HILLARY A. DAVIDSON MONICA E. VACA 2 Federal Trade Commission 600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. Washington, D.C. 20580 3 Ph. (202) 326-2384; (202) 326-2245; fax (202) 326-3395 MW 4 BLAINE T. WELSH Assistant United States Attorney 5 Bar No. 4790 6 333 Las Vegas Blvd. South, Suite 5000 Las Vegas, NV 89101 7 Ph. (702) 388-6336; fax (702) 388-6787 Attorneys for Plaintiff 8 9 10 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF NEVADA 11 CV-S-05-0160-RCJ-PAL Federal Trade Commission, 12 Plaintiff, 13 V. 14 National Vending Consultants, Inc., a New COMPLAINT FOR 15 Mexico corporation; Success Vending Group, INJUNCTIVE AND OTHER Inc., a New Mexico corporation; **EQUITABLE RELIEF** 16 **USA Candy Express, Inc.**, a Nevada corporation; Patrick Abeyta, Jr., individually and as an officer 17 of National Vending Consultants, Inc.; Debra Abeyta, individually and as an officer of 18 National Vending Consultants, Inc.; Larry Welli, individually and as an officer of Success Vending 19 Group, Inc.; Richard Savard, individually and as an officer of Success Vending Group, Inc.; 20 Defendants, 21 and Darlene Savard, a/k/a Darlene Robarge, 22 Relief Defendant. 23 24

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Plaintiff, the Federal Trade Commission ("FTC" or "Commission"), for its complaint alleges:

1. The FTC brings this action under Sections 5(a), 13(b) and 19 of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 45(a), 53(b) and 57b, to obtain temporary, preliminary, and permanent injunctive relief, rescission of contracts, restitution, disgorgement, appointment of a receiver, and other equitable relief for defendants' violations of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a), and the FTC's Trade Regulation Rule entitled "Disclosure Requirements and Prohibitions Concerning Franchising and Business Opportunity Ventures" ("Franchise Rule" or "Rule"), 16 C.F.R. § 436.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 2. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, 1337(a), and 1345, and 15 U.S.C. §§ 53(b) and 57b. This action arises under 15 U.S.C. § 45(a)(1).
- 3. Venue in the United States District Court for the District of Nevada is proper under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b) and (c), and 15 U.S.C. § 53(b).

THE PARTIES

4. Plaintiff, the Federal Trade Commission, is an independent agency of the United States Government created by statute. 15 U.S.C. §§ 41 et seq. The Commission is charged, inter alia, with enforcement of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a), which prohibits unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce, as well as enforcement of the Franchise Rule, 16 C.F.R. § 436. The Commission is authorized to initiate federal district court proceedings, by its own attorneys, to enjoin violations of the FTC Act and the Franchise Rule in order to secure such equitable relief as may be appropriate in each case, and to obtain consumer redress. 15 U.S.C. §§ 53(b) and 57b.

- 5. Defendant National Vending Consultants, Inc. ("NVC"), a New Mexico corporation with its principal place of business at 1406 El Camino Real Street, Socorro, NM 87801, promotes and sells vending machine business ventures. NVC has transacted business in the District of Nevada.
- 6. Success Vending Group, Inc. ("SVG"), also known as S. Vending, Inc., a New Mexico corporation listing its address as 11005 Spain N.E., 11th Floor, Albuquerque, NM 97111, and with its principal place of business at 1631 and 1651 East Sunset Road, Las Vegas, NV 89119, promotes and sells vending machine business ventures. SVG has transacted business in the District of Nevada.
- 7. Defendant USA Candy Express, Inc. ("Candy Express") is a Nevada corporation with its principal place of business at 1631 East Sunset Road, Las Vegas, NV 89119, engaged in the vending machine business. Candy Express has transacted business in the District of Nevada.
- 8. Defendant Patrick Abeyta, Jr. is the President of NVC and an undisclosed officer or director of SVG. At all times material to this complaint, acting alone or in concert with others, he has formulated, directed, controlled or participated in the acts and practices of the corporate defendants, including the acts and practices set forth in this complaint. He has transacted business in the District of Nevada.
- 9. Defendant Debra Abeyta is the Vice President of NVC. At all times material to this complaint, acting alone or in concert with others, she has formulated, directed, controlled or participated in the acts and practices of the defendant NVC, including the acts and practices set forth in this complaint. She has transacted business in the District of Nevada.
- 10. Defendant Larry Welli is the President of SVG. At all times material to this complaint, acting alone or in concert with others, he has formulated, directed,

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 controlled or participated in the acts and practices of defendant SVG, including the acts and practices set forth in this complaint. He has transacted business in the District of Nevada.

- 11. Defendant Richard Savard is the General Manager of SVG and/or NVC, and holds himself out as the Vice President and co-owner of SVG. At all times material to this complaint, acting alone or in concert with others, he has formulated, directed, controlled or participated in the acts or practices of defendant SVG, including the acts and practices set forth in this complaint. He has transacted business in the District of Nevada.
- 12. Relief defendant Darlene Savard, also known as "Darlene Robarge," is an individual who has received funds that can be traced directly to the corporate defendants' deceptive acts or practices, and she has no legitimate claim to those funds.

COMMON ENTERPRISE

13. Corporate defendants SVG, NVC, and Candy Express (herein, the "Vending Enterprise") have operated as a common enterprise while engaging in the deceptive acts and practices and other violations of law alleged below. Individual defendants Patrick Abeyta, Jr., Debra Abeyta, Larry Welli, and Richard Savard have formulated, directed, controlled or had authority to control, or participated in the acts and practices of the corporate defendants that comprise the common enterprise.

COMMERCE

14. At all times relevant to this complaint, the defendants have maintained a substantial course of trade in the offering for sale and sale of vending machine business opportunities, in or affecting commerce, as "commerce" is defined in Section 4 of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 44.

DEFENDANTS' BUSINESS PRACTICES

15. Defendant NVC, a member of the Vending Enterprise, and its principals,
defendants Patrick Abeyta, Jr., and Debra Abeyta, are bound by a permanent injunctive
order. The order forbids these three defendants from making or assisting others in
making misrepresentations to consumers when they offer to sell business ventures,
including misrepresentations about the profitability of the business venture offered, the
authenticity of third-party references, and the availability of profitable locations. In
addition, the order forbids them from violating the Franchise Rule. The Order was
entered on April 13, 2001, in the United States District Court for the District of New
Mexico, in the case <u>United States of America v. National Vending Consultants, Inc., et</u>
al., Civ. 00 0155 DJS.

16. The Vending Enterprise promotes vending machine business opportunities in advertisements in classified sections of newspapers nationwide. The advertisements offer the sale of vending machine business opportunities that include vending machines and retail locations for the machines. The advertisements suggest, in some cases, that the prospective purchaser of the business opportunity will earn substantial amounts of money, and provide a toll-free telephone number for prospective purchasers to call. Typical advertisements state:

Are You Ready To Make \$erious Cash! Direct from the factory 90 mach. + candy & locs. All for \$9995 1-800-330-2140

and

ABSOLUTELY ALL CASH 90 vending machines with locations. All for \$9,995 1-800-330-2140

and

AAA Vending Excellent Routes \$9,995 Invest. 888-660-8363

- 17. Consumers who call the toll-free number provided in such an advertisement are connected to telemarketers for the Vending Enterprise, who represent to prospective purchasers that they will receive what they need to get started in a vending machine business venture, including: (1) vending machines; and (2) locations in which to place those machines. The Vending Enterprise sells different types of vending machines in various quantities, but the least expensive package of machines and locations costs \$9,995.
- 18. In the course of its initial sales pitch or in subsequent telephone conversations with prospective purchasers, telemarketers for the Vending Enterprise make oral representations about the earnings potential in the business venture. For example, telemarketers working for the Vending Enterprise typically represent that individuals who operate thirty (30) Tri-Star Deluxe vending machines can expect to earn \$900 per week, and individuals who purchase ten (10) Snackmate vending machines can expect to earn a minimum of \$700 per week.
- 19. The Vending Enterprise sends a packet of materials to prospective purchasers shortly after the initial sales pitch. The packet contains promotional materials stating or implying that vending machine businesses are highly profitable. For example, the packet contains a page with the heading "Return On Investment," which states that Peanut M & Ms sold through a vending machine generate a "700% Return on Investment!" A question follows: "What would you have if you had 20 machines out there making you 700% every day of the week? How about if you had 100 machines making 700% 2000% Return on Investment?" Another page with the heading "LOCATIONS" states in bold face type: "Remember, if you empty your full

machine just 3 times, you have paid for the machine free and clear." A page labeled "NOW IS THE TIME" states that "Vending is an all cash business that provides a steady, dependable income week after week, month after month." Other materials state: "Immediate Cash Flow!" and "Incredible Return on Investment!"

- 20. The packet of materials also includes a Franchise Offering Circular which has a disclaimer stating that NVC and SVG: "[do] not furnish or authorize its salespersons to furnish any oral or written information concerning the actual or potential sales, costs, income or profits of a vending business. Actual results vary from unit to unit and [NVC and SVG] cannot estimate the results of any particular franchise." In reality, the Vending Enterprise and its telemarketers do make representations to prospective purchasers concerning the purported actual or potential sales, costs, income, or profits of their vending machine business opportunities.
- 21. In fact, the earnings representations made by the Vending Enterprise are false and misleading.
- 22. The Vending Enterprise represents to prospective purchasers that the money they pay for the vending machine business opportunity includes locations to place the vending machines, and that a locator company that the Vending Enterprise recommends will secure retail outlets for the vending machines.
- 23. In the course of the initial sales pitch or in subsequent telephone calls, the Vending Enterprise typically pressures prospective purchasers to make their purchase quickly. For example, telemarketers for the Vending Enterprise often tell consumers that available locations in the prospective purchaser's geographic area are likely to be taken by other interested callers if they fail to act quickly. In numerous instances, the Vending Enterprise pressures prospective purchasers to send their purchase money by wire transfer less than ten days after providing the prospective purchaser with the

disclosure documents required by the Franchise Rule.

- 24. The Vending Enterprise provides to prospective purchasers the names and telephone numbers of purported "references." The Vending Enterprise represents that these references are prior purchasers of business opportunities from NVC or SVG and will provide accurate descriptions of their experiences with their vending machine business ventures. However, the Vending Enterprise's representations about the company-selected references are false and misleading. The references have not purchased business opportunities from the defendants or do not provide reliable descriptions of their experiences.
- 25. The Vending Enterprise, doing business as SVG, encourages its customers who have bought vending machines to travel to SVG's Las Vegas offices to receive "training." In reality, the Vending Enterprise gathers customers at its Las Vegas facility to attempt to sell them more products, such as a dollar bill changer, through deception. The Vending Enterprise pays someone from its sales staff to pose as a customer during the "training" to try to convince the trainees that they should buy the dollar bill changers. The shill misrepresents to customers that he has a vending machine business that he purchased from SVG and further misrepresents that he made a lot of money with his vending machine business after he purchased the dollar bill changers.
- 26. The Franchise Rule requires a franchisor to disclose the business experience of each of the franchisor's current directors and executive officers. SVG fails to disclose that Patrick Abeyta, Jr., and Richard Savard are directors or executive officers of SVG.
- 27. The Franchise Rule requires franchisors to disclose to consumers if the franchise or its directors and executive officers have been subject to law enforcement actions relating to franchise activities. The Franchise Offering Circular sent to

consumers by the Vending Enterprise fails to disclose the 2001 permanent injunction that enjoins NVC, Patrick Abeyta, Jr., and Debra Abeyta from violating the Franchise Rule and from making misrepresentations to consumers in the course of offering business ventures for sale, as described in Paragraph 15.

- 28. The Franchise Rule requires the franchisor to disclose to consumers whether any of its current directors or executive officers have, at any time in the previous seven fiscal years, been convicted of a felony that involves fraud. The Vending Enterprise, doing business as SVG, fails to disclose that Richard Savard pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud in 2001, in the United States District Court for Southern District of Florida, case number 00-531-CR-Seitz.
- 29. The Franchise Rule requires franchisors to disclose to consumers the length of time the franchisor has offered or sold a franchise and the business experience of the franchisor's executive officers. The Vending Enterprise, doing business as SVG, represents to prospective purchasers orally and in its Franchise Offering Circular, that it has been in business for seventeen (17) years "offering this specific business opportunity program." In addition, the Franchise Offering Circular represents that, "[f]rom October 1987 through the Present, Mr. [Larry] Welli has been President and head of Marketing for [SVG], involved primarily in marketing and distribution of vending equipment and assisting start-up vendors."
- 30. The representations in SVG's Franchise Offering Circular regarding the length of time SVG has offered vending machine opportunities and the business experience of its President, Larry Welli, are false. Although it was originally incorporated in 1987, SVG has done business under the name "Success Vending Group, Inc." only since August of 2003. In 1987, the company was incorporated as "First Shelph Corp.," and its listed business purpose was to improve and develop real

property. The President of First Shelph Corp. was Leland Franks. In 1998, the company changed its name to D.P.S. Technologies, Inc., and the articles of incorporation were amended to reflect that the purpose of the business was to offer for sale vending machines. The President of D.P.S. Technologies, Inc., was defendant Patrick Abeyta, Jr. In August of 2003, the name of the company changed again to Success Vending Group, Inc., and it listed Larry Welli as its only officer. Thus, the defendants fail to disclose accurate information concerning the length of time the franchisor has offered or sold a franchise, and fail to disclose accurate information about the business experience of the franchisor's executive officer, Larry Welli.

- 31. The Franchise Rule requires franchisors to provide to consumers a disclosure of, among other things, a list of existing franchisees and a balance sheet and income statement for the franchisor. The Vending Enterprise's disclosure document is incomplete because it fails to disclose a list of existing franchisees, and fails to include a balance sheet and income statement for the franchisor.
- 32. The Vending Enterprise has no reasonable basis for its earnings representations, fails to disclose that materials are available which demonstrate a reasonable basis for the claims, or fails to provide the earnings claim document required by the Franchise Rule.

VIOLATIONS OF SECTION 5 OF THE FTC ACT

33. Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a), prohibits "unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce."

COUNT I

Misrepresentations Regarding Income

34. In numerous instances in the course of offering for sale and selling their vending machine business ventures, the defendants, directly or indirectly, represent,

expressly or by implication, that consumers who purchase the defendants' business ventures are likely to earn substantial income.

- 35. In truth and in fact, consumers who purchase the defendants' business ventures are not likely to earn substantial income.
- 36. Therefore, defendants' representations as set forth in Paragraph 34 are false and misleading and constitute a deceptive act or practice in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

COUNT II

Misrepresentations Regarding References and Current Customers

- 37. In numerous instances, in the course of offering for sale and selling their vending machine business ventures, the defendants, directly or indirectly, represent, expressly or by implication, that certain company-selected references and other individuals have purchased the defendants' business ventures or will provide reliable descriptions of experiences with these business ventures.
- 38. In truth and in fact, in numerous instances, the references and other individuals have not purchased the defendants' business ventures or do not provide reliable descriptions of experiences with these business ventures.
- 39. Therefore, the defendants' representations as set forth in Paragraph 37 are false and misleading and constitute deceptive acts or practices in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

THE FRANCHISE RULE

40. The business ventures sold by the defendants are franchises, as "franchise" is defined in Sections 436.2(a)(1)(ii), (a)(2), and (a)(5) of the Franchise Rule, 16 C.F.R. §§ 436.2(a)(1)(ii), (a)(2), and (a)(5).

- 41. The Franchise Rule requires a franchisor to provide prospective franchisees with a complete and accurate basic disclosure document containing twenty categories of information, including information about existing injunctions relating to franchise activities, the length of time the franchisor has offered or sold a franchise, the business experience of the franchise's executive officers, an income statement of the franchisor, and information identifying existing franchisees. 16 C.F.R. § 436.1(a)(1) (a)(20). The pre-sale disclosure of this information required by the Rule enables a prospective franchisee to contact prior purchasers and take other steps to assess the potential risks involved in the purchase of the franchise. Furthermore, this information must be disclosed at least 10 days prior to payment by the prospective franchisee.
- 42. As a matter of policy, the FTC has authorized franchisors to comply with the Rule by furnishing prospective franchisees with disclosures in a format known as the Uniform Franchise Offering Circular ("UFOC"). Authorization to use the UFOC format to comply with the Rule's disclosure requirements was first granted by the Commission in the Final Interpretive Guides to the Rule, 44 Fed. Reg. 49966, 49970-71, and expressly requires adherence to the UFOC disclosure requirements in their "entirety." This conditional authorization has been ratified by the Commission following subsequent amendments to the UFOC requirements by the North American Securities Administrators Association, most recently on December 30, 1993. 58 Fed. Reg. 69224. Corporate defendants NVC and SVG have elected to use the UFOC disclosure format.
- 43. Item 19 of the UFOC Guidelines requires the franchisor to disclose whether or not an earnings claim is made. Item 19 further requires that "[a]n earnings claim made in connection with an offer of a franchise must be included in full in the offering circular and must have a reasonable basis at the time it was made" and that

"[a]n earnings claim shall include a description of its factual basis and the material assumptions underlying its preparation and presentation." Item 19 recognizes an income multiplication table to be an earnings claim.

- 44. The Franchise Rule specifically prohibits franchisors from making any claim or representation that contradicts information required to be disclosed pursuant to Section 436.1 of the Rule. 16 C.F.R. § 436.1(f).
 - 45. The Franchise Rule additionally requires that a franchisor:
 - (a) have a reasonable basis for any oral, written, or visual earnings claim it makes, 16 C.F.R. § 436.1(b)(2), (c)(2) and (e)(1);
 - (b) disclose, in immediate conjunction with any earnings claim it makes, and in a clear and conspicuous manner, that material which constitutes a reasonable basis for the earnings claim is available to prospective franchisees, 16 C.F.R. § 436.1(b)(2) and (c)(2); and
 - (c) provide, as prescribed by the Rule, an earnings claim document containing information that constitutes a reasonable basis for any earnings claim it makes, 16 C.F.R. § 436.1(b) and (c).
- 46. Pursuant to Section 18(d)(3) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 57a(d)(3), and 16 C.F.R. § 436.1, violations of the Franchise Rule constitute unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce, in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

VIOLATIONS OF THE FRANCHISE RULE COUNT III

Basic Disclosure Violations

47. In connection with the offering of franchises, as "franchise" is defined in Section 436.2(a) of the Rule, the defendants violate Section 436.1(a) of the Rule and

Section 5(a) of the FTC Act by failing to provide prospective franchisees with accurate and complete disclosure documents within the time period prescribed by the Rule.

COUNT IV

Earnings Disclosure Violations

48. In connection with the offering of franchises, as "franchise" is defined in Section 436.2(a) of the Franchise Rule, the defendants violate Sections 436.1(b)-(c) of the Rule and Section 5(a) of the FTC Act by making earnings claims to prospective franchisees while, *inter alia*: (1) lacking a reasonable basis for each claim at the times it is made; (2) failing to disclose, in immediate conjunction with each earnings claim, and in a clear and conspicuous manner, that material which constitutes a reasonable basis for the claim is available to prospective franchisees; and/or (3) failing to provide prospective franchisees with an earnings claim document, as prescribed by the Rule, and / or earnings disclosures as prescribed by Item 19 of the UFOC Guidelines.

COUNT V

Claim or Representation That Contradicts a Required Disclosure

49. In connection with the offering of franchises, as "franchise" is defined in Section 436.2(a) of the Rule, defendants violate Section 436.1(f) of the Rule and Section 5(a) of the FTC Act by making claims or representations to prospective franchisees that are contradictory to the information required to be disclosed by Section 436.1 of the Rule.

DISGORGEMENT OF RELIEF DEFENDANT'S ILL-GOTTEN GAINS COUNT VI

50. In the course of offering for sale and selling their vending machine business ventures, the defendants have committed deceptive acts or practices.

- 51. The relief defendant, Darlene Savard, has received funds or otherwise benefitted from funds which are directly traceable to funds obtained from the defendants' purchasers through its deceptive acts or practices.
- 52. The relief defendant is not a bona fide purchaser with legal and equitable title to the defendants' purchasers' funds or assets, and the relief defendant will be unjustly enriched if she is not required to disgorge the funds or the value of the benefit she received as a result of the defendants' deceptive acts or practices.
- 53. The relief defendant should be required to disgorge the funds and assets, or the value of the benefit she received from those funds and assets, which are traceable to the defendants' deceptive acts or practices.
- 54. By reason of the foregoing, the relief defendant holds funds and assets in constructive trust for the benefit of the defendants' purchasers.

CONSUMER INJURY

55. Consumers nationwide have suffered or will suffer substantial monetary loss as a result of the defendants' violations of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act and the Franchise Rule. Absent injunctive relief by this Court, the defendants are likely to continue to injure consumers and harm the public interest.

THIS COURT'S POWER TO GRANT RELIEF

- 56. Section 13(b) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 53(b), empowers this Court to grant injunctive and other ancillary relief, including consumer redress, disgorgement and restitution, to prevent and remedy any violations of any provision of law enforced by the Federal Trade Commission.
- 57. Section 19 of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 57b, authorizes this Court to grant such relief as the Court finds necessary to redress injury to consumers or other persons resulting from the defendants' violations of the Franchise Rule, including the rescission

and reformation of contracts, and the refund of money.

58. This Court, in the exercise of its equitable jurisdiction, may award ancillary relief to remedy injury caused by the defendants' law violations.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, plaintiff requests that this Court, as authorized by Sections 13(b) and 19 of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 53(b) and 57b, and pursuant to its own equitable powers:

- 1. Award plaintiff such preliminary injunctive and ancillary relief, including a temporary restraining order, asset freeze, and appointment of a receiver, as may be necessary to avert the likelihood of consumer injury during the pendency of this action and to preserve the possibility of effective final relief;
- 2. Permanently enjoin the defendants from violating the FTC Act and the Franchise Rule, as alleged herein;
- 3. Award such relief as the Court finds necessary to redress injury to consumers resulting from the defendants' violations of the FTC Act and the Franchise Rule, including but not limited to, rescission of contracts, the refund of monies paid, and the disgorgement of ill-gotten gains by the defendants and the relief defendant; and
- 4. Award plaintiff the costs of bringing this action, as well as such other and additional relief as the Court may determine to be just and proper.

Respectfully submitted,

John D. Graubert Acting General Counsel

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- CIVIL COVER SHEET

The IS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace per 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

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS		DEFENDANT	SNational Vendin	g Consultants, Inc.
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190 Other Contract	Product Liability 385 Property Damage		s	☐ 875 Customer Challenge 12 USC 3410
195 Contract Product Liability 196 Franchise	☐ 360 Other Personal Product Liability	730 Labor/Mgmt.Reporting	864 SSID Title XVI	890 Other Statutory Actions
REAL PROPERTY	Injury CIVIL RIGHTS PRISONER PETITION	& Disciosure Act	□ 865 RSI (405(g))	☐ 891 Agricultural Acts
210 Land Condemnation	CIVIL RIGHTS PRISONER PETITION ☐ 441 Voting ☐ 510 Motions to Vacate		FEDERAL TAX SUITS	■ 892 Economic Stabilization Act
220 Foreclosure	442 Employment Sentence	e 790 Other Labor Litigation 791 Empl. Ret. Inc.	•	2 893 Environmental Matters
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