

1 JEFFREY BLUMBERG (MD Bar)
2 E-mail: Jeffrey.blumberg@cfpb.gov
3 Phone: 202-435-9687

4 REBECCA COLEMAN (MD Bar)
5 E-mail: rebecca.coleman@cfpb.gov
6 Phone: 202-435-7541
7 1700 G Street NW
8 Washington, DC 20552
9 Fax: (202) 435-7722

10 LEANNE HARTMANN, CA Bar # 264787 - Local Counsel
11 301 Howard St., Suite 1200
12 San Francisco, CA 94105
13 Phone: (415) 844-9787
14 Email: leanne.hartmann@cfpb.gov
15 Attorneys for Plaintiff
16 Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection

17
18 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
19 **CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**
20

21 Bureau of Consumer Financial
22 Protection,

23 Plaintiff,

24 v.

25 GST Factoring, Inc., et al.,

26 Defendants.
27
28

Case No. 8-20-cv-01239-DOC-ADS

**DEFAULT JUDGMENT AND
ORDER FOR PERMANENT
INJUNCTION, MONETARY
RELIEF, AND CIVIL MONEY
PENALTIES AGAINST
DEFENDANTS GST FACTORING,
INC. AND RICK GRAFF [42]**

Plaintiff, The Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection (Bureau), filed its Complaint for Injunctive Relief, Restitution, Civil Money Penalties, and Disgorgement (Complaint), [ECF 1](#), pursuant to the Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act (Telemarketing Act), [15 U.S.C. §§ 6101](#) et seq., and its implementing

1 rule, the Telemarketing Sales Rule (TSR), 16 C.F.R. Part 310. The Bureau alleged that
2 the Defendants engaged in abusive telemarketing practices in violation of the TSR by
3 requesting and receiving payment of unlawful advance fees from consumers seeking
4 debt-relief services for their private student loans.

5 Defendants GST Factoring, Inc. (GST) and Rick Graff signed Waivers of Service
6 of Summons, which the Bureau duly filed, ECF 12-13, but they failed to file an answer or
7 otherwise respond to the Complaint. The clerk entered defaults against GST and Graff
8 (the Defaulting Defendants) on October 1, 2020. ECF 33. The Bureau has filed an
9 Application for Entry of Default Judgment and Order for Permanent Injunction,
10 Monetary Relief, and Civil Money Penalties against the Defaulting Defendants pursuant
11 to Fed. R. Civ. P. 55(b)(2) and Local Rules 55-1 and 55-2. The Court, having considered
12 the Bureau's application, supporting declarations and exhibits and other evidence filed in
13 this matter, finds good cause to grant the relief requested.

14 **THEREFORE, it is HEREBY ORDERED, ADJUDGED, AND DECREED** as
15 follows:

16 **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

17 1. This is an action by the Bureau pursuant to Section 6 of the Telemarketing
18 Act, its implementing rule, the TSR, 16 C.F.R. Part 310, and Sections 1054, 1055, and
19 1061 of the Consumer Financial Protection Act of 2010 (CFPA), 12 U.S.C. §§ 5564,
20 5565, 5581. The Bureau has authority to seek the relief contained herein.

21 2. This Court has jurisdiction over the subject-matter of this action and has
22 jurisdiction over Defaulting Defendants pursuant to 12 U.S.C. § 5565(a)(1), and 28
23 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1345.

24 3. Venue in the Central District of California is proper under 12 U.S.C.
25 § 5564(f).

26 4. Defaulting Defendants received a copy of the Complaint in this matter and
27 waived service of the summons.

28 5. Defaulting Defendants have failed to answer or otherwise defend this action.

1 6. The Clerk of Court properly entered default against Defaulting Defendants.

2 7. Defaulting Defendants are not minors, incompetent persons, or current
3 members of the military service.

4 8. Defaulting Defendants were served with written notice of the Application
5 via U.S. Mail on November 4, 2020, at least seven days before any hearing on the
6 Application. The written notice included the amount of the money judgment requested,
7 comprised of restitution and civil money penalties, in the Bureau's Application.

8 9. The Bureau's Complaint states a claim upon which relief may be granted.

9 10. The allegations in the Complaint, except with respect to damages, are taken
10 as true because of Defaulting Defendants' default.

11 11. Judgment is entered on behalf of the Bureau and against Defaulting
12 Defendants on Counts I and II of the Complaint.

13 12. This Court is empowered to issue injunctive relief, monetary relief, and civil
14 money penalties pursuant to 12 U.S.C. § 5565.

15 13. The Bureau is entitled to an Order imposing a permanent injunction against
16 Defaulting Defendants and requiring Defaulting Defendants to pay restitution in the
17 amount of \$11,618,552, and to each pay civil money penalties in the amount of
18 \$15,000,000.

19 14. This action and the relief awarded in this Order are in addition to, and not in
20 lieu of, other remedies as may be provided by law, including both civil and criminal
21 remedies.

22 15. Entry of this Order is in the public interest.

23 **Defaulting Defendants Violated the TSR By Requesting and Receiving Advance**
24 **Fees For a Telemarketed Debt-Relief Service (Count I)**

25 16. Defaulting Defendants, having used telemarketing to enroll consumers with
26 private student-loan debt into debt-relief services purportedly provided by Defendants
27 Amanda Johanson, David Mize, Jacob Slaughter, or Daniel Ruggiero, which were
28 supposed to reduce or eliminate the consumers' debts primarily through negotiation,

1 charged those consumers fees on a monthly basis starting at or just after enrollment, and
2 before their debts were reduced or eliminated.

3 17. GST, as a seller under the TSR, unlawfully requested and received payment
4 of fees for debt-relief services before the terms of at least one of the consumer's debts
5 had been negotiated, settled, reduced, or otherwise altered pursuant to an agreement
6 executed by the consumer; and the consumer had made at least one payment pursuant to
7 that agreement, in violation of the TSR. 16 C.F.R. § 310.4(a)(5)(i)(A)-(B).

8 18. Graff is liable for GST's violations of the TSR because he participated
9 directly in the violations or had the authority to control them, and he knew of the conduct
10 or was recklessly indifferent to it. *FTC v. Am. Fin. Benefits Ctr.*, 324 F. Supp. 3d 1067,
11 1080-81 (N.D. Cal. 2018) (citing *FTC v. Publ'g Clearing House, Inc.*, 104 F.3d 1168,
12 1170 (9th Cir. 1997)).

13 **Defaulting Defendants Violated the TSR By Providing Substantial Assistance or**
14 **Support to Codefendants Who Unlawfully Requested and Received Advance Fees**

15 19. Defendants Johanson, Mize, and Slaughter, as sellers under the TSR,
16 unlawfully requested and received payment of fees for debt-relief services before the
17 terms of at least one of the consumer's debts had been negotiated, settled, reduced, or
18 otherwise altered pursuant to an agreement executed by the consumer; and the consumer
19 had made at least one payment pursuant to that agreement, in violation of the TSR. 16
20 C.F.R. § 310.4(a)(5)(i)(A)-(B).

21 20. Defaulting Defendants provided substantial assistance or support to
22 Johanson, Mize, and Slaughter by, among other things, developing the debt-relief
23 business as described in the Complaint, facilitating the telemarketing, and facilitating the
24 collection and distribution of advance fees paid by consumers, and Defaulting Defendants
25 knew or consciously avoided knowing about the violations of Johanson, Mize, and
26 Slaughter. Therefore, Defaulting Defendants violated the TSR, 16 C.F.R. § 310.3(b).

Basis for Equitable and Monetary Relief

21. The Bureau is proceeding on behalf of thousands of financially distressed individuals unlawfully charged millions of dollars for debt-relief services. *Consumer Fin. Prot. Bureau v. Siringoringo*, No. SACV1401155JVSAJWX, [2016 WL 102435](#), at *6 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 7, 2016). Considering the balance of hardships and the public interest, the public interest is served by an injunction preventing Defaulting Defendants from engaging in behavior related to their previous illegal conduct. *FTC v. Affordable Media*, [179 F.3d 1228, 1236](#) (9th Cir. 1999). Defaulting Defendants were involved in an elaborate, illegal scheme that lasted more than five years, and therefore broader “fencing-in” relief provisions help to “prevent similar and related violations from occurring in the future.” *World Accounts, Inc. v. FTC*, [594 F.2d 212, 215](#) (9th Cir. 1979). Accordingly, the permanent injunction ordered in Sections I through III below constitutes “appropriate . . . equitable relief.” [12 U.S.C. §§ 5564\(a\), 5565\(a\)](#).

22. Restitution “may be measured by the full amount lost by consumers. . . .” *Consumer Fin. Prot. Bureau v. Gordon*, [819 F.3d 1179, 1195](#) (9th Cir. 2016) (quoting *FTC v. Stefanchik*, [559 F.3d 924, 931](#) (9th Cir. 2009)).

23. The Bureau has established, through competent evidence, that Defaulting Defendants received \$11,618,552, in unlawful advance fees, net of refunds, from 2,816 consumers, providing a basis for the monetary judgment amount ordered in Section IV.

24. A penalty amount of \$15,000,000 against each Defaulting Defendant is appropriate. Defaulting Defendants acted knowingly, or at least reckless, and therefore, they could be subject to much higher penalties, but in light of the applicable mitigating factors, the lower penalty as ordered in Section V is warranted. [12 U.S.C. §§ 5565\(c\)\(2\)\(B\), \(C\), \(c\)\(3\)](#).

DEFINITIONS

25. The following definitions apply to this Order:

A. “**Affected Consumer**” means a consumer who paid fees pursuant to an Engagement Agreement.

1 B. “**Assisting Others**” includes, but is not limited to:

- 2 i. formulating or providing, or arranging for the formulation or
3 provision of, any advertising or marketing material, including, but
4 not limited to, any telephone sales script, direct mail solicitation, or
5 the text of any Internet website, email, or other electronic
6 communication;
- 7 ii. formulating or providing, or arranging for the formulation or
8 provision of, any marketing support material or service, including
9 web or Internet Protocol addresses or domain name registration for
10 any Internet websites, affiliate marketing services, or media
11 placement services;
- 12 iii. consulting in any form whatsoever;
- 13 iv. providing names of, or contributing to the generation of, potential
14 customers;
- 15 v. participating in or providing services related to the offering, sale,
16 or servicing of a product, or the collection of payments for a
17 product;
- 18 vi. acting or serving as an owner, officer, director, manager, principal,
19 partner, or limited partner of any entity; and
- 20 vii. investing or loaning money.

21 C. “**Consumer Financial Product or Service**” is synonymous in meaning
22 and equal in scope to the definition of the term in Section 1002(5) of the
23 CFPA, 12 U.S.C. § 5481(5), and, subject to applicable restrictions
24 contained in the CFPA, includes, but is not limited to:

- 25 i. Extending credit and servicing loans, including acquiring,
26 purchasing, selling, brokering, or other extensions of credit (other
27
28

1 than solely extending commercial credit to a person who originates
2 consumer credit transactions);

3 ii. Providing financial advisory services to consumers on individual
4 financial matters or relating to proprietary financial products or
5 services, including providing credit counseling to any consumer or
6 providing services to assist a consumer with debt management or
7 debt settlement, modifying the terms of any extension of credit, or
8 avoiding foreclosure;

9 iii. Collecting, analyzing, maintaining, or providing consumer report
10 information or other account information, including information
11 relating to the credit history of consumers, used or expected to be
12 used in connection with any decision regarding the offering or
13 provision of a Consumer Financial Product or Service; or

14 iv. Collecting debt related to any Consumer Financial Product or
15 Service.

16 D. **“Corporate Defendant”** means GST Factoring, Inc., and its successors
17 and assigns.

18 E. **“Debt-Relief Service”** means any program or service represented,
19 directly or by implication, to renegotiate, settle, or in any way alter the
20 terms of payment or other terms of the debt or obligation, including, but
21 not limited to a reduction in the balance, interest rate, or fees owed by a
22 consumer to an unsecured creditor or debt collector.

23 F. **“Defaulting Defendants”** means the Corporate Defendant and the
24 Individual Defendant individually, collectively, or in any combination.

25 G. **“Effective Date”** means the date on which this Order is entered by the
26 Court.

27 H. **“Engagement Agreement”** means an agreement to provide a Debt-
28 Relief Service relating to private student-loan debt, the receivables from

1 which were assigned to Corporate Defendant through a factoring
2 agreement.

3 I. **“Individual Defendant”** means Rick Graff and by any other name by
4 which he might be known.

5 J. **“Person”** means an individual, partnership, company, corporation,
6 association (incorporated or unincorporated), trust, estate, cooperative
7 organization, or other entity.

8 K. **“Telemarketing”** means a plan, program, or campaign which is
9 conducted to induce the purchase of goods or services or a charitable
10 contribution, by use of one or more telephones and which involves more
11 than one interstate phone call.

12 **I.**

13 **PERMANENT BAN ON DEBT-RELIEF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**

14 **IT IS ORDERED** that:

15 26. Defaulting Defendants, whether acting directly or indirectly, are
16 permanently restrained and enjoined from:

17 A. Advertising, marketing, promoting, offering for sale, selling, or providing
18 any Debt-Relief Service;

19 B. Assisting Others in advertising, marketing, promoting, offering for sale,
20 selling, or providing any Debt-Relief Service; or

21 C. Receiving any remuneration or other consideration from, holding any
22 ownership interest in, providing services to, or working in any capacity for
23 any Person that is engaged in advertising, marketing, promoting, offering for
24 sale, selling, or providing any Debt-Relief Service.

II.

PERMANENT BAN ON TELEMARKETING CONSUMER FINANCIAL PRODUCTS OR SERVICES

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

27. Defaulting Defendants, whether acting directly or indirectly, are permanently restrained and enjoined from:

- A. Telemarketing any Consumer Financial Product or Service;
- B. Assisting Others in Telemarketing any Consumer Financial Product or Service; or
- C. Receiving any remuneration or other consideration from, holding any ownership interest in, providing services to, or working in any capacity for any Person that is engaged in Telemarketing any Consumer Financial Product or Service.

III.

PROHIBITION ON COLLECTING ACCOUNTS AND USE OF CONSUMER INFORMATION

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

28. As of the Effective Date, Defaulting Defendants, and their officers, agents, servants, employees, and attorneys, and all other persons in active concert or participation with any of them, who receive actual notice of this Order, whether acting directly or indirectly, are permanently restrained and enjoined from charging fees to Affected Consumers or collecting, attempting to collect, or selling, assigning, or otherwise transferring any right to collect payment from any Affected Consumer.

29. Defaulting Defendants, and their officers, agents, servants, employees, and attorneys, who receive actual notice of this Order, whether acting directly or indirectly, may not disclose, use, or benefit from, consumer information, including the name, address, telephone number, email address, social security number, other identifying information, or any data that enables access to a consumer's account (including a credit card, bank account, or other financial account) of any person that Defaulting Defendants

1 obtained prior to the Effective Date in connection with the advertising, marketing,
2 promotion, offering for sale, sale, or providing of any Debt-Relief Service. However,
3 consumer information may be disclosed if requested by a government agency or required
4 by law, regulation, or court order.

5 **IV.**

6 **ORDER TO PAY REDRESS**

7 **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that:

8 30. A judgment for monetary relief is entered in favor of the Bureau and against
9 Defaulting Defendants, jointly and severally, in the amount of \$11,618,552, for the
10 purpose of providing redress to Affected Consumers.

11 31. Any funds received by the Bureau in satisfaction of this judgment will be
12 deposited into a fund or funds administered by the Bureau or to the Bureau's agent
13 according to applicable statutes and regulations to be used for redress for injured
14 consumers, including, but not limited to, refund of moneys, restitution, damages, or other
15 monetary relief, and for any attendant expenses for the administration of any such
16 redress.

17 32. If the Bureau determines, in its sole discretion, that redress to consumers is
18 wholly or partially impracticable or if funds remain after the administration of redress is
19 completed, funds will not revert to Defendants. Defendants will have no right to
20 challenge the Bureau's choice of remedies under this Section, and will have no right to
21 contest any actions that the Bureau or its representatives may take under this paragraph.

22 33. Payment of redress to any Affected Consumer under this Order may not be
23 conditioned on that Affected Consumer waiving any right.

24 **V.**

25 **ORDER TO PAY CIVIL MONEY PENALTIES**

26 **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that:

27 34. Under Section 1055(c) of the CFPA, 12 U.S.C. § 5565(c), by reason of the
28 violations of law alleged in the Complaint and taking into account the factors in 12

1 U.S.C. § 5565(c)(3), a judgment awarding a civil money penalty in the amount of
 2 \$15,000,000 is entered against Corporate Defendant with post-judgment interest at the
 3 legal rate. This monetary judgment is enforceable against any asset owned by, on behalf
 4 of, for the benefit of, or in trust by or for Corporate Defendant.

5 35. Under Section 1055(c) of the CFPA, 12 U.S.C. § 5565(c), by reason of the
 6 violations of law alleged in the Complaint and taking into account the factors in 12
 7 U.S.C. § 5565(c)(3), a judgment awarding a civil money penalty in the amount of
 8 \$15,000,000 is entered against Individual Defendant with post-judgment interest at the
 9 legal rate. This monetary judgment is enforceable against any asset owned by, on behalf
 10 of, for the benefit of, or in trust by or for Individual Defendant.

11 36. The civil money penalties paid under this Order shall be deposited in the
 12 Civil Penalty Fund of the Bureau as required by Section 1017(d) of the CFPA, 12 U.S.C.
 13 § 5497(d).

14 VI.

15 ADDITIONAL MONETARY PROVISIONS

16 **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that:

17 37. Defaulting Defendants must relinquish all dominion, control, and title to any
 18 funds paid pursuant to this Order to the fullest extent permitted by law and no part of the
 19 funds may be returned to Defaulting Defendants.

20 38. Defaulting Defendants shall not seek or accept, directly or indirectly,
 21 reimbursement or indemnification from any source, including any insurance policy, with
 22 regard to any civil money penalty paid pursuant to this Order.

23 39. Defaulting Defendants shall not claim, assert, or apply for a tax deduction or
 24 tax credit with regard to any federal, state, or local tax for any civil money penalty that
 25 Defaulting Defendants pay pursuant to this Order.

VII.

RETENTION OF JURISDICTION

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

40. The Court will retain jurisdiction of this matter for the purposes of construction, modification, and enforcement of this Order.

VIII.

SERVICE

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

41. This Order may be served upon Defendants by electronic mail, certified mail, or United Parcel Service, either by the United States Marshal, the Clerk of the Court, or any representative or agent of the Bureau.

SO ORDERED this 3rd day of Dec, 2020.

David O. Carter

Honorable David O. Carter
United States District Judge