# FILED SUPREME COURT STATE OF WASHINGTON 11/19/2018 3:30 PM BY SUSAN L. CARLSON CLERK

NO. 76201-0-I

# COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON DIVISION 1

## HISHM CHONAH,

Respondent / Plaintiff,

V.

COASTAL VILLAGES POLLOCK, LLC and C/P NORTHERN HAWK, LLC, Petitioners / Defendants.

### OPPOSITION TO DISCRETIONARY REVIEW

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# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.	Introd	luction	3
2.	State	ment of the case	3
3.	Argur	nent	6
	a.	No case law holds that a trial court may not consider intent	6
	b.	Trial courts are not bound to apply judicial estoppel whenever the three New Hampshire factors are present	8
4.	CON	CLUSION	.9

# **TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**

# Cases

New Hampshire v. Maine, 532 U.S. 742 (2001)3, 7, 8,	9, 10
Arkison v. Ethan Allen, 160 Wn.2d 535 (2007)	3, 8, 9
Cunningham v. Reliable Concrete Pumping, 126 Wn.App. 222	
(2005)	7, 8
Statutes	
18 U.S.C. § 1014	10

# 1. Introduction

Coastal Villages bases its arguments on a logical fallacy: appellate courts have affirmed the discretion of trial courts to impose estoppel when the three factors laid out in <a href="New Hampshire">New Hampshire</a> and <a href="Arkison">Arkison</a> are present; therefore, if the three factors are present the trial court must apply estoppel.

This fallacy allows Coastal Villages to ignore the clear guidance of the U.S. and Washington State Supreme Courts: the three factors are not an exhaustive formula, and additional considerations may guide a court's decision about whether estoppel is appropriate. New Hampshire v. Maine, 532 U.S. 742, 751 (2001); Arkison v. Ethan Allen, 160 Wn.2d 535, 539 (2007).

The Court of Appeals decision is consistent with the purposes of judicial estoppel and the guidance of <a href="New Hampshire">New Hampshire</a> and <a href="Arkison">Arkison</a> in holding the "trial court's analysis was entirely appropriate in light of the flexible, fact-based nature of the equitable doctrine of judicial estoppel."

## 2. Statement of the case

Hishm Chonah immigrated from Sudan in 2001 with an accounting certificate from a school in Sudan but his English was

too poor for him to make use of it, and he took a fishing job.

Appendix pp 1-2. After his injury Coastal Villages paid him maintenance under the maritime Jones Act, first at \$25 per day and then at \$45 per day. He could not meet his living expenses on \$775 - \$1395 a month and got farther and farther into debt. When one of his creditors froze his checking account he talked to people at the bank, and they suggested he contact an attorney. Id. at 6-7.

He found Brad Puffpaff, a sole practitioner who had been admitted to practice less than a year earlier. The two talked about the accident and the maintenance payments and surgeries. Chonah told him he didn't need a lawyer for the injury case because his employer was treating him well. He told him that once the surgeries were done they would stop paying him maintenance, and they would pay him for his lost time and loss of future wages. Id. at 4. Puffpaff gave Chonah a questionnaire to fill out but he could not understand it, so the two met again and Puffpaff filled out the form for him. Id. at 3.

The transcript of the interview with the bankruptcy trustee makes it clear that Chonah did not understand what the term "claim" meant, and that he thought the trustee was asking if he had a current lawsuit with any party:

- Q. Do you remember going to that meeting [of creditors]?
- A. Yes. sure.
- Q. And Brad was there too?
- A. We meet outside and we go in there together.
- Q. And so was he inside with you?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you remember what questions you were asked at that meeting?
- A. It wasn't many questions, but they ask you if you are telling the truth, and everything is right, but exactly the questions -- they asked a couple questions, it wasn't many.
- Q. Did they ask you anything about your injury claim?
- A. The way they asked me, like I'm going to try to say it, but it's not exactly -- I don't remember the words exactly. He asked me did you have another like Court -- I mean like issue in the Court or something, something like that, and I asked him no, because I wasn't have a claim against somebody or somebody have against me or something, just only that I have that, so I said no, I think. But exactly the question, I wasn't remember.

At that time I don't understand what is going on me is the case. It was an injury and it will be okay and that's it. That's how I it, you know.

### ld. at 5.

Puffpaff was with Chonah when the trustee interviewed him, and did not correct his answer about an injury claim. Puffpaff had mistakenly listed Chonah's income as "L&I workman's compensation--\$1395" rather than as maintenance payments under the Jones Act. <u>Id</u>. at 9. (\$45.00 per day times 31 days is \$1395.)

Workers receiving disability income under Washington's L&I cannot

sue their employers for an on-the job injury, and disability payments have a blanket exemption under the bankruptcy code:

The following property may be exempted under subsection (b)(2) of this section:

. . . .

- (10) The debtor's right to receive-
  - (A) a social security benefit, unemployment compensation, or a local public assistance benefit:
  - (B) a veterans' benefit;
  - (C) a disability, illness, or unemployment benefit;

11 U.S.C. § 522(d). Puffpaff did not have enough experience to differentiate a Jones Act claim from an L&I claim, he did not list a personal injury claim in the bankruptcy schedules, and he did not correct Chonah's testimony at the meeting of creditors.

# 3. Argument

# a. No case law holds that a trial court may not consider intent

This case is procedurally distinct from every case either party has cited; in none of these cases did a defendant appeal a trial court's decision to not impose estoppel. The cases have a common procedural stance. A plaintiff/appellant asks for the reversal of judicial estoppel because the trial court did not consider intent. The

appellate court holds that intent is not a necessary element because the guidance of New Hampshire is permissive: considerations in addition to the three factors **may** guide a court's decision and application of the doctrine **may** be inappropriate when a party's prior position was based on inadvertence or mistake. The appellate court then holds that intent is not a necessary element of the three-factor analysis and affirms the discretion of the trial court to apply estoppel.

The cases hold that the trial court is not required to make an express finding about the debtor's intent. But they do not support an argument that courts **may not** consider intent or other circumstances in addition to the three factors. For example, in discussing an Eleventh Circuit case the <u>Cunningham</u> Court acknowledged that intent was relevant, writing "While noting that judicial estoppel might not apply in cases of simple error or 'inadvertence', the court also observed that 'deliberate or intentional manipulation can be inferred from the record." <u>Cunningham v.</u>

Reliable Concrete Pumping, 126 Wn.App. 222, 234 (2005).

The Court of Appeals made no error when it recognized, as a matter of comity, the express finding of the Bankruptcy Court that Chonah did not intentionally conceal his maritime claim in his original bankruptcy filing. The trial court exercised its discretion well

within the strictures of <u>New Hampshire</u> and <u>Arkison</u> when it decided that judicial estoppel was not appropriate because Chonah's failure to disclose his claim was inadvertent.

# b. Trial courts are not bound to apply judicial estoppel whenever the three New Hampshire factors are present

Judicial estoppel is invoked to protect the integrity of the judicial process by "prohibiting parties from deliberately changing positions according to the exigencies of the moment." New Hampshire at 750. In the bankruptcy context the doctrine serves to encourage full disclosure, and "creditors and bankruptcy courts rely on the accuracy of disclosure statements." Cunningham v. Reliable Concrete Pumping, 126 Wn.App. 222 (2005), footnote 10.

Given the purposes of the doctrine it makes no sense to argue a court cannot consider all the circumstances of the case, and in particular whether a debtor intentionally hid a claim. When debtors make unintentional mistakes they are not affronting the integrity of the courts, and applying estoppel against mistaken debtors does nothing to encourage compliance with bankruptcy disclosure requirements.

Costal Villages attempts to shackle the discretion inherent in equity when it argues that courts "may not consider factors which have been expressly deemed irrelevant to the judicial estoppel analysis." No published case has deemed any factor irrelevant.

The guidance in <a href="New Hampshire">New Hampshire</a> and <a href="Arkison">Arkison</a> is permissive and open-ended, that the three factors are not an exhaustive formula and additional considerations may guide a court's decision.

The trial court was following this guidance when it weighed additional circumstances including "quirks of maritime and bankruptcy law" and "language and cultural barriers".

### 5. CONCLUSION

Coastal Villages has not articulated how the purposes of judicial estoppel would be served by imposing it in this case. No matter how strong Chonah's Jones Act case might be or how clear his innocence in omitting the claim from his bankruptcy filing, he would be denied his day in court, the alleged wrongdoer would avoid all liability, and his creditors in bankruptcy would recover nothing. The very purpose of the doctrine of judicial estoppel, protecting the integrity of the judicial process, would be thwarted.

Coastal Villages has not cited any case law that supports its

position that the trial court was mistaken when it weighed language

and cultural barriers, quirks of maritime and bankruptcy law, and

questionable legal advice.

When it argues that the trial court must impose estoppel in a

mechanical manner whenever the three factors in New Hampshire

are present it distorts the purpose of the doctrine. "Because the rule

is intended to prevent the improper use of judicial machinery, judicial

estoppel is an equitable doctrine invoked by a court at its discretion."

New Hampshire at 750 (internal quotation marks and citation

omitted).

Hishm Chonah requests that this Court deny review.

Dated November 19, 2018

Michael Healy, WSBA #33756

Attorney for Respondent Hishm Chonah

10

# NO. <u>76201-0-I</u>

# COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON DIVISION 1

## HISHM CHONAH,

Respondent / Plaintiff,

v.

COASTAL VILLAGES POLLOCK, LLC and C/P NORTHERN HAWK, LLC, Petitioners / Defendants.

## **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I certify that on November 19, 2018, I served via e-service a true and correct copy of the Opposition to Discretionary Review on the following entities:

The Court of Appeals for the State of Washington, Division I One Union Square 600 University Street Seattle, WA 98101

Michael Barcott and Daniel Barcott Holmes Weddle & Barcott 999 3rd Ave, Suite 2600 Seattle, WA 98104

Date November 19, 2018

/s/ Michael Healy

# Appendix page 1

1	А.	September 15.	10:33		
2	Q. Where were you born?				
3	A.	Sudan.	10:33		
4	Q.	When did you come to the U.S.?	10:33		
5	A.	2001.	10:33		
6	Q.	What caused you to come to the U.S.?	10:33		
7	A.	How I come, you mean?	10:33		
8	Q.	Why you came.	10:33		
9	A.	The reason I came here was to live here and study	10:33		
10	here, th	at was the reason.	10:34		
11	Q.	Was there anything going on in Sudan? Was there	10:34		
12	fighting	there or anything like that that caused you to move out	10:34		
13	of Sudan	?	10:34		
14	Α.	No, just looking for a better life.	10:34		
15	Q.	Do you have family in Sudan?	10:34		
16	Α.	Yes.	10:34		
17	Q.	What family members do you have in Sudan, immediate	10:34		
18	family?		10:34		
19	Α.	All of them. My dad, mom, brother and sister, all of	10:34		
20	them her	e.	10:34		
21	Q.	How many brothers and sisters?	10:34		
22	Α.	I have seven brothers and one sister.	10:34		
23	Q.	Are you the only member of your immediate family that	10:34		
24	is livin	g in the U.S.?	10:34		
25	А.	Yes.	10:34		

1	Q.	How many students in that university?	10:40
2	A.	It's a big university. I don't know how many.	10:40
3	Q.	Like ten, 20, 30,000?	10:40
4	A.	It could be that. It could be more. I'm not sure	10:40
5	exactly.	It's getting bigger right now.	10:41
6	Q.	And you graduated with a specialty in accounting?	10:41
7	A.	Yeah.	10:41
8	Q.	When you came to the U.S. did you ever consider going	10:41
9	into acc	ounting here?	10:41
10	Α.	That was the first thing I think about, but it doesn't	10:41
11	happen.		10:41
12	Q.	How come?	10:41
13	A.	Well, first I need to study the English language and	10:41
14	then I n	eed to go to school and at the same time I need to make	10:41
15	money to	help I have family back there, so it became hard.	10:41
16	And then	I go to fishing and the more I get income, the more	10:41
17	they nee	d money, you know, that's how life is, so it just became	10:41
18	that way		10:41
19	Q.	I'm familiar with that. Have you had any education in	10:41
20	the U.S.	at all?	10:41
21	Α.	Just a couple classes here and there, but not really.	10:41
22	Did I go	to college or something? No. When I was in American	10:41
23	Seafood	I had ESL once, something like that, I believe.	10:41
24	Q.	How is your English ability now compared to three	10:42
25	years ag	o? About the same?	10:42

1	of the unique posture of this case.	11:21
2	MR. BARCOTT: I was going to just ask you to do that	11:21
3	because those conversations are just so central to where we are.	11:21
4	MR. MERRIAM: Yeah, I know. I'll waive it will say we	11:21
5	can reimpose it at any time.	11:21
6	(Marked Deposition Exhibit 2).	11:21
7	Q. This is the paper that was filed in the bankruptcy	11:22
8	court that started the process of reopening your bankruptcy and	11:22
9	later converting. This is a paper signed by the lawyers. There	11:22
10	are certain things that I want to find out if they are accurate	11:22
11	in this paper or not accurate in this paper.	11:22
12	Go to page 3, please. Going to line 4, at the end of	11:22
13	line 4 there is a sentence that begins "He gave Chonah a	11:22
14	questionnaire to take home and fill out."	11:22
15	A. Hold on. Which line?	11:23
16	Q. Three down. It starts "He gave."	11:23
17	A. Number 2 or number 3?	11:23
18	Q. It's between 3 and 4.	11:23
19	A. "He gave," yeah	11:23
20	Q Chonah a questionnaire to take home and fill out,	11:23
21	but Chonah's English was not good enough to understand the	11:23
22	questions so Puffpaff completed it at a second interview."	11:23
23	So Puffpaff completed it at the second interview.	11:23
24	That's just what you told me about a few minutes ago, right?	11:23
25	A. Yes.	11:23

1	Q.	"Chonah told Puffpaff he expected to receive a payment	11:23
2	from Coa	stal Villages for the wages he had lost and for his loss	11:23
3	of futur	re wages. He said he expected the payment once his	11:23
4	surgerie	s were completed and the maintenance payments stopped,	11:23
5	and was	concerned that he might need an attorney if Coastal	11:23
6	Villages	offered too little."	11:24
7	Α.	Yes.	11:24
8	Q.	You told Mr. Puffpaff that you would get some money	11:24
9	from Coa	stal Villages after your maintenance stopped?	11:24
10	Α.	Yes.	11:24
11	Q.	And once again, Mr. Puffpaff didn't tell you anything	11:24
12	about ho	w that might impact your bankruptcy?	11:24
13	Α.	No.	11:24
14	Q.	Do you own a home?	11:24
15	А.	No.	11:24
16	Q.	Have you ever owned a home?	11:24
17	Α.	My family used to have one, but no, like me.	11:24
18	Q.	Have you rented a place to live for the last five	11:24
19	years?		11:24
20	Α.	Yeah. Yeah, I'm renting still the same.	11:24
21	Q.	Go to page 4 of this paper, please.	11:24
22	Α.	Excuse me. Do you mind if I stand up?	11:25
23	Q.	Do you want to keep going?	11:25
24	Α.	No, I'm fine.	11:25
25	Q.	Go to line 13. This paper says, "His inexperienced	11:25

1	Α.	Yes, right.	11:50
2	Q.	Do you remember going to that meeting?	11:50
3	Α.	Yes, sure.	11:50
4	Q.	And Brad was there too?	11:50
5	Α.	We meet outside and we go in there together.	11:50
6	Q.	And so was he inside with you?	11:50
7	Α.	Yes.	11:50
8	Q.	Do you remember what questions you were asked at that	11:50
9	meeting?		11:50
10	Α.	It wasn't many questions, but they ask you if you are	11:50
11	telling	the truth, and everything is right, but exactly the	11:50
12	question	s they asked a couple questions, it wasn't many.	11:50
13	Q.	Did they ask you anything about your injury claim?	11:50
14	Α.	The way they asked me, like I'm going to try to say	11:50
15	it, but	it's not exactly I don't remember the words exactly.	11:51
16	He asked	me did you have another like Court I mean like issue	11:51
17	in the C	ourt or something, something like that, and I asked him	11:51
18	no, beca	use I wasn't have a claim against somebody or somebody	11:51
19	have aga	inst me or something, just only that I have that, so I	11:51
20	said no,	I think. But exactly the question, I wasn't remember.	11:51
21		At that time I don't understand what is going on me is	11:51
22	the case	. It was an injury and it will be okay and that's it.	11:51
23	That's h	ow I it, you know.	11:51
24		(Marked Deposition Exhibit 6.)	11:51
25	Q.	Mr. Chonah, Exhibit 6 is the order of the bankruptcy	11:52

1	Q.	Right. It was American Seafoods in 2001?	11:02
2	Α.	Yes.	11:02
3	Q.	Okay. Is there anything else in paragraph 1 that is	11:02
4	not accu	rate?	11:02
5	Α.	Yes, it's fine.	11:02
6	Q.	Everything else is accurate? Yes?	11:02
7	Α.	Yes.	11:02
8	Q.	So the very next paragraph starts off "In December	11:02
9	2013 my	bank account was frozen and I went to see an attorney,	11:02
10	Brad Puf	fpaff."	11:02
11		Do you see that?	11:02
12	Α.	Yes.	11:03
13	Q.	Is that true, was your bank account frozen in December	11:03
14	2013?		11:03
15	Α.	I'm not sure of the month, but I think that's true.	11:03
16	Q.	Around that time was your bank account frozen?	11:03
17	А.	I think so.	11:03
18	Q.	How did you learn your bank account was frozen?	11:03
19	А.	Well, I went one time to my account and there was no	11:03
20	money th	ere and it showed me zero there and I was I didn't	11:03
21	know wha	t was going on, and then I checked like my like my	11:03
22	what do	they call that? like my mail and I found out they	11:03
23	sent me	something like that and I couldn't understand what it	11:03
24	means.		11:03
25		So I asked the bank when I see the zero there and I'm	11:03

1	sure there is money there, and they check with me and they tell	11:03
2	me we don't know what's going on, you can talk to your attorney	11:03
3	or something, so I found out something was going on.	11:03
4	Q. When you were told who it was, which of your creditors	11:03
5	had taken the funds out of your account?	11:04
6	A. I don't remember. Nobody take nothing. They just	11:04
7	freeze it.	11:04
8	Q. Do you know who it was, who froze it?	11:04
9	A. I'm not sure.	11:04
10	Q. You saw attorney Brad Puffpaff. How did you find that	11:04
11	attorney?	11:04
12	A. I called one lawyer, I know him, like I have him	11:04
13	(inaudible), so I called his office and they don't do this, and	11:04
14	they give me some other guy and I call, but he say no, too. So	11:04
15	then I just go on-line and found someone and I called and they	11:04
16	give me his office. I don't know what they call that	11:04
17	connection.	11:04
18	So I called his office I called somebody else and	11:04
19	they said no, I'm not doing this, but here, I will give you a	11:04
20	transfer to my worker in the same office, you can do that, so	11:04
21	that's how I found him.	11:04
22	Q. So that was Brad who you got transferred to in the	11:04
23	same office?	11:05
24	A. Yes.	11:05
25	Q. The next sentence of the declaration, it says, "He and	11:05

						Appendix page 8
Fill in this infor	mation to identif	y your case:				
Debtor 1	Hishm		Chonah			
	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name		Che	ck if this is:
Debtor 2	First Name	Middle Nome	Last Name		l_	An amended filing
(Spouse, if filing)	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name			A supplement showing post-petition
United States Ban Case number	kruptcy Court for the:	WESTERN D	DISTRICT OF WA	SHINGT	ON L	chapter 13 income as of the following date:
(if known)	-			_		MM / DD / YYYY
O(() : 1 E E	201					
Official Form E						
Schedule I: Y	our Income					12/13
include information about your spouse. your name and case	about your spouse. If more space is nee	If you are separ ded, attach a se Answer every c	ated and your spo eparate sheet to th	use is no	ot filing with y	spouse is living with you, ou, do not include information any additional pages, write
Fill in your emp information.	loyment		Dobtor 1			Debter 2 or you filing analysis
If you have more			Debtor 1			Debtor 2 or non-filing spouse
job, attach a sep with information		yment status	<ul><li>☐ Employed</li><li>✓ Not employed</li></ul>	ad		☐ Employed ☐ Not employed
additional emplo	vers.	-41		Ju		Not employed
Include part-time	Occup	ation	Unemployed			
or self-employed		yer's name				
Occupation may student or home applies.	- inpi	yer's address	Number Street			Number Street
			City	Stat	te Zip Code	City State Zip Code
	How I	ong employed t	here?			
		ou file this forr		ing to repo	ort for any line	, write \$0 in the space. Include your
If you or your non-filing you need more space			er, combine the info	ormation fo	or all employe	rs for that person on the lines below. If
				For	r Debtor 1	For Debtor 2 or non-filing spouse
	oss wages, salary, ans). If not paid monthl			2	\$0.00	
3. Estimate and lis	st monthly overtime	oay.		3. + _	\$0.00	
4. Calculate gross	s income. Add line 2	+ line 3.		4.	\$0.00	

Official Form B 6I Schedule I: Your Income page 1 First Name

Appendix page 9

Case number (if known)

		F -	or Debtor 1	For Debto non-filing			
	Copy line 4 here	4.	\$0.00				
5.	List all payroll deductions:			•			
	5a. Tax, Medicare, and Social Security deductions	5a.	\$0.00				
	5b. Mandatory contributions for retirement plans	5b.	\$0.00				
	5c. Voluntary contributions for retirement plans	5c.	\$0.00				
	5d. Required repayments of retirement fund loans	5d.	\$0.00				
	5e. Insurance	5e.	\$0.00				
	5f. Domestic support obligations	5f.	\$0.00				
	5g. Union dues	5g.	\$0.00				
	5h. Other deductions.  Specify:	5h. <b>+</b>	\$0.00				
6.	<b>Add the payroll deductions.</b> Add lines 5a + 5b + 5c + 5d + 5e + 5f + 5g + 5h.	6.	\$0.00				
7.	Calculate total monthly take-home pay. Subtract line 6 from line 4.	7.	\$0.00				
8.	List all other income regularly received:						
	8a. Net income from rental property and from operating a business, profession, or farm	8a.	\$0.00				
	Attach a statement for each property and business showing gross receipts, ordinary and necessary business expenses, and the total monthly net income.						
	8b. Interest and dividends	8b.	\$0.00				
	8c. Family support payments that you, a non-filing spouse, or a dependent regularly receive	8c.	\$0.00				
	Include alimony, spousal support, child support, maintenance, divorce settlement, and property settlement.						
	8d. Unemployment compensation	8d.	\$0.00				
	8e. Social Security	8e.	\$0.00				
	8f. Other government assistance that you regularly receive Include cash assistance and the value (if known) or any non-cash assistance that you receive, such as food stamps (benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or housing subsidies.						
	Specify: L&I WORKMAN'S COMPENSATION	_ 8f.	\$1,395.00				
	8g. Pension or retirement income	8g.	\$0.00				
	8h. Other monthly income. Specify:	8h. <b>+</b>	\$0.00				
9.	<b>Add all other income.</b> Add lines 8a + 8b + 8c + 8d + 8e + 8f + 8g + 8h.	9.	\$1,395.00				
10.	Calculate monthly income. Add line 7 + line 9. Add the entries in line 10 for Debtor 1 and Debtor 2 or non-filing spouse.	10.	\$1,395.00	+		\$1,395.00	
11.	<ol> <li>State all other regular contributions to the expenses that you list in Schedule J.         Include contributions from an unmarried partner, members of your household, your dependents, your roommates, and other friends or relatives.     </li> </ol>						
	Do not include any amounts already included in lines 2-10 or amounts that	at are no	t available to pay e	expenses liste	ed in Sche		
	Specify:				11. <b>+</b>	\$0.00	
12.	Add the amount in the last column of line 10 to the amount in line 11. income. Write that amount on the Summary of Schedules and Statistical Related Data, if it applies.				12.	\$1,395.00 Combined monthly income	
13.	Do you expect an increase or decrease within the year after you file	this forn	n?			•	
	✓ No. None.  Yes. Explain:						

Official Form B 6I Schedule I: Your Income page 2

## LAW OFFICES OF MIKE HEALY

# November 19, 2018 - 3:30 PM

# **Transmittal Information**

Filed with Court: Supreme Court

**Appellate Court Case Number:** 96384-3

**Appellate Court Case Title:** Hishm Chonah v. Coastal Villages Pollock, LLC, et al.

**Superior Court Case Number:** 16-2-01184-5

## The following documents have been uploaded:

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