

Trujillo Rodriguez & Richards, llc

A PENNSYLVANIA LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY ATTORNEYS AT LAW

8 Kings Highway West Haddonfield, NJ 08033 856-795-9002 856-795-9887 Fax Lisa J. Rodriguez New Jersey Responsible Attorney

1717 Arch Street Suite 3838 Philadelphia, PA 19103 215-731-9004 215-731-9044 Fax

May 21, 2007

# BY ELECTRONIC FILING AND HAND DELIVERY

The Honorable Noel L. Hillman United States District Court District of New Jersey Mitchell H. Cohen U.S. Courthouse 1 John F. Gerry Plaza, Room 6020 Camden, NJ 08101

Re:

Workman, et al. v. Menu Foods, et al.

Civil Action No. 07-cv-1338

## Dear Judge Hillman:

In furtherance of Your Honor's request at the May 18,2007 hearing on Plaintiffs' Emergency Motion for an Order to Show Cause Why Defendants' Communications Should Not Be Limited or Supervised ("Motion"), we have attached hereto as Exhibit A a proposed letter to be sent by Defendants on behalf of Plaintiffs to pet owners with whom Menu Foods has previously communicated.

Before addressing the substance of Plaintiffs' proposed curative letter, however, we would like to further explain our request that Defendants provide us with all information they have thus far received from potential class members who responded to Defendants' initial Claim Form that prompted Plaintiffs' Motion in the first instance. During argument, Defendants' counsel was unable to confirm that this information will in no way be used for litigation purposes (including the May 31, 2007 MDL hearing), and instead assured the Court only that it is information they would likely have to produce in the regular course of discovery. This assurance, however, only illustrates the problem. Defendants can benefit from the information they received as a result of the improper

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communication to putative class members immediately, while Plaintiffs cannot. At a minimum, Plaintiffs should be made aware of exactly what information Defendants have actually received in response to the original Claim Form.

With regard to the curative letter, we set forth below an explanation as to why each statement in Plaintiffs' proposed letter is necessary to correct misleading omissions or statements in Defendants' communication. We believe this letter should be sent as soon as possible to the approximately 19,000 pet owners to whom Defendants sent a letter with revised Claim Form attached last week. We believe it should also be posted on Defendants' two websites where their communication is currently posted:

http://www.menufoods.com/recall/United%20States%20Residents.pdf and http://www.claimsalert.ca/menufoods/.

After three introductory paragraphs, Plaintiffs state the following in their letter to pet owners:

1. "The numerous class action lawsuits that have been filed throughout the United States by pet owners against Menu Foods and other potentially responsible parties are likely to be coordinated or consolidated into a single action before a single judge within the next two months by the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation. All these cases that will likely be coordinated or consolidated are part of what is referred to as *In re Pet Food Products Liability Litigation*, MDL No. 1850. A list of attorneys representing pet owners in MDL No. 1850, including their contact information, is attached to this letter."

This paragraph corrects a material omission in Defendants' communication. It informs pet owners of the MDL process – to which Menu Foods consented - and that, as a result, there will likely be one class action remaining after consolidation. This information is critical to pet owners' decision of whether or not to forego settling directly with Defendants and continue as part of the class. Being a member of the class in a single consolidated class action is easier to understand, is less confusing and is far less intimidating to pet owners than being a member of a class where there are over 80 class actions now pending. Providing this information eliminates questions such as: "With so many class actions pending, which class will I be a member of?," or "If I do nothing, will I be assigned to one of the many class actions currently pending and how is such an assignment made?"

2. "As a pet owner whose pet may have been harmed by a recalled Menu Foods product, you are automatically a member of the class of plaintiffs who have brought actions against Menu Foods, and you do not need to do anything else to pursue your rights as a class member at this time. If you do not choose to settle directly with Menu Foods, you are automatically eligible to receive a portion of any recoveries received by the class if a class is certified."

While the Defendants' communication certainly advises recipients to contact an attorney if they have questions and supplies a partial list of class counsel to contact, it leaves the impression

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that recipients only have two options – to settle directly with Menu Foods or affirmatively contact an attorney. This is misleading. There exists a third option that Defendants have omitted – that recipients need not do anything because they are automatically members of the class if their pets were harmed by Menu Foods products and will be automatically eligible for any recoveries awarded to the class, which may, in fact, be greater than any recoveries potentially offered directly by Menu Foods. See In re General Motors Corp. Engine Interchange Litig., 594 F.2d 1106, 1139 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1979) ("The danger that the offer to settle individual claims would create is the possible misleading of class members about the strength and extent of their claims and the alternatives for obtaining satisfaction of those claims. Thus, an offer to settle should contain sufficient information to enable a class member to determine (1) whether to accept the offer to settle, (2) the effects of settling, and (3) the available avenues for pursuing his claim if he does not settle)" (emphasis added).

3. "If you choose to pursue a settlement directly with Menu Foods by filling out and submitting the Claim Form sent to you separately by Menu Foods, please know that returning the Claim Form to Menu Foods will not preclude you from pursuing other available avenues for recovery at a later date, including being a part of the class action, in the event that you are not satisfied with Menu Foods' settlement offer. In addition, once you receive a settlement offer from Menu Foods, you are not bound to accept it and are free to contact an attorney for advice at that time. However, please note that if you do accept a settlement offer from Menu Foods you will not be able to participate in the class action."

Defendants' communication is also misleading by implying that once the Claim Form is filled out and returned, pet owners are locked in to settling directly with Defendants, no matter what the settlement offer is. To correct this, Plaintiffs propose the first sentence in the paragraph above. In addition, the second sentence in the paragraph above makes it clear that after receiving a settlement offer, pet owners are free to reject it and are free to consult with an attorney about the settlement offer or any other matter related to their claims. This language comports with the requirements of the Keystone decision with which defense counsel stated at the hearing Defendants attempted to comply. See Keystone Tobacco Co., Inc. v. U.S. Tobacco Co., 238 F. Supp. 2d 151, 157 (D. D.C. 2002) (where defendant made a settlement offer to putative class members, the court held defendant "took steps to avoid providing inaccurate or misleading information" where defendant, inter alia, "advised customers to consult with their own lawyers before deciding to settle the case or sign the releases.")

"If you are at all unclear of any of your legal rights or options at this time, please do 4. not hesitate to contact any of the attorneys on the attached list, or another attorney of your choice."

This language further reinforces the ability of recipients to consult with counsel and refers them to a complete list of counsel, adding the names of counsel that were omitted from the list included in Defendants' communications.

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5. "If you are currently represented by counsel in this matter and have received a communication directly from Menu Foods, please disregard that communication completely and inform your attorney immediately."

This language seeks to protect putative class members currently represented by counsel from future inadvertent communications from Defendants that violate the prohibition against communicating with represented parties and to allow Plaintiffs' counsel to keep the Court informed of such matters. We can represent to Your Honor that this has, in fact, occurred on several occasions. Filed herewith is the Declaration of Mark J. Tamblyn, an attorney whose firm represents numerous plaintiffs in this litigation. In his Declaration, Mr. Tamblyn confirms that one of his clients, Ms. Shirley Sexton, named representative in *Sexton v. Menu Foods, et al.*, No. 07-CV-01958 GHK (C.D.Cal.) (Hon. George King), received a Claim Form *on the day of argument* of Plaintiffs' Motion. To assist Defendants in their effort to extract represented parties from their pet owner contact list, attached hereto as Exhibit B is a list of all named representative plaintiffs in the class actions filed around the country naming Menu Foods as a defendant.

Finally, with Your Honor's permission, we would also like to present to Defendants a list of all affected pet owners who are currently represented by counsel and, while not acting as representative plaintiffs, should also be removed from Defendants' contact database. These pet owners have either signed attorney retainer agreements or have contacted counsel and have been sent retainer agreements to sign. These pet owners are among the 19,000 with whom Defendants improperly communicated last week. This list, however, will take more time to compile.

Respectfully yours,

/s Lisa J. Rodriguez

Lisa J. Rodriguez

Sherrie R. Savett Russell D. Paul **Berger & Montague, P.C.** 1622 Locust Street Philadelphia, PA 19103

# EXHIBIT A

May , 2007

Dear Concerned Pet Owner:

By this time you may have received communications from Menu Foods regarding settling any claims you may have against it as a result of injury to, or death of, your pet, along with expenses that you might have incurred due to the Menu Foods recall.

Along with other attorneys, we represent pet owners throughout the country who have purchased a Menu Foods product that is subject of the recall. We have been authorized by Judge Noel L. Hillman of the United State District Court for the District of New Jersey to send you this letter.

The purpose of this letter is to add some additional information to the prior communications you have received directly from Menu Foods to ensure that you are fully informed of all of your legal rights.

The class action lawsuits that have been filed throughout the United States by pet owners against Menu Foods and other potentially responsible parties are likely to be coordinated or consolidated into a single action before a single judge within the next two months by the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation. All these cases that will likely be coordinated or consolidated are part of what is referred to as *In re Pet Food Products Liability Litigation*, MDL No. 1850. A list of attorneys representing pet owners in MDL No. 1850, including their contact information, is attached to this letter.

As a pet owner whose pet may have been harmed by a recalled Menu Foods product, you are automatically a member of the class of plaintiffs who have brought actions against Menu Foods, and you do not need to do anything else to pursue your rights as a class member at this time. If you do not choose to settle directly with Menu Foods, you are automatically eligible to receive a portion of any recoveries received by the class if a class is certified.

If you choose to pursue a settlement directly with Menu Foods by filling out and submitting the Claim Form sent to you separately by Menu Foods, please know that returning the Claim Form to Menu Foods will not preclude you from pursuing other available avenues for recovery at a later date, including being a part of the class action, in the event that you are not satisfied with Menu Foods' settlement offer. In addition, once you receive a settlement offer from Menu Foods, you are not bound to accept it and are free to contact an attorney for advice at that time. However, please note that if you do accept a settlement offer from Menu Foods you will not be able to participate in the class action.

If you are at all unclear of any of your legal rights or options at this time, please do not hesitate to contact any of the attorneys on the attached list, or another attorney of your choice.

If you are currently represented by counsel in this matter and have received a communication directly from Menu Foods, please disregard that communication completely and inform your attorney immediately.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Wexler Mark J. Tamblyn WEXLER TORISEVA WALLACE LLP 1610 Arden Way, Suite 290 Sacramento, California 95815

Sherrie R. Savett Russell D. Paul BERGER & MONTAGUE, P.C. 1622 Locust Street Philadelphia, PA 19103

Stuart A. Davidson LERACH COUGHLIN STOIA GELLER RUDMAN & ROBBINS LLP 120 East Palmetto Park Road, Suite 500 Boca Raton, Florida 33432

Steve W. Berman Jeniphr Breckenridge HAGENS BERMAN SOBOL SHAPIRO LLP 1301 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2900 Seattle, WA 98101

# EXHIBIT B

# LIST OF ATTORNEYS REPRESENTING PLAINTIFFS IN CASES AGAINST MENU FOODS (BY STATE)

## <u>ALABAMA</u>

Attorney for McCullough

Charles A. McCallum

R. Brent Irby

McCallum Hoaglund Cook & Irby, LLP

2062 Columbiana Road

Vestavia Hills, AL 35216

Telephone: (205) 824-7767

Facsimile: (205) 824-7768

## **ARIZONA**

Attorney for Richard

Wendy J. Harrison

Guy A. Hanson

Dana L. Hooper

BONNETT FAIRBOURN FRIEDMAN

& BALINT PC

2901 North Central Ave., Ste 1000

Phoenix, AZ 85012-3311

Telephone: (602) 274-1100

Facsimile: (602) 274-1199

#### **ARKANSAS**

## Attorney Cooper and Sims

Jason M. Hatfield

LUNDY & DAVIS LLP

300 N. College Avenue, Suite 309

Fayetteville, AR 72701

Telephone: (479) 527-3921

Facsimile: (479) 587-9196

## Attorney for Gray

Bill G. Horton

**NOLAN CADDELL & REYNOLDS** 

P.O. Box 184

Fort Smith, AR 72902

Telephone: (479) 782-5294

Facsimile: (479) 7823-5184

Jeremy Y. Hutchinson

Jack Thomas Patterson III

PATTON ROBERTS MCWILLIAMS

& CAPSHAW LLP

Stephens Building

111 Center Street, Suite 1315

Little Rock, AR 72201

Telephone: (501) 372-3480

Facsimile: (501) 372-3488

## Attorneys for Stacy

Scott E. Poynter

Christopher D. Jennings

**EMERSON POYNTER LLP** 

The Museum Center

500 President Clinton Avenue, Suite 305

Little Rock, AR 72201 Telephone: 501-907-2555

Facsimile: 501-907-2556

# **CALIFORNIA**

## Attorney for Sexton

Stuart C. Talley

KERSHAW, CUTTER & RATINOFF LLP

980 9th Street, 19th Floor

Sacramento, CA 95814

Telephone: (916) 448-9800

Facsimile: (916) 669-4499

## Attorney for Sexton

Mark J. Tamblyn

## WEXLER TORISEVA WALLACE LLP

1610 Arden Way, Suite 290

Sacramento, CA 95815

Telephone: (916) 568-1100

Facsimile: (916) 568-7890

## Attorney for Berndl, Bonier

William M. Audet

Michael McShane

## AUDET & PARTNERS LLP

221 Main Street, Suite 1460

San Francisco, CA 34105

Telephone: (415) 568-2555

Facsimile: (415) 568-2556

## Attorney for Payne

Eric Benink

# KRAUSE KALFAYAN BENINK AND SLAVENS

625 Broadway, Suite 635 San Diego, CA 92101

Telephone: (619) 232-0331

Facsimile: (619) 232-4019

## Attorney for Byers

Elizabeth J. Cabraser

Heather A. Foster

#### LIEFF CABRASER HEIMANN & BERNSTEIN LLP

Embarcadero Center West

275 Battery Street, Suite 3000

San Francisco, CA 94111

Telephone: (415) 956-1000

Facsimile: (415) 956-1008

# Attorney for Swarberg

Jeffrey B. Cereghino

## BERDING AND WEIL

3240 Stone Valley Road West

Alamo, CA 94507

Telephone: (925) 838-2090

Facsimile: (925) 820-5592

## Attorney for Finestone

Thomas M. Ferlauto

William T. King

## KING & FERLAUTO

1880 Century Park East, Suite 820

Los Angeles, CA 90067-1627

Telephone: (310) 552-3366

## **Attorney for Grady**

Gregory D. Helmer

Andrew H. Friedman

#### HELMER FRIEDMAN

723 Ocean Front Walk

Venice, CA 90291

Telephone: (310) 369-7714

Facsimile: (310) 399-7040

## Attorney for Grady

Paul L. Hoffman

Michael D. Seplow

# SCHONBRUN DESIMONE SEPLOW HARRIS & HOFFMAN

723 Ocean Front Walk

Venice, CA 90291

Telephone: (310) 396-0731 Facsimile: (310) 399-7040

## Attorney for Paul Randolph Johnson

Michael L. Kelly

Robert M. Churella

#### KIRTLAND & PACKARD LLP

2361 Rosecrans Avenue, 4th Floor

El Segundo, CA 90245

Telephone: (310) 536-1000

Facsimile: (310) 536-1001

# Attorney for Bullock, Carter, Pittsonberger

Laurence D. King

## KAPLAN FOX & KILSHEIMER LLP

555 Montgomery Street, Suite 1501

San Francisco, CA 94111

Telephone: (415) 772-4700

Facsimile: (415) 772-4707

## Attorney for Ford, Wahl

Katherine J. Odenbreit

#### **CLASS ACTION LITIGATION GROUP**

11111 Santa Monica Blvd.

**Suite 1000** 

Los Angeles, CA 90025-3344

Telephone: (310) 481-9851

Facsimile: (310) 479-7051

## Attorney for Colquitt

Brian J. Robbins

Steven J. Simerlein

## ROBBINS UMEDA & FINK, LLP

610 West Ash Street, Suite1800

San Diego, CA 92101

Telephone: (619) 525-3990

Facsimile: (619) 525-3991

## Attorney for Bullock, Carter, Pittsonberger

Todd M. Schneider

SCHNEIDER & WALLACE

180 Montgomery Street, Suite 2000

San Francisco, CA 94104

Telephone: (415) 421-7100

Facsimile: (415) 421-7105

## Attorney for Golding, Howe, Nunez, Townsend

Jeff S. Westerman

Sabrina S. Kim

MILBERG WEISS & BERSHAD LLP

One California Plaza

300 South Grand Avenue, Suite 3900

Los Angeles, CA 90071

Telephone: (213) 617-1200

Facsimile: (213) 617-1975

# <u>COLORADO</u>

## Attorney for Colquitt

Kip B. Shuman

Jeffrey A. Berens

SHUMAN & BERENS

801 East 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Denver, CO 80218

Telephone: (303) 861-3003

Facsimile: (303) 830-6920

## Attorney for Tompkins

Jennifer Reba Thomaidis

THOMAIDIS LAW, LLC

1866 Vine Street

Denver, CO 80206

Telephone: (303) 322-4355

Facsimile: (303) 322-4354

# CONNECTICUT

Attorney for Colquitt, Osborne

Bruce E. Newman

Kevin Creed

**NEWMAN CREED & ASSOCIATES** 

99 North Street, Route 6

P. O. Box 575

Bristol, CT 06011-0575

Telephone: (860) 583-5200

Facsimile: (860) 582-0012

# FLORIDA

## Attorney for Birney

Luis Guillermo Figueroa

ATTORNEYS TRIAL GROUP

540 N. Semoran Boulevard

Orlando, FL 32807

Telephone: (407) 737-4123

Facsimile: (407) 737-3366

# Attorney for Troiano

Paul J. Geller

Stuart A. Davidson

## LERACH COUGHLIN STOIA GELLER RUDMAN & ROBBINS LLP

120 E. Palmetto Park Road, Ste. 500

Boca Raton, FL 33432-4809

Telephone: (561) 750-3000

Facsimile: (561) 750-3364

#### Attorney for Troiano

Lawrence Kopelman

## KOPELMAN & BLANKMAN

350 E. Las Olas Blvd., Suite 980

Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301

Telephone: (954) 462-6855

Facsimile: (954) 462-6899

## Attorney for Freeman

Eric Lee

LEE & AMTZIS, P.L.

5550 Glades Road, Suite 401

Boca Raton, FL 33428

Telephone: (561) 981-9988

Facsimile: (561) 981-9980

## Attorney for Blaszkowski

Catherine J. MacIvor

## MALTZMAN FOREMAN P.A.

2 S. Biscayne Boulevard,

**Suite 2300** 

One Biscayne Tower

Miami, FL 33131-1803

Telephone: (305) 358-6555 Facsimile: (305) 374-9077

## Attorney for Donnelly, Johnson

Scott R. Shepherd

## SHEPHERD FINKELMAN MILLER & SHAH, LLC

4400 North Federal Highway

Lighthouse Point, FL 33064

Telephone: (954) 943-9191 Facsimile: (954) 943-9173

## Attorney for Ferrarese

Scott Wm. Weinstein

## MORGAN & MORGAN, PA

12800 University Drive, Suite 600

P.O. Box 9504

Fort Myers, FL 33906

Telephone: (239) 433-6880

Facsimile: (239) 433-6836

## Attorney for Diedrich

Marc A. Wites

## WITES & KAPETAN, P.A.

4400 North Federal Highway

Lighthouse Point, FL 33064

Telephone: (954) 570-8989

Facsimile: (954) 354-0205

#### IDAHO

## Attorney for Suzanne Johnson, Klimes

Phillip H. Gordon

Bruce S. Bistline

## **GORDON LAW OFFICES**

623 West Hays Street

Boise, ID 83702

Telephone: (208) 345-7100

Facsimile: (208) 345-0050

## Attorney for Klimes

Mick Hodges

# HODGES LAW OFFICE

163 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, West

Twin Falls, IDD 83303

Telephone: (208) 734-2011 Facsimile: (208) 734-2511

# **ILLINOIS**

# Attorney for Foxe

John Harry Alexander

#### JOHN H. ALEXANDER & ASSOCIATES

100 West Monroe Street, Suite 2100

Chicago, IL 60603

Telephone: (312) 263-7752

## Attorney for Amro

Kenneth A. Wexler

Andrae P. Reneau

## WEXLER TORISEVA WALLACE LLP

One North LaSalle Street, Suite 200

Chicago, IL 60602

Telephone: (312) 346-2222

Facsimile: (312) 346-0022

## Attorney for Majerczyk

John Blim

Jay Edelson

## **BLIM & EDELSON LLC**

53 West Jackson Blvd., Suite 1642

Chicago, IL 60604

Telephone: (312) 913-9400

Facsimile: (312) 913-9401

# Attorney for Connerton, Johnson, Rozman, and Tompkins

Ilan Chorowsky

# PROGRESSIVE LAW GROUP, LLC

1130 North Dearborn St., Ste 3110

Chicago, IL 60610

Telephone: (312) 643-5893

Facsimile: (312) 643-5894

## Attorney for Johnson

Larry D. Drury

LARRY D. DRURY LTD

205 W. Randolph Street, Suite 1430

Chicago, IL 60602

Telephone: (312) 346-7950 Facsimile: (312) 346-5777

## Attorney for Pittsonberger

Joseph M. Vanek

VANEK VICKERS & MASINI, P.C.

111 S. Wacker Drive, Suite 4050

Chicago, IL 60606

Telephone: (312) 224-1500 Facsimile: (312) 224-1510

## Attorney for Bruski

Peter C. Wachowski

**BELLAS & WACHOWSKI** 

15 North Northwest Highway

Park Ridge, IL 60068

Telephone: (847) 823-9030

# **MAINE**

## Attorney for Brazilian

Daniel J. Mitchell

Leonard M. Gulino

BERNSTEIN SHUR

100 Middle Street

P. O. Box 9729

Portland, ME 04104-5029

Telephone: (207) 774-1200

Facsimile: (207) 774-1127

## **MASSACHUSETTS**

## Attorney for Rodrigues

Brian R. Cunha

**BRIAN CUNHA & ASSOCIATES** 

311 Pine Street

Fall River, MA 02720

Telephone: (508) 675-9500 Facsimile: (508) 679-6560

# Attorney for Connerton

Eugene R. Richard

WAYNE RICHARD & HURWITZ, LLP

One Boston Place, Suite 3620

Boston, MA 02108

Telephone: (617) 720-7870 Facsimile: (617) 720-7877

# **MINNESOTA**

# Attorney for Donnelly, Kroschell

Daniel E. Gustafson

Renae Steiner

## **GUSTAFSON GLUEK**

650 Northstar East

608 Second Avenue South

Minneapolis, MN 55402

Telephone: (612) 333-8844

Facsimile: (6112) 339-6622

#### Attorney for Christina Johnson

Lawrence E. Feldman

#### LAWRENCE E. FELDMAN & ASSOCIATES

432 Tulpechocken Avenue

Elkins Park, PA 19027

Telephone: (215) 885-3302 Facsimile: (215) 885-3303

#### Attorney for Rozman

Mark Reinhardt

Garrett D. Blanchfield, Jr.

#### REINHARDT WENDORF & BLANCHFIELD

332 Minnesota Street, Suite E-1250

St. Paul, MN 55101

Telephone: (651) 287-2100 Facsimile: (651) 287-2103

#### **NEVADA**

#### Attorney for Streczyn

William M. O'Mara

David C. O'Mara

Brian O. O'Mara

## THE O'MARA LAW FIRM P.C.

311 East Liberty Street

Reno, NV 89501

Telephone: (775) 323-1321 Facsimile: (775) 323-4058

#### **NEW JERSEY**

Attorney for Colquitt, deBarathy, Diedrich, Freeman, Hidalgo, Gagliardi, Golding,

McCullough, Nunez, Richard, Solkolwski, Turturro, and Wilson

Joseph J. DePalma Bruce D. Greenberg

LITE DEPALMA GREENBERG & RIVAS LLC

Two Gateway Center, 12th Floor

Newark, NJ 07102-5003 Telephone: (973) 623-3000 Facsimile: (973)623-0858

Attorney for Berndl, Bonier

Michael A. Ferrara, Jr.

THE FERRARA LAW FIRM LLC

601 Longwood Avenue Cherry Hill, NJ 08002

Telephone: (856) 779-9500 Facsimile: (856) 661-0369

Attorney for Pittsonberger

Gary S. Graifman

KANTROWITZ GOLDHAMER & GRAIFMAN

210 Summit Avenue Montvale, NJ 07645

Telephone: (201) 391-7000 Facsimile: (201) 307-1086

Attorney for Byers

Seth R. Lesser

LOCKS LAW FIRM

457 Haddonfield Road, Suite 500

Cherry Hill, NJ 08002

Telephone: (856) 663-8200

Facsimile: (856) 661-8400

-and-

110 East 55<sup>th</sup> Street

New York, NJ 10022

Telephone: (212) 838-3333 Facsimile: (212) 838-3735

Attorney for McGuirman

Alan C. Milstein

SHERMAN SILVERSTEIN KOHL ROSE & PODOLSKY, PC

Fairway Corporate Center

4300 Haddonfield Road, Suite 311

Pennsauken, NJ 08109

Telephone: (856) 662-0700

Attorney for Bullock, Carter, Pirches

William J. Pinilis

KAPLAN FOX & KILSHEIMER LLP

237 South Street

Morristown, NJ 07962

Telephone: (973) 656-0222

Facsimile: (973) 401-1114

Attorney for Conner

Christopher A. Seeger

SEEGER WEISS, LLP

550 Broad Street, Suite 920

Newark, NJ 07102

Telephone: (973) 639-9100

Facsimile: (973) 639-9393

Attorney for Johnson

James C. Shah

Nathan C. Zipperian

SHEPHERD FINKELMAN MILLER & SHAH LLC

475 White Horse Pike

Collingswood, NJ 08107-1909

Telephone: (856) 858-1700

Facsimile: (856) 858-7012

Attorney for Carestio, Conti, Long, Schneider, Workman

Donna Siegel Moffa

Lisa J. Rodriguez

TRUJILLO RODRIGUEZ & RICHARDS LLC

8 Kings Highway West

Haddonfield, NJ 08033

Telephone: (856) 795-9002

Facsimile: (856) 795-9887

Attorney for Guercioni

Keith T. Smith

Ridgewood Plaza

2327 New Road, Suite 202

Northfield, NJ 08234

Telephone: (609) 645-7060

Attorney for Suzannet Thomson, et al.

Gregg D. Trautmann

TRAUTMANN & ASSOCIATES

262 East Main Street

Rockaway, NJ 07866

Telephone: (973) 316-8100 Facsimile: (973) 983-1119

## **NEW MEXICO**

## Attorney for Krosschell

Joseph Goldberg

FREEDMAN BOYD DANIELS HOLLANDER & GOLDBERG, P.A.

20 First Plaza, Suite 700

Alburguerque, NM 87102

Telephone: (505) 842-9960 Facsimile: (505) 842-0761

# **NEW YORK**

#### Attorney for Tinker

Arthur N. Abbey

Stephen T. Rodd

Orin Kurtz

ABBEY SPANIER RODD ABRAMS

& PARADIS LLP

212 East 39th Street

New York, NY 10016

Telephone: (212) 889-0066

Facsimile: (212) 684-5191

# Attorney for Bullock, Carter, Pirches, Pittsonberger

Robert Kaplan

Linda P. Nussbaum

Christine M. Fox

KAPLAN FOX & KILSHEIMER LLP

805 Third Avenue, 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor

New York NY 10022

Telephone: (212) 687-1980

Facsimile: (212) 687-7714

Attorney for Cashman

Gregory Mark Nespole

Martin E. Restituyo

WOLF HALDENSTEIN ADLER FREEMAN & HERZ

270 Madison Avenue

New York, NY 10016

(212)-545-4702

Fax: (212)-686-0114

## Attorney for Tinker

Alan E. Sash

#### McLaughlin & Stern LLP

260 Madison Avenue

New York, NY 10016

Telephone: (212) 448-1100 Facsimile: (212) 448-0066

## **OHIO**

## Attorney for Boehm

Jeremy Gilman

Nicole Dorsky

# BENESCH FRIEDLANDER COPLAN & ARONOFF

2300 BP Tower

200 Public Square

Cleveland, OH 44114

Telephone: (216) 363-4565 Facsimile: (216) 363-4588

# Attorney for Boehm

Dennis E. Murray, Sr.

John T. Murray

Leslie O. Murray

## **MURRAY & MURRAY**

111 East Shoreline Drive

P.O. Box 19

Sandusky, OH 44871-0019

Telephone: (419) 624-3000

Facsimile: (419) 624-0707

## **OREGON**

# Attorney for Brown

Andrew S. Kierstead

LAW OFFICES OF ANDREW S. KIERSTEAD

1001 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 1100

Portland, OR 97204

Telephone: (508) 224-6246 Facsimile: (508) 224-4356

## **PENNSYLVANIA**

## Attorney for Donnelly, Johnson

Natalie Finkelman Bennett

SHEPHERD FINKELMAN MILLER & SHAH, LLC

35 E. State Street

Media, PA 19063

Telephone: (610) 891-9880 Facsimile: (610) 891-9883

## Attorney for Carestio, Conti, Schneider, Workman

Sherrie R. Savett

Michael T. Fantini

Russell D. Paul

## BERGER & MONTAGUE PC

1622 Locust Street

Philadelphia, PA 19103

Telephone: (215) 875-3000 Facsimile: (215) 875-4604

## Attorney for Conti

Michael J. Boni

#### BONI & ZACK, LLC

15 St. Asaphs Road

Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004

Telephone: (610) 822-0201 Facsimile: (610) 822-0206

## Attorney for Pirches

Kimberly M. Donaldson

## CHIMICLES & TIKELLIS, LLP

361 West Lancaster Avenue

Haverford, PA 19041

Telephone: (610) 642-8500

Facsimile: (610) 649-3633

## Attorney for Conti

Michael Donovan

## DONOVAN SEARLES, LLC

1845 Walnut Street, Suite 1100

Philadelphia, PA 19103

Telephone: (215) 732-6067 Facsimile: (215) 732-8060

## Attorney for Donnelly

Lawrence E. Feldman

LAWRENCE E. FELDMAN & ASSOCIATES

432 Tulpechocken Avenue Elkins Park, PA 19027 Telephone: (215) 885-3302

Facsimile: (215) 885-3303

## Attorney for Pirches

Reginald A. Krasney

717 Constitution Drive, Suite 100

Exton, PA 19341

Telephone: (610) 458-3320 Facsimile: (610) 458-3225

## Attorney for Schneider

Roberta D. Liebenberg

FINE KAPLAN & BLACK, R.P.C.

1835 Market Street - 28th Floor

Philadelphia, PA 19103 Telephone: (215) 567-6565

Facsimile: (215) 568-5872

## Attorney for Long

Joseph H. Meltzer

Edward W. Ciolko

## SCHIFFRIN BARROWAY TOPAZ & KESSLER, LLP

280 King of Prussia Road

Radnor, PA 19807

Telephone: (610) 667-7706 Facsimile: (610) 667-7056

## Attorney for Krosschell

Dianne M. Nast

RODANAST, P.C.

801 Estelle Drive

Lancaster, PA 17601

Telephone: (717) 892-3000 Fascimile: (717) 892-1200

## Attorney for Workman

Robert A. Rovner

Jeffrey I. Zimmerman

## ROVNER ALLEN ROVNER ZIMMERMAN

& NASH

175 Bustleton Pike

Feasterville, PA 19053-6456 Telephone: (215) 698-1800

Facsimile: (215) 355-0940

## RHODE ISLAND

Attorney for Brown

Peter N. Wasylyk

LAW OFFICES OF PETER N. WASYLYK

1307 Chalkstone Avenue

Providence, RI 02908

Telephone: (401) 831-7730 Facsimile: (401) 861-6064

#### **TENNESSEE**

## Attorney for Holt and Bowser

A. James Andrews

905 Locust Street

Knoxville, TN 37902

Telephone: (865) 660-3993

Facsimile: (865) 523-4623

## Attorney for Holt and Bowser

Nicole Bass

905 Locust Street

Knoxville, TN 37902

Telephone: (865) 310-6804

## Attorney for Holt and Bowser

Perry A. Craft

# CRAFT & SHEPPARD PLC

The Shiloh Building

214 Centerview Drive, Suite 223

Brentwood, TN 37027

Telephone: (615) 309-1707

Facsimile: (615) 309-1717

## Attorney for Light

Dan C. Stanley

Robert R. Kurtz

## STANLEY & KURTZ, PLLC

422 S. Gay Street, Third Floor

Knoxville, TN 37902

Telephone: 865-522-9942 Facsimile: 865-522-9945

# **TEXAS**

#### Attorney for Scott

Richard Adams

James C. Wyly

Sean F. Rommel

#### PATTON ROBERTS MCWILLIAMS

& CAPSHAW LLP

Century Bank Plaza, Suite 400

P. O. Box 6128

Texarkana, TX 75505-6128

Telephone: (903) 334-7000

Facsimile: (903) 334-7007

## Attorney for Brown

Marc Stanley

## STANLEY MANDEL & IOLA LLP

3100 Monticello Avenue, Suite 750

Dallas, TX 75205

Telephone: (214) 443-4300

Facsimile: (214) 443-0358

#### WASHINGTON

Attorney for Adams, Dineen, Guthrie, Heller, Suzanne Johnson, Klimes, Kornelius, Labbate, Migliore, Moran, Mullen, Palmer, Percy, Puett, Reeves, Robinson, Rusiecki,

Shingle, Thomas, Ullman, Weitz, Whaley, and Whitt

Steve W. Berman

Jeniphr Breckenridge

## HAGENS BERMAN SOBOL SHAPIRO LLP

1301 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2900

Seattle, WA 98101

Telephone: (206) 623-7292

Facsimile: (206) 623-0594

## Attorney for Suggett

Adam P. Karp

## **ANIMAL LAW OFFICES**

114 W. Magnolia Street, Suite 425

Bellingham, WA 98225

Telephone: (888) 430-0001

Facsimile: (866) 652-3832

Attorney for Adams, Dineen, Guthrie, Heller, Kornelius, Labbate, Migliore, Moran, Mullen, Palmer, Percy, Puett, Reeves, Robinson, Rusiecki, Shingle, Thomas, Ullman,

Weitz, Whaley, and Whitt Michael David Myers

**MYERS & COMPANY PLLC** 

1809 Seventh Avenue, Suite 700

Seattle, WA 98101

Telephone: (206) 398-1188 Facsimile: (206) 400-1112

#### WASHINGTON, D.C.

#### Attorney for Bullock, Carter

Gary E. Mason Donna F. Solen

THE MASON LAW FIRM

1225 19th Street, NW, Suite 500

Washington, D.C. 20036

Telephone: (202) 429-2290

Facsimile: (202) 429-2294

## Attorney for deBarathy

Mila F. Bartos

# FINKELSTEIN THOMPSON LLP

1050 30<sup>TH</sup> Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20007

Telephone: (202) 337-8000

Fax: (202) 337-8090

## Attorney for Pittsonberger

Jeffrey A. Wigodsky

## KARP FROSH LAPIDUS WIGODSKY & NORWIND, P.A.

1133 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 250

Washington, D.C. 20036

Telephone: (202) 822-3777

Facsimile: (202) 822-9722

#### **WISCONSIN**

## Attorney for Johnson, Rozman, and Tompkins

Frank Jablonski

Noah Golden-Kramer

PROGRESSIVE LAW GROUP, LLC

354 Main Street

Madison, WI 53703 Telephone: (608) 258-8511 Facsimile: (608) 442-9494