

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

AQUAPAW BRANDS LLC,

Plaintiff,

v.

FED STORE, *et al.*,

Defendants.

Civil Action No.

FILED UNDER SEAL

**DECLARATION OF MICHAEL SCOTESE
IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFF'S *EX PARTE* APPLICATION
FOR ENTRY OF A TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER
AND PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION**

I, **MICHAEL SCOTESE**, do hereby declare:

1. I am over eighteen (18) years of age. I have never been convicted of a felony or any criminal offense involving moral turpitude, and I am fully competent to testify to the matters stated herein. I have personal knowledge of every statement made in this Declaration and such statements are true and correct.

2. I am an executive of Cap Hill Brands, the 100% owner of the Plaintiff company, AQUAPAW BRANDS LLC, a Delaware limited liability with a registered address of 113 Cherry Street, PBM 89249, Seattle, Washington 98104-2205, and the 100% owner of all the assets of AQUAPAW LLC, the original company that developed and marketed the product at issue in this case (i.e., the Slow Treater[®]).

3. I make this declaration in support of Plaintiff's *Ex Parte* Application for Entry of a Temporary Restraining Order and Preliminary Injunction against Defendants, the Individuals, Partnerships, and Unincorporated Associations identified on **Schedule "A"** to the Complaint.

4. The Defendants use the interactive commercial Internet websites and Internet based e-commerce stores using the seller identities and store names set forth on **Schedule "A"** to willfully infringe one or more of the claims of U.S. Patent No. 11,419,309 ("Plaintiff's Patent") by offering for sale, selling, and distributing knock-off versions of Plaintiff's Slow Treater[®] Brand dog soothing device ("Infringing Products").

5. The inventor of the Plaintiff's patented product solved the challenging the problem of bathing a dog. By placing peanut butter into the patented device, which includes rubber protuberances ("nubs") in the center of the product, and affixing it with suction cups to the bathroom wall, the pet is enticed to jump into the tub where it can be bathed. The nubs on the device slow down the pet's ability to get all the peanut butter out of the device and the licking at the peanut butter soothes the pet. The product is sold by Plaintiff under the brand name Slow Treater[®] ("Plaintiff's Product").

6. Plaintiff's Product has been featured in videos, articles, or podcasts by numerous media outlets, including:

NBC's "The Today Show"

Buzz Feed: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/malloryannp/products-from-amazon-thatll-make-grooming-your-pet-so>

Buzz Feed: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/malloryannp/products-that-are-almost-too-damn-clever-2019>

Good Housekeeping: <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/holidays/gift-ideas/g474/pet-gifts/?slide=8>

Pop Sugar: <https://www.popsugar.com/family/Aquapaw-Slow-Treater-Mat-Bathing-Dogs-45362700>

<https://tppm.com/p/27845/aquapaw/aquapaw-slow-treater/>

<https://www.purewow.com/family/how-to-give-a-dog-a-bath>

7. Plaintiff's Product is sold under the brand name Slow Treater[®], and is widely legitimately advertised and promoted by Plaintiff, its authorized distributors, and unrelated third parties via the Internet. Over the past several years, visibility on the Internet, particularly via Internet search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, and Bing has become increasingly important to Plaintiff's overall marketing. Plaintiff's Product won a First Place *2018 Fear Free Award* at the 2018 *Superzoo* trade show.

8. Thus, Plaintiff and its authorized distributors expend significant monetary resources on Internet marketing, including search engine optimization ("SEO") strategies. Other costs include social media ads, tradeshows, and handing out free samples. Those strategies allow Plaintiff and its authorized retailers to educate consumers fairly and legitimately about the value associated with Plaintiff's brand and the goods sold thereunder. Similarly, Defendants' individual seller's stores are indexed on search engines and compete directly with Plaintiff for space in the search results.

9. Plaintiff sells its dog soothing device under the registered Slow Treater[®] trademark U.S. Reg. No. 5,611,043 for "Pet feeding dishes" in class 21.

10. The Plaintiff's Product is designed to entice the pet to get into the bathtub and keep it there while distracted by the task of licking a treat from the feeder. The product is molded in FDA-approved food grade material. The top of the product includes multiple nubs and is surrounded by a circular raised rim to hold the treat and slow the pet's ability to lick it out.

Suction cups are disposed on the back of the product for fastening to the bathtub wall. The Plaintiff's Product retails for \$10.95:



11. The unique features of Plaintiff's Product, including, the distinct photographs, the design, the instructions, the packaging, and the unique presentation of the product, all comprise Plaintiff's valuable intellectual property ("IP") and all have become distinct in consumer's minds such that consumers associate all of this IP with Plaintiff's Product. Screenshots of Plaintiff's Website and Amazon Store are attached as Complaint **Exhibit 1**.

12. The innovative features of Plaintiff's Product are the subject of U. S. Patent No. 11,419,309 entitled "Animal Feeder System and Method of Use". A copy of the patent is attached as Complaint **Exhibit 2**.

13. Due to the success of Plaintiff's Product, Plaintiff has become the target of multiple infringers seeking to profit off the goodwill and reputation and fame enjoyed by

Plaintiff's Product. Defendants have flooded the market with cheap imitations and caused Plaintiff's sales and profit to plummet.

14. Plaintiff has been forced to police the various Internet marketplaces to identify and seek takedowns of unlawful listings for the Infringing Products¹ since allowing the unlawful listings to continue is causing damage to Plaintiff's reputation and bottom line. Some Defendants sell their infringing products at a fraction of the controlled retail price. Because of the software provided by the various Internet Marketplaces, the lowest priced items are sorted to the top and/or promoted by the software and then purchased by the consumers. Plaintiff's Product is thus ignored. Plaintiff has had varied success in identifying and requesting takedowns of the various unlawful listings and as soon as one is taken down another unlawful listing replaces it. Another major problem with the Internet Marketplaces is that there is a direct and convenient connection between various Chinese and other unidentified manufactures to the Infringing Products. In essence, a counterfeiter in Vietnam or Russia, for example, may order a crate of Infringing Products from a Chinese manufacturer, have them drop shipped to a fulfillment center in the United States, and then sell the Infringing Products to a US consumer through a Third-Party Service Provider. The ease of this system encourages knock-offs to flourish.

15. For these reasons, Plaintiff retained the legal counsel of Ference & Associates LLC ("the Ference firm") to perform the policing of various Internet marketplaces. During the process, the Ference firm identified many Chinese manufacturers operating on Marketplace Storefronts hosted by the Internet marketplaces. These manufacturers were supplying many of

¹ As set forth in the Complaint, Defendants have offered for sale, sold, and distributed knock-off versions of Plaintiff's Product that infringe upon at least one claim of the Plaintiff's Patent (the "Infringing Product").

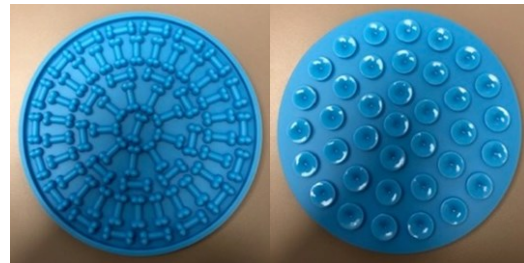
the other identified Defendants with infringing products flooding the Internet marketplaces and damaging Plaintiff’s business. This damage to Plaintiff’s business will continue unless Plaintiff receives the sought after restraining order and injunctive relief.

16. Defendants’ sale, distribution, and advertising of the Infringing Product are highly likely to cause consumers to believe that Defendants are offering genuine versions of Plaintiff’s Products when in fact they are not.

17. To illustrate, below are several examples of the Infringing Products²:



PLAINTIFF’S PRODUCT



TYPE 1 INFRINGING PRODUCT



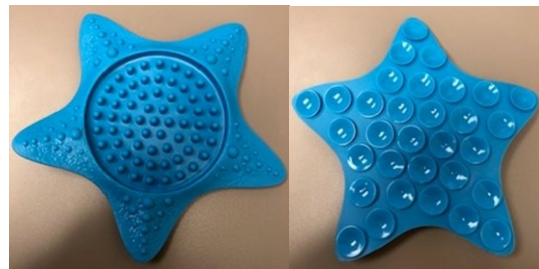
PLAINTIFF’S PRODUCT



TYPE 2 INFRINGING PRODUCT



PLAINTIFF’S PRODUCT



TYPE 3 INFRINGING PRODUCT

² Other exemplary Infringing Products are shown in the screen shots in Schedule “B” to the Complaint.. Each example infringes on at least one claim of the Plaintiff’s Patent. Some of the screen shots may include other bundled products that are not infringing.

18. As poorly designed and manufactured products, Defendants' Infringing Products may injure an unsuspecting pet that tries to ingest it; likewise, the flimsiness of the product may disappoint a customer who may give the product a bad review.

19. The Infringing Products threaten to destroy the reputation of high quality that Plaintiff's Products have earned.

20. Defendants do not have, nor have they ever had, the right or authority to use Plaintiff's Patent. Defendants' unlawful activities have deprived and continue to deprive Plaintiff of its rights to control its IP. By their activities, Defendants are defrauding Plaintiff and the consuming public for Defendants' benefit. Defendants should not be permitted to continue their unlawful activities, which are causing Plaintiff ongoing irreparable harm. Accordingly, Plaintiff is seeking entry of a temporary restraining order prohibiting Defendants' further wrongful infringement.

21. Given Defendants' use of Plaintiff's Patent, the Infringing Products are indistinguishable to consumers, both at the point of sale and post-sale is causing and will continue to cause Plaintiff's irreparable harm and damage.

22. The infringements of Plaintiff's IP devalue the Plaintiff's Slow Treater[®] brand dog soothing device by associating it with inferior quality goods, and it undermines the value of the Plaintiff's IP by creating the impression that infringement may be undertaken with impunity which threatens Plaintiff's ability to attract investors and markets for the Plaintiff's Products.

23. I have reviewed **Composite Exhibit 1** attached to the Declaration of Dee Odell and the pictured web listings and upon my information and belief, the Defendants identified in **Schedule "A"** of the Complaint, were and/or are currently manufacturing, importing, exporting,

advertising, marketing, promoting, distributing, displaying, offering for sale and or/selling non genuine, knock-off versions of Plaintiff's Product that infringe on at least one claim of the Plaintiff's Patent, with the non-genuine, copies of Plaintiff's Product directed to U.S. consumers, including those consumers in Pennsylvania, through their e-commerce stores.

24. None of the identified Defendants are authorized re-sellers of genuine version of Plaintiff's Product. Moreover, none of the identified Defendants are authorized to manufacture, import, export, advertise, offer for sale, or sell Plaintiff's Products or knock-offs. Further, Plaintiff never consented or granted permission to any of the identified Defendants to use Plaintiff's Patent.

25. I have confirmed that all of the identified products pictured in **Composite Exhibit 1** are infringements of Plaintiff's Product and upon information and belief, the Defendants set forth in **Schedule "A" of the Complaint** were and/or are currently manufacturing, importing, exporting, advertising, marketing, promoting, distributing, displaying, offering for sale and/or selling Infringing Products, to sell to U.S. consumers, including those consumers in Pennsylvania, through their Online Marketplace Storefronts. Through visual inspection of Defendants' listings for Infringing Products, it was confirmed that each Defendant is offering an infringing version of the Plaintiff's Product. The checkout pages or order forms for the Infringing Products confirm that each Defendant was and/or is still currently offering for sale and/or selling Infringing Products through their respective Merchant Storefronts and User Accounts and that each Defendant provides shipping and/or has actually shipped Infringing Products to the United States³, including to customers located in Pennsylvania. At checkout, a

³ If shipped and received, the products were examined physically to confirm that they are infringing and knock-offs and not genuine.

shipping address located in the Pittsburgh area (“the Pennsylvania Address”) in the Western District of Pennsylvania verified that each Defendant provides shipping to the Pennsylvania Address. I inspected the detailed web listings describing the Infringing Products Defendants are offering for sale through the Internet based e-commerce stores operating under each of their respective Seller IDs, and determined the products were not genuine versions of Plaintiff’s Products.

26. Defendants’ actions have caused and will continue to cause, in the event the requested relief is not granted, irreparable harm to Plaintiff’s goodwill and reputation as well as to the unassuming consumers who will continue to believe that the Defendants cheaply produced, inferior, and typically faulty infringing products and knock-offs are produced, authorized, approved, endorsed or licensed by Plaintiff, when they are not.

27. Defendants’ intentional and illegal conduct, including offering for sale and selling inferior infringing knock-offs into the U.S. and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has caused lost profits to Plaintiff and damaged the inherent value of Plaintiff’s business, by diluting the brand and goodwill, damaging Plaintiff’s reputation for providing high quality products, and interfering with Plaintiff’s relationships with its customers and authorized resellers, as well as impeding Plaintiff’s ability to attract new customers and business.

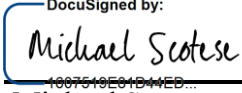
28. All the injuries and damages described above are taking place in the United States, including in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

29. In addition to trying to stop the injuries and damages caused to Plaintiff’s business, Plaintiff is also seeking in this lawsuit to protect pet owners from being exposed to and purchasing the substandard, faulty, and potentially dangerous infringing products.

30. I have worked with Plaintiff's legal counsel in this case to assist them in identifying knock-off products and have provided them with various leads in order to find the various outlets for the infringing and knock-off products. If called upon by the Court, Plaintiff's legal counsel is able to explain additional differences between the genuine version of Plaintiff's Product and the knock-off products by the identified Defendants.

31. To be sure that none of the Defendants receive advance notice of the relief and remedies requested in Plaintiff's Complaint or the *Ex Parte* Application for Entry of a Temporary Restraining Order and Preliminary Injunction in this case, neither I nor anybody else working for Plaintiff have publicized the filing of this lawsuit.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Signed: 
 Michael Scotese

***Dated: August 15, 2023
Seattle, Washington***