1 GEGEÁÖÒÔÁEFÁEI KGÍ ÁÚT SOÞ ŐÁÔU WÞVŸ 2 ÙWÚÒÜQJÜÁÔUWÜVÁÔŠÒÜS 3 ÒËZ(ŠÒÖ ÔOTÙÒÁNÁGEÏCTEJ GGET ÁÙÒCE 4 5 IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON **COUNTY OF KING** 6 DOUGLAS PROUDLOVE, individually and on 7 behalf of all others similarly situated, NO. 20-2-09220-7 SEA 8 Plaintiff, FIRST AMENDED CLASS ACTION 9 COMPLAINT ٧. 10 SEED CONSULTING, LLC, doing business as, 11 SEED CAPITAL, CORP., ERIK GANTZ, KEVIN 12 TUSSY, and DOES 1-10, 13 Defendants. 14 I. INTRODUCTION 15 1.1 Plaintiff Douglas C. Proudlove is a retired house painter from Mt. Vernon who 16 lives on a fixed income. Unfortunately, Mr. Proudlove was drawn into a fraudulent scheme 17 18 that destroyed his credit and left him with over \$50,000 in debt. After seeing ads on TV, Mr. Proudlove attended a series of classes put on by 19 1.2 20 Response Marketing Group. The classes were supposed to give him training and tools to make money buying and selling real estate. During a 3-day seminar in a Seattle hotel, Response 21 22 Marketing pressured Mr. Proudlove into buying its "Diamond Elite 360" program. When Mr. 23 Proudlove said he could not afford the \$37,997 price tag a Response Marketing agent 24 presented Defendant Seed Capital as the solution. 25 1.3 Seed Capital had a table set up at the Response Marketing seminar and Mr. Proudlove signed a form Agreement with Seed Capital on the spot. Seed Capital was supposed 26 27

to provide "consulting services and assistance related to establishing financial and credit accounts." Exhibit A at 1. What Seed Capital did was open multiple consumer credit cards in Mr. Proudlove's name, and charge one of those cards \$3,495 for its services.

- 1.4 Washington's Credit Services Organization Act ("CSOA") regulates companies that are paid to obtain extensions of credit for others. The statute prohibits certain unfair conduct, requires specific disclosures, and requires that the buyer be given notice of his right to cancel any contract to purchase the services of a credit services organization. Seed Capital operated as credit services organization but failed to comply with the statute's requirements.
- 1.5 Seed Capital failed to comply with the CSOA and used other unfair or deceptive means to collect thousands of dollars in fees from Mr. Proudlove and others for services of little or no value to consumers.

II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 2.1 This Court has jurisdiction over Seed Capital and the claims in this action.
- 2.2 Seed Capital regularly conducts business in the State of Washington.
- 2.3 The events and transactions giving rise to Mr. Proudlove's claims took place in Washington. Seed Capital promoted its services and contracted to provide services to Mr. Proudlove and other proposed class members in the State of Washington.
- 2.4 By engaging in conduct in the State of Washington that violates the Consumer Protection Act (CPA), including without limitation, engaging in unfair or deceptive conduct that caused Mr. Proudlove and other Washington consumers to do business with it, Seed Capital submitted itself to the jurisdiction of this Court. *See* RCW 19.86.160
- 2.5 Venue is proper in King County because Seed Capital does business in King County, promoted its services to Mr. Proudlove in King County, and entered into an agreement to provide services with Mr. Proudlove in King County. RCW 4.12.025(3).

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III. PARTIES

- 3.1 Plaintiff Douglas C. Proudlove lives in Mount Vernon, Washington. He is a "buyer" as defined by the CSOA and a "person" as defined by the CPA. *See* RCW 19.134.010(1); RCW 19.86.010(1).
- 3.2 Defendant Seed Consulting, LLC is a corporation doing business as Seed Capital Corp. and registered under the laws of the State of Nevada.
 - 3.3 Seed Capital is not registered to do business in Washington.
- 3.4 At all times material hereto, Seed Capital held itself out as being in the business of helping consumers improve their credit rating or obtain extensions of credit in the State of Washington. Seed Capital is therefore a "credit services organization" under the CSOA and a "person" engaged in "trade" or "commerce" under the CPA.
- 3.5 Defendant Erik Gantz is a co-founder of Seed Capital and, at all times relevant herein, has been an officer and shareholder of Seed Capital. He has created, implemented, adopted and ratified Seed Capital policies and practices.
- 3.6 Grantz exercises control over Seed Capitals business practices, including but not limited to (1) marketing Seed Capital services at events promoting expensive education and training in buying and selling real estate, and other get-rich-quick schemes; (2) charging consumers several thousand dollars to obtain credit cards which consumers could obtain for themselves for free; and (3) making false statements in credit card applications to facilitate obtaining credit cards used, in part, to pay Seed Capital's fees.
- 3.7 Defendant Kevin Tussy is a co-founder of Seed Capital and, at all times relevant herein, has been an officer and shareholder of Seed Capital. He has created, implemented, adopted and ratified Seed Capital policies and practices.
- 3.8 Tussy exercises control over Seed Capitals business practices, including but not limited to (1) marketing Seed Capital services at events promoting expensive education and training in buying and selling real estate, and other get-rich-quick schemes; (2) charging

consumers several thousand dollars to obtain credit cards which consumers could obtain for themselves for free; and (3) making false statements in credit card applications to facilitate obtaining credit cards used, in part, to pay Seed Capital's fees.

- 3.9 Plaintiff is ignorant of the true names and capacities, whether individual, corporate, or otherwise, of defendants sued herein as Does One through Ten. Plaintiff will seek leave to amend this complaint when the true names and capacities of said defendants are ascertained. Plaintiff alleges on information and belief that each defendant herein is acting in concert with, and as the agent or employee of, each other defendant.
- 3.10 Plaintiff alleges on information and belief that the interests of all Defendants have been so unified that their separate personalities no longer exist and that if the acts of the corporate defendants are treated as those of the corporation alone, an inequitable result will follow. In this complaint, Seed Capital refers to all Defendants, or any of them individually.

IV. FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

- 4.1 Mr. Proudlove is sixty-four years old. He graduated high school but did not attend college. He spent approximately twenty-five years of his work life as a house painter in Skagit County. Mr. Proudlove stopped working for health reasons in late 2017 or early 2018. He currently lives on only the disability benefits he receives.
- 4.2 Mr. Proudlove has never been employed in the real estate industry. The training Response Marketing promised him was not required by his employer and was not going to support or help his work as a house painter.
- 4.3 Mr. Proudlove does not operate and has not operated a real estate business.

 He did not register to operate a real estate business in Washington. He did not buy or sell any real estate after he paid for Response Marketing's Diamond Elite program.
- 4.4 Mr. Proudlove was drawn in by a scam that has ruined the financial lives of countless Americans. His dealings with Response Marketing follow a pattern documented by the Federal Trade Commission's recent complaint against Response Marketing and dozens of

related entities over its real estate seminar scam. Exhibit B (*FTC, et al, v. Nudge, LLC, et al.,* No. 2:19-cv-00867-RJS (D. Utah Nov. 5, 2019).

- 4.5 After seeing a TV infomercial featuring celebrities promoting real estate seminars, Mr. Proudlove attended a free class at a hotel in Lynnwood, Washington on January 17, 2017. The presentation was very high energy and positive. Presenters said the class was too short to teach everything, and that and get access to the company's special system, including secret buyer and investor lists, attendees had to pay for a second three-day class. The free class was designed to lure victims into paying for the three-day class.
- 4.6 Based on Response Marketing's representations at the free class, Mr.

 Proudlove paid \$1,147 to attend the three-day class at the Westin Hotel in Seattle from

 January 27-29, 2017. Response Marketing said attendees would have access to funding and discounted properties through Response Marketing's "strategic partners."
- 4.7 Mr. Proudlove attended the three-day class with his daughter, Sarah Stout. There were about 30 to 40 people in the sessions, mostly senior citizens. The presentations featured HGTV celebrities. It was fast-paced and exciting. Mr. Proudlove felt euphoric, thinking that he had finally found a way to provide for himself and create a nest egg for his family.
- 4.8 Mr. Proudlove was assigned a mentor named Wyatt. Wyatt's real function was to push Mr. Proudlove to purchase Response Marketing's worthless training products. Wyatt pressured Mr. Proudlove to sign up for the "Diamond Elite 360" program.
- 4.9 When Wyatt told Mr. Proudlove that the Diamond Elite 360 program would cost \$37,997, Mr. Proudlove explained that he could not afford that amount. Wyatt said he had a solution, then walked Mr. Proudlove to a table in the Westin lobby, where Mr. Proudlove was handed off to Seed Capital representatives who pressured him to sign up with their company.

- 4.10 Mr. Proudlove understood Seed Capital to be one of the "strategic partners" promoted by Response Marketing to fund real estate transactions.
- 4.11 At the Seed Capital table Mr. Proudlove met with an individual whom he believes was Rob Oburn. Mr. Oburn presented Mr. Proudlove with Seed Capital's form Services Agreement.
- 4.12 The Agreement does not list Seed Capital's address, the name or address of its agent in Washington authorized to receive service of process, or any information about a bond or trust account.
- 4.13 The Agreement defines Seed Capital's services as "consulting services and assistance related to establishing financial and credit accounts on behalf of Client and Client's business (the "Services"), including credit cards, lines-of-credit, bank loans or other similar financial accounts." Exhibit A ¶ 1.
- 4.14 The Agreement required Mr. Proudlove to pay \$3,495 in "Service Fees." *Id.* ¶ 3.1.
- 4.15 In a section headed "Certain Fees Non-Refundable," the Agreement states: "The fees are not contingent on Client's need or lack thereof for any new Accounts and, as such, Client may not cancel, withdraw, intentionally cause to be denied, or fail to follow through on a credit application in a timely matter [sic], unless Consultant authorizes such action in writing to do so [sic]." *Id.* ¶ 3.4. It further provides that Service Fees are "non-refundable to Client." *Id.* ¶ 4.
- 4.16 The Agreement sets out conditions under which the Consultant may terminate the Agreement but does not authorize termination by the Client. See id. \P 5.
- 4.17 Seed Capital had Mr. Proudlove complete a broad certification and release purporting to authorize Seed Capital to apply for credit accounts in his name, process and endorse documents regarding those accounts and "open an email account for application correspondence to Seed Capital."

- On or about February 2, 2017, "Sarah" from Seed Capital called Mr. Proudlove at home with some questions. Sarah asked Mr. Proudlove his annual income. He told her he made about \$30,000 a year. She then asked him if he owned his own home, free and clear. He told her that he did and that it was worth about \$200,000. Sarah told him that considering his home equity, his annual income was the equivalent of \$130,000 a year. Sarah told him that she would be getting him 4 to 6 credit cards. Mr. Proudlove did not complete any credit card applications, and he does not believe he has ever seen any of the credit card applications Seed Capital submitted in his name.
- 4.19 On or about February 15, 2017, Mr. Proudlove began receiving credit cards in the mail. One of the credit cards was an American Express card. Without express consent from Mr. Proudlove to use that card, Seed Capital charged its \$3,495 fee to that card.
- At about the same time, Mr. Proudlove received credit cards issued by Bank of America, Barclays Bank, Capital One, Chase, Discover and Citibank. These cards were charged thousands of dollars in fees to a Response Marketing entity called "Renovate to Rent" on February 15, 2017.
- 4.21 All the credit cards were personal, not business, credit cards, issued to Mr. Proudlove for personal, family and household use.
- 4.22 Mr. Proudlove received nothing of value in exchange for the money he paid to Response Marketing. He has not entered into a real estate transaction in connection with the Response Marketing education. He has not opened a real estate business in Washington.
- Seed Capital was Response Marketing's "strategic partner" in the real estate course scheme. Seed Capital was at the Response Marketing program to facilitate Response Marketing's unfair or deceptive practices by obtaining credit cards used to pay Seed Capital's and Response Marketing's exorbitant fees. Were it not for Seed Capital's calculated presence at the real estate classes, Mr. Proudlove would not have paid tens of thousands of dollars for Response Marketing's programs and would not have paid Seed Capital \$3,495.

- 4.24 Instead of providing Mr. Proudlove with seed money to start a business, Seed Capital buried him in consumer credit card debt.
- 4.25 As a result, Mr. Proudlove has been sued by a credit card company and a debt buyer, has received collection letters from multiple collection agencies, and has tens of thousands of dollars in debts that he cannot afford to pay.

V. CLASS ACTION ALLEGATIONS

5.1 Mr. Proudlove brings this action on behalf of himself and the following proposed Class:

Umbrella Class: All Washington residents who signed an agreement with Seed Capital in substantially the form of Exhibit A, paid any money to Seed Capital, and received only consumer credit cards or lines of credit as a result of Seed Capital's services, at any time starting four years preceding the filing of this action.

Response Marketing Sub-class: All persons in the Umbrella Class who purchased Seed Capital's services in connection with a program operated by Response Marketing Group or any related entity.

- The proposed Class and Sub-Class are so numerous that joinder is impracticable under Civil Rule 23(a)(1). On information and belief, there are more than 100 people in the Class. According to the Federal Trade Commission, more than 750,000 consumers have attended Response Marketing's sessions in the last five years; since 2012, Response Marketing and its related entities have collected over \$400,000,000 from consumers through their deceptive scheme. On information and belief, Plaintiff alleges that Seed Capital has acted as a credit services organization for at least 40 Response Marketing students who reside in the state of Washington.
- 5.3 Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the proposed Class under Civil Rule 23(a)(2). These common questions include:

5.3.12 Whether Tussy is individually liable for violating the Consumer Protection Act?

- 5.3.13 Whether Gantz and Tussy engaged in a civil conspiracy resulting in damage to Mr. Proudlove and the proposed Class?
- 5.4 Mr. Proudlove's claims are typical of those of the proposed Class as required by Civil Rule 23(a)(3). Like other members of the proposed Class, Mr. Proudlove paid money to Seed Capital to advise and assist him in obtaining an extension of credit, signing an agreement that is materially the same as the agreement signed by absent class members.
- Mr. Proudlove is an adequate representative of the proposed Class under Civil Rule 23(a)(4). He will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Class. Mr. Proudlove has retained competent and capable attorneys who are experienced trial lawyers with significant experience in complex and class action litigation. Mr. Proudlove and his counsel are committed to prosecuting this action vigorously on behalf of the Class and have the financial resources to do so. Neither Mr. Proudlove, nor her counsel, have interests that are contrary to or that conflict with those of the Class.
- 5.6 <u>Declaratory and injunctive relief are appropriate as to the Class under Civil Rule</u>

 23(b)(2). Defendants have acted on grounds generally applicable to the Class, making declaratory and final injunctive relief appropriate with respect to the Class as a whole.
- 5.7 <u>Common issues predominate over any individualized issues and a class action is superior to individual litigation under Civil Rule 23(b)(3).</u> The common and overriding questions are whether Defendants have engaged in common courses of conduct that are unfair or deceptive or that violated the Washington Credit Services Organization Act.

 Defendants' conduct is uniform to all members of the Class. Mr. Proudlove and members of the Class have suffered harm and damages as a result of Defendants' unlawful and wrongful conduct. Absent a class action, however, most Class members likely would find the cost of litigating their claims prohibitive.

Per Se violation of the Washington Consumer Protection Act RCW 19.86 et seq.

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forth in the preceding paragraphs.

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the meaning of the Washington Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86.010(2).

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Defendant Seed Capital is a "person" within the meaning of the Washington 6.2 Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86.010(1), and conducts "trade" and "commerce" within

Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference each and every allegation set

VI. FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

- 6.3 Seed Capital is a "credit services organization" within the meaning of RCW 19.134.010(2)(a), because with respect to the extension of credit by others, in return for the payment of money, it sells, provides, performs, or represents that it can or will sell, provide or perform the following services: (i), improving, saving or preserving a buyer's credit record, history or rating; and, (ii) obtaining an extension of credit for a buyer.
- 6.4 The extensions of credit Seed Capital procured for Mr. Proudlove were consumer credit cards issued for personal, family, or household use.
- 6.5 Plaintiff and class members are "persons" within the meaning of the Washington Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86.010(1).
- 6.6 A violation of the CSOA by a credit services organization is an unfair or deceptive business practice, prohibited by the CPA. RCW 19.134.070(5).
- 6.7 Seed Capital engages in conduct prohibited by the CSOA. See RCW 19.134.020. Seed Capital's violations include but are not limited to the following:
- 6.7.1 The CSOA prohibits a credit services organization from making or counseling or advising a buyer to make any statement that is untrue or misleading about the consumer's creditworthiness in connection with an application for credit. RCW 19.134.020(3). On information and belief, Seed Capital overstated Mr. Proudlove's income on credit card applications that Seed Capital prepared and submitted on his behalf.

- 6.7.2 The CSOA prohibits a credit services organization from charging money solely for referring buyers to companies that will extend credit to the general public on substantially the same terms as those offered to the general public. RCW 19.134.020(2). Seed Capital charged Mr. Proudlove \$3,495 to complete consumer credit card applications that he could have completed himself. The credit cards Mr. Proudlove received were available to the general public on substantially the same terms.
- 6.8 Seed Capital violates the CSOA by failing to provide a copy of its written agreement to buyers. RCW 19.134.040. Mr. Proudlove only received the Agreement from Seed Capital in response to a demand from his counsel.
- 6.9 Seed Capital also violates the CSOA having buyers sign a form agreement that utterly fails to comply with the statute's requirements. These failures include but are not limited to the following:
- 6.9.1 The CSOA requires that an agreement between a buyer and a credit service organization include the organization's address, and the address of its agent in this state authorized to receive service of process. RCW 19.134.060(1)(d). Seed Capital's form Agreement contains no address information.
- The CSOA requires that an agreement between a buyer and a credit service organization contain specific disclosures regarding credit reporting. RCW 19.134.050(1)-(2). Seed Capital's form Agreement contains none of the required disclosures.
- 6.9.3 The CSOA requires that an agreement contain a "complete and detailed description of the services to be performed by the credit services organization." RCW 19.134.050(3). Seed Capital's Agreement omits the fact that the only service it would provide for Mr. Proudlove and Class members was filling out consumer credit card applications.

6.9.4 The CSOA requires disclosure of the buyer's right to proceed against a bond or trust account held by the credit services organization and information about the bond issuer or trustee of the trust account. RCW 19.134.050(4). Seed Capital's Agreement discloses nothing about any bond or trust account. On information and belief, Seed Capital failed to maintain a bond or trust account as required by the CSOA.

- 6.9.5 The CSOA requires that a credit services organization's agreement include a conspicuous statement that the buyer has the right to cancel the contract within five days, RCW 19.134.060(1)(a), and include a detachable notice of cancellation that the buyer can send back to obtain a full refund, RCW 19.134.060(2). Seed Capital's form Agreement gives the buyer no right to cancel and states that all fees are non-refundable. It includes no detachable Notice of Cancellation.
- 6.10 Seed Capital's unfair acts or practices occurred in trade or commerce and injured or had the capacity to injure others.
- 6.11 Seed Capital's general course of conduct as alleged herein impact the public interest.
- 6.12 Grantz and Tussy directed or participated in all of Seed Capital's unfair or deceptive conduct.
- 6.13 The acts complained of herein are ongoing or have a substantial likelihood of being repeated.
- 6.14 As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' unfair acts or practices, Mr. Proudlove and Class members suffered injury to their business or property and lost money.
- 6.15 Mr. Proudlove and the Class are therefore entitled to an order enjoining the conduct complained of herein; actual damages; treble damages pursuant to RCW 19.86.090; costs of suit, including reasonable attorneys' fees; and such further relief as the Court may deem proper.

VII. SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of the Washington Consumer Protection Act—Unfair or Deceptive Acts or Practices)

- 7.1 Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference each and every allegation set forth in the preceding paragraphs.
- 7.2 Washington's legislature has declared that the CPA should be liberally construed so that its beneficial purpose of protecting consumers from unfair, deceptive and fraudulent acts or practices be served. RCW 19.86.920.
- 7.3 Entities like Response Marketing illicitly profit by promoting educational classes that supposedly will allow students to achieve "personal freedom" through "non-traditional" education. Instead, they follow a common scheme in which a free "preview" event, leads to a paid multi-day seminar, the focus of which is to manipulate students to pay tens of thousands of dollars for worthless "elite" or "VIP" education. According to the Federal Trade Commission, Response Marketing and related entities took in more than \$400,000,000 through these consumer scams, with 95% of their students never making more than they paid for classes.
- 7.4 The entire process by which Seed Capital obtains contracts with consumers, obtains credit cards in consumers' names, receives payment, and facilitates payment to itself and Response Marketing is unfair or deceptive. Its unfair or deceptive acts or practices include but are not limited to the following:
- 7.4.1 Seed Capital attends events as a strategic partner that Response Marketing promotes as a funder for real estate transactions. In reality, however, Seed Capital collects thousands of dollars in fees simply to fill out consumer credit card applications in a buyer's name. Seed Capital and the event sponsor have a symbiotic relationship. Seed Capital uses deceptive marketing to convince consumers to sign up for Seed Capital to get the student credit cards that are used to pay itself and Response Marketing. The contracts make contradictory and false promises that Seed will obtain low interest lines of credit that will

VIII. PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for relief as follows:

A. For certification of the proposed Class as defined above;

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1	RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED AND DATED this 1st day of December, 2020.
2	TERRELL MARSHALL LAW GROUP PLLC
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4	By: <u>/s/ Beth E. Terrell, WSBA #26759</u> Beth E. Terrell, WSBA #26759
5	Email: bterrell@terrellmarshall.com
٦	Blythe H. Chandler, WSBA #43387
6	Email: bchandler@terrellmarshall.com
7	936 North 34th Street, Suite 300
,	Seattle, Washington 98103-8869
8	Telephone: (206) 816-6603 Facsimile: (206) 319-5450
9	1 acsimile. (200) 319-3430
	Sam Leonard, WSBA #46498
10	Email: sam@seattledebtdefense.com
11	LEONARD LAW
	1001 4th Avenue, Suite 3200
12	Seattle, Washington 98154
13	Telephone: 206-486-1176
	Facsimile: 206-458-6028
14	Paul Arons, WSBA #47599
15	Email: lopa@rockisland.com
4.0	LAW OFFICE OF PAUL ARONS
16	685 Spring Street, #104
17	Friday Harbor, Washington 98250
10	Telephone: (360) 378-6496
18	Facsimile: (360) 378-6498
19	Attornaus for Digintiff
20	Attorneys for Plaintiff
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
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