb
Case Manager