IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND

ROBERT D. V	HITTAKER,	Ш
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7415 Cedar Avenue Sykesville, Maryland 21784

Plaintiff

v.

HOWARD COUNTY, MARYLAND

3430 Court House Drive Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

Serve: Calvin Ball

County Executive

George Howard Building 3430 Court House Drive Ellicott City, MD 21043

and

HOWARD COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

2201 Warwick Way Marriottsville, MD 21104

Serve: Calvin Ball

County Executive

George Howard Building 3430 Court House Drive Ellicott City, MD 21043

Defendants

COMPLAINT AND JURY DEMAND

COMES NOW PLAINTIFF, Robert D. Whittaker, III, by and through undersigned counsel, and sues the Defendants, Howard County, Maryland and Howard County Fire and Rescue Services (hereafter "Defendants" or "HCFRS"), and as cause states:

PARTIES

- Plaintiff Robert D. Whittaker, III resides at 7415 Cedar Avenue, Sykesville,
 Maryland 21784. Mr. Whittaker primarily worked at 2200 Scott Wheeler Drive Marriottsville,
 Maryland 21104 in Howard County, Maryland at all relevant times.
- 2. Defendant Howard County, Maryland is a body corporate and politic with a primary address of 3430 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, Maryland 21043.
- Defendant Howard County Fire and Rescue Services is an agency of Howard County, Maryland with a primary address of 2201 Warwick Way, Marriottsville, Maryland 21104.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 4. Jurisdiction in this case is based upon 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 29 U.S.C. § 621 *et seq.* Venue in this case is based upon 28 U.S.C. § 1391, as the incidents which give rise to this case occurred in Maryland in this District and Division and Defendants maintain sufficient contacts in the State of Maryland.
- 5. Plaintiff has timely complied with any conditions precedent and jurisdictional prerequisites to filing suit.
- 6. Plaintiff exhausted any and all administrative remedies, including filing a charge of discrimination with the EEOC before filing suit. Plaintiff filed a timely Charge of Discrimination on or about September 11, 2018. On May 20, 2021 the EEOC issued its Notice of Suit Rights.

FACTS

7. Plaintiff was among 1,600 applicants for only approximately 20 positions to become a trainee for Howard County Fire and Rescue Services. Plaintiff was required to apply,

meet all testing pre-requisites, and score high enough on exams to obtain one of the few trainee slots.

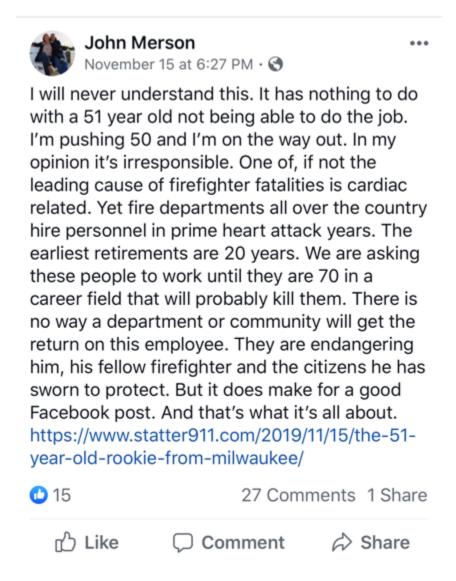
- 8. Plaintiff performed and passed a physical examination and beat the required time by approximately two minutes.
- 9. In fact, Plaintiff was in excellent physical condition and had previously cycled through Spain and France, including eight stages of the Tour De France route, raced in 5ks, and raced in a Tough Mudder (an endurance race of 10 to 12 miles through multiple significant obstacles).
- 10. Following the physical examination process, Plaintiff was advised that he was one of 600-700 individuals who were interviewed for the trainee position. Following the interview process Plaintiff underwent extensive physical examinations, background checks, and psychological evaluations. Plaintiff passed all of these exams.
- 11. Plaintiff was one of just 20 individuals to be accepted as a trainee for Defendants. He began his employment with Defendants on January 22, 2018 as a Firefighter/EMT Trainee in class TC30.
- 12. Plaintiff was 46 at the time he began working for Defendants. At the time of his termination he was easily the oldest in the class and certainly the only trainee over 35 virtually all were in their 20s.
- 13. Early in Plaintiff's employment, one of the trainers, Captain Welsh, stated "you don't do half bad for an old guy." Plaintiff was disappointed that his age became an issue for Defendants so early on but didn't respond at that time.

- 14. Beginning on or about April 20, 2018 and continuing until his discharge, Plaintiff was subjected to unequal terms and conditions in his employment, ultimately leading to his termination.
- 15. At all relevant times, Plaintiff was performing satisfactorily and passing all classroom requirements, physical requirements, and practical exams.
- 16. However, despite performing satisfactorily in all aspects of his training, Plaintiff was singled out for mistreatment.
- 17. In late April 2018 Plaintiff suffered a minor knee injury during one of the practical classes. Plaintiff was then removed from the classroom and was told he could not remain in the classroom. Defendants also informed Plaintiff he had to turn in his books, he could not park in the trainee parking lot, and he had to be segregated in an administrative room away from the class. Thus, Plaintiff was unable to continue learning the classroom components and was unable to engage in self-study during that time.
- 18. Other, younger trainees in Plaintiff's class (all below 35) also suffered injuries during training. However, all of those trainees were permitted to remain in class and none were removed from the classroom, had their parking taken away, had their books taken away, or put on administrative segregation.
- 19. Shortly after Plaintiff's injury and being removed from class without his books, the trainees, including Plaintiff, had a practical drill in late April or early May 2018. Because he missed classroom and training on this drill, Plaintiff did not pass this drill on his first attempt.
- 20. Not passing practical drills on the first attempt happens with some regularity amongst the trainees. In fact, some younger trainees took practicals up to five times without passing with no discipline or adverse actions against them.

- 21. Nevertheless, when it came to Plaintiff, the only over 40 trainee, the Assistant Chief Jose Sanchez required him to perform a ladder practical in front of him. This was a highly unusual and irregular request. He did not observe the other Trainees perform the practical, including others who did not pass them.
- 22. When he performed the practical before Assistant Chief Sanchez, Plaintiff performed the practical satisfactorily and passed the exam. This was despite Defendants denying him access to the classroom or even his books.
- 23. It was clear that Plaintiff was being set up for termination by Defendants although Plaintiff disrupted that transparent plan by passing the exam.
- 24. Assistant Chief Sanchez's actions were so unusual, and Plaintiff's performance so excellent, that one of the instructors called Plaintiff that evening and stated: "I know I shouldn't have been watching; I know why he was there, he was there to get rid of you; and that was [f-ing] awesome!; for you to do it in front of him was priceless."
- 25. Shortly after this, in mid-May 2018, Plaintiff was counseled by one of the trainers for allegedly failing an exercise. However, this was clearly incorrect and pretextual because Captain Welsh informed the class this particular day was a free day.
- 26. Moreover, Plaintiff was in excellent shape and had the ability to, and actually did, satisfactorily perform all fitness-related requirements.
- 27. On the other hand, there were multiple younger trainees, again, all under 35, who had significant fitness issues. For example, two trainees had heart issues. One trainee by the time of graduation could still not run three miles, which was an obvious conditioning issue and deficiency for a firefighter/EMS. Another trainee on multiple occasions had to sit out drills or not perform them, but was still permitted to attend class, watch practicals, keep the textbooks,

and utilize the trainee parking lot. Another trainee, who suffered from severe dehydration, on multiple occasions had to sit out drills or not perform them, but was still permitted to attend class, watch practicals, keep the textbooks, and utilize the trainee parking lot.

- 28. This favorable treatment of younger employees is in stark contrast to Defendants' harsh and negative treatment of Plaintiff.
- 29. On May 24, 2018, Defendants stated Plaintiff had to resign or would be terminated. Plaintiff declined to resign and Defendants terminated his employment. When Plaintiff was terminated from employment, Defendants, per Assistant Chief Sanchez, claimed he was terminated for "not meeting standards."
- 30. However, this was obviously false because Plaintiff was satisfactorily performing and passed every class.
- 31. At the time of his termination, Plaintiff was easily the oldest Trainee and certainly the only trainee over 35.
- 32. All of the trainers had the ability to influence employment decisions regarding Plaintiff. Incredibly, one of Plaintiff's trainers, Captain John Merson, later made his beliefs public regarding older recruits in a public Facebook post. In response to a news story out of Milwaukee titled, "They 51-year-ld rookie from Milwaukee" with a caption stating: "The 51-year-old rookie. Congratulations to Hernan Galarz. He's the oldest person to complete recruit school in the Milwaukee (WI) Fire Department. Galarz comes to the job with no fire department background. Take a moment to watch the story." Rather than offering congratulations or words of support to Mr. Galarz, Captain Merson posted, among other things, that he "will never understand this," that "it's irresponsible," "and [t]here is no way a department or community will get the return on this employee." Captain Merson stated in his post:



- 33. These statements by Captain Merson, who had influence over Plaintiff's employment, reflect the discriminatory animus directed to Plaintiff.
- 34. Plaintiff has suffered loss of employment, benefits, shame, embarrassment and emotional distress as a result of Defendants' actions.

Count I(ADEA Discrimination)

35. Plaintiff adopts and incorporates by reference all allegations of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.

- 36. Defendant's conduct as described in this Complaint constitutes discrimination on the basis of age in violation of the ADEA and its implementing regulations. *See* 29 U.S.C. § 621 *et seq*.
- 37. As outlined above, Defendants violated the ADEA when they mad the adverse employment decisions, culminating in termination, as discussed above.
- 38. At all times relevant hereto, Plaintiff performed at or above Defendants' reasonable expectations, and there was no other legitimate basis for Defendants' decision to terminate Plaintiff.
- 39. The above acts and practices of Defendants constitute unlawful discriminatory employment practices within the meaning of the ADEA.
- 40. The foregoing conduct, as alleged, constitutes a willful violation of the ADEA within the meaning of 29 U.S.C § 626(b) and, as a result, Plaintiff is entitled to liquidated damages.
- 41. As a result of Defendants' discriminatory acts, Plaintiff has suffered and will continue to suffer monetary damages and damages for mental anguish and humiliation. His damages are ongoing.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants for equitable relief, economic and noneconomic damages, including ongoing damages, in an amount to be determined at trial, but no less than one million dollars (\$1,000,000.00), plus interest, fees, and costs, including reasonable attorneys' fees, expert witness fees, litigation expenses, and out-of-pocket costs incurred in connection with this action, and such other and further relief this Honorable Court determines just and equitable, including all available statutory, equitable relief, and injunctive relief. In addition or in the alternative, Plaintiff further specifically demands

prospective injunctive relief in the form of an order of reinstatement to his position and an order proscribing the unlawful conduct described in this Complaint.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff respectfully requests a jury trial in all claims so triable.

/s/ Levi S. Zaslow

Levi S. Zaslow (Bar No. 29101)

Respectfully submitted,

SMITHEY LAW GROUP LLC

/s/ Levi S. Zaslow

Levi S. Zaslow (Bar No. 29101) SMITHEY LAW GROUP LLC 706 Giddings Ave #200 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

P: (410) 919-2990 F: (410) 280-1602

Levi.Zaslow@smitheylaw.com

Attorneys for Plaintiff

Case 1:21-cv-02108 **(ELVII) DOOMER SHIFTE** 08/18/21 Page 1 of 2

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS	ocket sneet. (SEE INSTRUC.	HONS ON NEXT PAGE O	F THIS FO	DEFENDANTS					
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES) (c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)				County of Residence NOTE: IN LAND CO THE TRACT Attorneys (If Known)	(IN U.S. F	PLAINTIFF CASES O	,	OF	
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☐ 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff	☐ 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government)	Not a Party)			ГБ DEF 1 □ 1	Incorporated or Proof Business In T		for Defenda PTF 4	ant) DEF □ 4
☐ 2 U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenshi	p of Parties in Item III)	Citize	en of Another State	2 🗖 2	Incorporated and F of Business In A		□ 5	□ 5
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IV. NATURE OF SUIT		ly) RTS	FC	ORFEITURE/PENALTY		e for: Nature of Sur NKRUPTCY		otions.	FS
□ 110 Insurance □ 120 Marine □ 130 Miller Act □ 140 Negotiable Instrument □ 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment □ 151 Medicare Act □ 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excludes Veterans) □ 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits □ 160 Stockholders' Suits □ 190 Other Contract □ 195 Contract Product Liability □ 196 Franchise REAL PROPERTY □ 210 Land Condemnation □ 220 Foreclosure □ 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment □ 240 Torts to Land □ 245 Tort Product Liability □ 290 All Other Real Property	PERSONAL INJURY 310 Airplane 315 Airplane Product Liability 320 Assault, Libel & Slander 330 Federal Employers' Liability 340 Marine 345 Marine Product Liability 350 Motor Vehicle Product Liability 360 Other Personal Injury 362 Personal Injury Medical Malpractice CIVIL RIGHTS 440 Other Civil Rights 441 Voting 442 Employment 443 Housing/ Accommodations 445 Amer. w/Disabilities - Employment 446 Amer. w/Disabilities - Other 448 Education	PERSONAL INJUR 365 Personal Injury - Product Liability Product Liability harmaceutical Personal Injury Product Liability Product Liability Product Liability PERSONAL PROPER 370 Other Fraud 371 Truth in Lending 380 Other Personal Property Damage Product Liability PERSONAL PROPER 385 Property Damage 70 Sterry Damage Product Liability PRISONER PETITION Habeas Corpus: 463 Alien Detainee 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence 530 General 535 Death Penalty Other: 540 Mandamus & Oth 550 Civil Rights 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Confinement	Y	STATEST TORE/PENALTY 5 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881 0 Other LABOR 0 Fair Labor Standards Act 0 Labor/Management Relations 0 Railway Labor Act 1 Family and Medical Leave Act 0 Other Labor Litigation 1 Employee Retirement Income Security Act IMMIGRATION 2 Naturalization Application 5 Other Immigration Actions	422 App 423 With 28 U 28	eal 28 USC 158 Idrawal USC 157 RTY RIGHTS yrights Int Idemark 2SECURITY (1395ff) k Lung (923) (C/DIWW (405(g)) D Title XVI	375 False C 376 Qui Ta 3729(a 400 State R 410 Antitru 430 Banks 450 Comme 460 Deport 470 Racket Corrup 480 Consur 850 Securit Exchat 891 Agricu 893 Envirot 895 Freedo Act 896 Arbitra 899 Admin Act/Re	Claims Act m (31 USC n)) leapportion leapp	nment ng nced and tions odities/ actions fatters mation recedure
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTION	Brief description of ca	use:							
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	UNDER RULE 2	IS A CLASS ACTION 3, F.R.Cv.P.	N D	EMAND \$		CHECK YES only URY DEMAND:		omplair	
VIII. RELATED CASI IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE			DOCKI	ET NUMBER			
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INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET FORM JS 44

Authority For Civil Cover Sheet

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and service of pleading or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. The attorney filing a case should complete the form as follows:

- Plaintiffs-Defendants. Enter names (last, first, middle initial) of plaintiff and defendant. If the plaintiff or defendant is a government agency, use only the full name or standard abbreviations. If the plaintiff or defendant is an official within a government agency, identify first the agency and then the official, giving both name and title.
 - County of Residence. For each civil case filed, except U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county where the first listed plaintiff resides at the time of filing. In U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county in which the first listed defendant resides at the time of filing. (NOTE: In land condemnation cases, the county of residence of the "defendant" is the location of the tract of land involved.)
 - Attorneys. Enter the firm name, address, telephone number, and attorney of record. If there are several attorneys, list them on an attachment, noting in this section "(see attachment)".
- II. **Jurisdiction.** The basis of jurisdiction is set forth under Rule 8(a), F.R.Cv.P., which requires that jurisdictions be shown in pleadings. Place an "X" in one of the boxes. If there is more than one basis of jurisdiction, precedence is given in the order shown below.

United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here. United States defendant. (2) When the plaintiff is suing the United States, its officers or agencies, place an "X" in this box.

Federal question. (3) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1331, where jurisdiction arises under the Constitution of the United States, an amendment to the Constitution, an act of Congress or a treaty of the United States. In cases where the U.S. is a party, the U.S. plaintiff or defendant code takes precedence, and box 1 or 2 should be marked.

Diversity of citizenship. (4) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1332, where parties are citizens of different states. When Box 4 is checked, the citizenship of the different parties must be checked. (See Section III below; NOTE: federal question actions take precedence over diversity cases.)

- III. Residence (citizenship) of Principal Parties. This section of the JS 44 is to be completed if diversity of citizenship was indicated above. Mark this section for each principal party.
- Nature of Suit. Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If there are multiple nature of suit codes associated with the case, pick the nature of suit code IV. that is most applicable. Click here for: Nature of Suit Code Descriptions.
- V. **Origin.** Place an "X" in one of the seven boxes.

Original Proceedings. (1) Cases which originate in the United States district courts.

Removed from State Court. (2) Proceedings initiated in state courts may be removed to the district courts under Title 28 U.S.C., Section 1441. When the petition for removal is granted, check this box.

Remanded from Appellate Court. (3) Check this box for cases remanded to the district court for further action. Use the date of remand as the filing

Reinstated or Reopened. (4) Check this box for cases reinstated or reopened in the district court. Use the reopening date as the filing date. Transferred from Another District. (5) For cases transferred under Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1404(a). Do not use this for within district transfers or multidistrict litigation transfers.

Multidistrict Litigation – Transfer. (6) Check this box when a multidistrict case is transferred into the district under authority of Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1407.

Multidistrict Litigation - Direct File. (8) Check this box when a multidistrict case is filed in the same district as the Master MDL docket. PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS NOT AN ORIGIN CODE 7. Origin Code 7 was used for historical records and is no longer relevant due to changes in statue.

- VI. Cause of Action. Report the civil statute directly related to the cause of action and give a brief description of the cause. Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity. Example: U.S. Civil Statute: 47 USC 553 Brief Description: Unauthorized reception of cable service
- Requested in Complaint. Class Action. Place an "X" in this box if you are filing a class action under Rule 23, F.R.Cv.P. Demand. In this space enter the actual dollar amount being demanded or indicate other demand, such as a preliminary injunction. Jury Demand. Check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not a jury is being demanded.
- VIII. Related Cases. This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases, if any. If there are related pending cases, insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judge names for such cases.

Date and Attorney Signature. Date and sign the civil cover sheet.

United States Dis	TRICT COURT
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	for the				
District of					
Plaintiff(s) V. Defendant(s)))) ()) ()) () () () () () () () ()				
SUMMONS	S IN A CIVIL ACTION				
To: (Defendant's name and address)					
A lawsuit has been filed against you.					
are the United States or a United States agency, or an P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff at	on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. In answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney,				
If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court. **CLERK OF COURT**					
Date:	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk				

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))

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was re	ceived by me on (date)	-	·		
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		ons on (name of individual)			, who is
	designated by law to	accept service of process	s on behalf of (name of organization)		
			on (date)	; or	
	☐ I returned the sum	mons unexecuted becaus	6e		; or
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	My fees are \$	for travel and	\$ for services, for a total of \$		
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Date:					
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Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

Date:

United Sta	TES DISTRICT COURT
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Plaintiff(s) V. Defendant(s) SUMMON To: (Defendant's name and address)))) ()) () () () () () () () () () ()
are the United States or a United States agency, or at P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff	as on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you n officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of r motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney,
If you fail to respond, judgment by default we You also must file your answer or motion with the co	vill be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. ourt.

CLERK OF COURT

Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (l))

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	☐ I personally served the summons on the individual at (place)						
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	on (date)	, and mailed a copy to	the individual's last known address; or				
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	designated by law to a	accept service of process on beh	alf of (name of organization)				
			on (date)	; or			
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	☐ Other (specify):						
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a total of \$				
	I declare under penalty	y of perjury that this information	n is true.				
Date:							
			Server's signature				
			Printed name and title				
			Server's address				

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc: