



PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
Lt. Governor

New Jersey Office of the Attorney General

Division of Consumer Affairs
Office of Consumer Protection
124 Halsey Street, 7th Floor, Newark, NJ 07102



GURBIR S. GREWAL
Attorney General

PAUL R. RODRÍGUEZ
Acting Director

August 17, 2020

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 45025
Newark, NJ 07101
(973) 504-6200

VIA CERTIFIED AND REGULAR MAIL

Bravo Supermarket, Inc.
1567 E. State Street
Trenton, NJ 08609
Attn: Radhames Almonte, Registered Agent

NOTICE OF VIOLATION AND OFFER OF SETTLEMENT

Dear Mr. Almonte:

The New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs, Office of Consumer Protection (“Division”) is charged with the enforcement of the New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act, N.J.S.A. 56:8-1 to -226 (“CFA”), including N.J.S.A. 56:8-108 to -109 (“Excessive Pricing Statute”) and N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5 to -2.6 (“Merchandise Pricing Statute”). The Division has conducted an investigation of Bravo Supermarket, Inc. (“You” or “Your”) as a result of consumer complaints received by the Division in connection with price gouging by You in the sale of Poland Spring Water Cases (35 count) (hereinafter “Poland Spring Cases”), (hereinafter “Investigation”).

As set forth in the attached Certification of Investigator April Amisson (“Investigator Amisson”), and Certification of Investigator Katelyn Robertello (“Investigator Robertello”), You have been found to have engaged in price gouging in the sale of Poland Spring Cases, and to have attempted to sell or offer for sale Poland Spring Cases without the total selling price plainly marked, in violation of the CFA.

The CFA, specifically **N.J.S.A. 56:8-109**, prohibits excessive and unjustified price increases in the offer for sale and/or sale of certain merchandise, which is consumed or used as a direct result of an emergency or which is consumed or used to preserve, protect or sustain life, health, safety or comfort of persons, including the offer for sale and/or sale of Poland Spring Cases, when a declared State of Emergency results in abnormal disruptions of the market.

In addition, the Merchandise Pricing Statute, specifically N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5, states:

It shall be an unlawful practice for any person to sell, attempt to sell or offer for sale any merchandise at retail unless the total selling price of

such merchandise is plainly marked by a stamp, tag, label or sign either affixed to the merchandise or located at the point where the merchandise is offered for sale.

The Merchandise Pricing Statute, specifically N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.6, also provides:

For the purposes of this act, each day for which the total selling price is not marked in accordance with the provisions of this act for each group of identical merchandise shall constitute a separate violation of this act and the act of which this act is a supplement.

As a result of the Division's Investigation, You have been found to have:

1. Engaged in the offer for sale and/or sale of merchandise consumed or used as a direct result of an emergency and/or which is consumed or used to preserve, protect, or sustain the life, health, safety or comfort of a person or their property within the meaning of N.J.S.A. 56:8-109, specifically Poland Spring Cases, at an "excessive price" within the meaning of N.J.S.A. 56:8-108 during the State of Emergency declared by Governor Philip S. Murphy on March 9, 2020 at 5:53 p.m. and within thirty (30) days after the declaration of the State of Emergency is terminated, or for such other period of time as the Governor may extend by executive order. Specifically, Bravo Supermarket, Inc. sold or offered for sale, Poland Spring Cases, between March 10, 2020 and at least May 8, 2020 at \$10.99 and \$12.99, a price more than ten percent (10%) higher than the prices at which Poland Spring Cases were offered for sale and/or sold by You in the usual course of business immediately prior to the State of Emergency.
2. Attempted to sell or offer for sale merchandise without a tag or label indicating the total selling price, in violation of N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5.

Each of these violations constitutes a separate violation of the CFA, subjecting You to civil penalties, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-13, as well as reimbursement of investigative costs and/or attorneys' fees, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-11 and N.J.S.A. 56:8-19.

IF YOU DO NOT CONTEST THE VIOLATIONS ALLEGED and wish to avail Yourself of this opportunity to settle the Investigation, within **fifteen (15)** days from the date of this Notice, You should sign and return the **enclosed Answering Certification** and agree to the following:

1. Cease and desist from engaging in any practices in violation of the CFA;
2. Cease and desist from selling, attempting to sell or offering for sale merchandise unless the total selling price of such merchandise is plainly marked by a stamp, tag, label or sign affixed to the merchandise or located at the point where the merchandise is offered for sale, as required by the Merchandise Pricing Statute, N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5;
3. Cease and desist from selling, attempting to sell or offering for sale merchandise at prices more than ten percent (10%) higher than the items' prices in the usual course of business

- immediately prior to the State of Emergency, as required by N.J.S.A. 56:8-109;
4. Pay a civil penalty in the amount of \$5,500.00; and
 5. Pay investigative costs in the amount of \$250.00.

If the above-referenced payment in the total amount of \$5,750.00 is received by the Division, along with your signed Answering Certification, You need not do anything further.

IF YOU DO NOT CONTEST THE VIOLATIONS ALLEGED, but want to present information to Division representatives about any mitigating circumstances in Your case that may persuade the Division to reduce the civil penalty, You may request an informal **Mitigation Conference**. If You request a Mitigation Conference **You will waive Your right to an Administrative Hearing**. The Mitigation Conference date is **August 21, 2020, at 10:00 a.m., at 124 Halsey Street, 7th Floor, Newark, New Jersey 07102 with Investigator Amisson, a representative of the Division. You may be accompanied by an attorney. Should you have any questions regarding this procedure, or seek an adjournment of this date, please contact Investigator Robertello at (973) 504-6522 or at RobertelloK@dca.njoag.gov. Alternatively, You may send written documentation to the Division concerning any mitigating circumstances that You believe may persuade the Division to reduce the civil penalty. To elect either of these options, You must return the enclosed Answering Certification within fifteen (15) days from the date of this Notice. The Division will then review this material and respond to You.**

IF YOU CONTEST THE VIOLATIONS ALLEGED, and do not wish to settle the matter consistent with the terms set forth above, **You may request a formal Administrative Hearing by returning the enclosed Answering Certification within fifteen (15) days from the date of this Notice.** In that event, this Notice will serve as notice of the violations against you. You should be aware that in making its final decision, the Director of the Division may, if violations of the above-referenced statute and regulations have been proven, order civil penalties and remedies other than the settlement offer above. **Specifically, You may be ordered to: pay civil penalties in an amount up to \$10,000 for the first violation and up to \$20,000 for the second violation and each subsequent violation pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-13; pay consumer restitution pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-15; and pay investigative costs and attorneys' fees to the Division, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-11 and 56:8-19 and cease and desist from act or practice in violation of CFA, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-18.**

Before a determination is made with regard to whether an **Administrative Hearing** will be conducted before the Acting Director of the Division or referred to the Office of Administrative Law, a **Pre-Hearing Conference** will be held. If You request an **Administrative Hearing**, your **Pre-Hearing Conference** will be scheduled on **August 21, 2020, at 10:00 a.m., at 124 Halsey Street, 7th Floor, Newark, New Jersey 07102 with Investigator Amisson, a representative of the Division. You may be accompanied by an attorney. Should You have any questions regarding this procedure, or seek an adjournment of this date, please contact Investigator Robertello at (973) 504-6522 or at RobertelloK@dca.njoag.gov. Your attendance at this Pre-Hearing Conference is mandatory.** Any failure to appear without a satisfactory explanation may result in an order barring You from raising certain defenses at the **Administrative Hearing**, pursuant to **N.J.A.C. 1:1-14.4.**

The purpose of this **Pre-Hearing Conference** is to discuss the issues in this matter and the defenses, which You may wish to raise. You should be prepared to discuss the evidence You will propose to offer at the **Administrative Hearing**. It may be helpful if You bring to the **Pre-Hearing Conference** a copy of any documentation that supports Your position. If the Director of the Division determines that there are no material facts in dispute, You will have an opportunity to submit legal arguments and any documentation that may be relevant to the ultimate disposition of this matter. If there are material facts in dispute, an **Administrative Hearing** will be scheduled. During the **Administrative Hearing**, You, either personally or with the assistance of an attorney, will have an opportunity to respond to the alleged violations and submit evidence and present testimony as may be necessary for the Director of the Division to make a final determination. **Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 1:1-5.1, and except as provided in N.J.A.C. 1:1-5.4, a corporation must be represented by an attorney.**

IF YOU FAIL TO RESPOND to this Notice within fifteen (15) days of the date of this Notice, the settlement offer will be withdrawn, and You will be deemed in default. The allegations against You will be deemed uncontested. Thereafter, this Notice and the underlying proofs may be reviewed by the Acting Director of the Division, and a **Final Decision and Order on Default (“Order”)** will be issued, and **You may be ordered to: pay civil penalties in an amount up to \$10,000 for the first violation and up to \$20,000 for the second violation and each subsequent violation pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-13; pay consumer restitution pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-15; and pay investigative costs and attorneys’ fees to the Division pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-11 and 56:8-19. You will receive no further notice from the Division prior to issuance of an Order.** Once an **Order** has been entered, Your failure to pay any civil penalties, attorneys’ fees, investigative costs and/or restitution within the time allowed will result in the filing of a **Certificate of Debt. Any subsequent violation of an Order with a cease and desist provision may subject You to a penalty of up to \$25,000 per violation pursuant to N.J.S.A. 56:8-18.** Service of an **Order** will be deemed effective if sent by first-class mail and certified mail, return receipt requested, to your last known mailing address.

Should You have any questions, please contact Investigator Robertello at (973) 504-6522 or at RobertelloK@dca.njoag.gov.

New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs
Office of Consumer Protection

By: /S/ Gregory K. Turner

Gregory K. Turner
Assistant Deputy of Enforcement

ANSWERING CERTIFICATION

Bravo Supermarket, Inc.

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that I have read and reviewed the Notice, regarding alleged violations of the CFA, N.J.S.A. 56:8-1 to -226, including the Merchandise Pricing Statute, N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5 to -2.6, and the Excessive Pricing Statute, N.J.S.A. 56:8-108 to -109.

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE OPTIONS BELOW:

(OPTION 1):

_____ **I DO NOT CONTEST THE VIOLATIONS ALLEGED** and acknowledge the conduct that has been alleged and **agree** to:

1. Cease and desist from engaging in any practices in violation of the CFA;
2. Cease and desist from selling, attempting to sell or offering for sale merchandise unless the total selling price of such merchandise is plainly marked by a stamp, tag, label or sign affixed to the merchandise or located at the point where the merchandise is offered for sale, as required by the Merchandise Pricing Statute, N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5;
3. Cease and desist from selling, attempting to sell or offering for sale merchandise at prices more than ten percent (10%) higher than the prices in the usual course of business immediately prior to the State of Emergency, as required by N.J.S.A. 56:8-109;
4. Pay a civil penalty in the amount of \$5,500.00; and
5. Pay investigative costs in the amount of \$250.00.

I understand that if the above-referenced payment in the total amount of \$5,750.00 is received by the Division, along with my signed Answering Certification, I need not do anything further.

I am also aware that the action taken against Bravo Supermarket, Inc. by the Division herein is a matter of public record, and that the Division's **Notice** and this Answering Certification are public documents. I am enclosing herewith a cashier's check or money order in the sum of **\$5,750.00** made payable to the "New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs", which I am mailing or delivering to: New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety, Division of Consumer Affairs, Office of Consumer Protection, 124 Halsey Street, P.O. Box 45025, Newark, New Jersey 07101, ATTN: **Van Mallet**.

Dated: _____

By: _____

SIGN NAME

Name: _____
PRINT NAME

(OPTION 2)

_____ **I DO NOT CONTEST THE VIOLATIONS ALLEGED** and hereby waive any rights I may have to a hearing in this matter to defend Bravo Supermarket, Inc. against any alleged violations, **BUT** I ask the Division to consider mitigating circumstances before rendering its final decision.

_____ I request a **Mitigation Conference** to present information to Division representatives; I understand that the Mitigation Conference will be held **on August 21, 2020 at 10:00 a.m., at 124 Halsey Street, 7th Floor, Newark, New Jersey 07101. I am aware that I may be represented by an attorney at the Mitigation Conference.**

_____ I am submitting **written documentation concerning mitigating circumstances**; I understand that the Division will consider this material before rendering a final decision.

I understand that, if, after considering the mitigation evidence presented, the Division is not persuaded that any reduction in the amounts set forth above and in the **Notice** is warranted or that any of the other terms or conditions should be modified, the following terms may be ordered and Bravo Supermarket, Inc. will be obligated to:

1. Cease and desist from engaging in any practices in violation of the CFA;
2. Cease and desist from selling, attempting to sell or offering for sale merchandise unless the total selling price of such merchandise is plainly marked by a stamp, tag, label or sign affixed to the merchandise or located at the point where the merchandise is offered for sale, as required by the Merchandise Pricing Statute, N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5;
3. Cease and desist from selling, attempting to sell or offering for sale merchandise at prices more than ten percent (10%) higher than the prices in the usual course of business immediately prior to the State of Emergency, as required by N.J.S.A. 56:8-109;
4. Pay a civil penalty in the amount of \$5,500.00; and
5. Pay investigative costs in the amount of \$250.00.

If a modification in these terms is accepted by the Division, I will be notified of the amounts that I must pay. I am also aware that the action taken against Bravo Supermarket, Inc. by the Division herein is a matter of public record, and that the Division's **Notice** and this Answering Certification are public documents. I am further aware that failure to comply may subject Bravo Supermarket, Inc. to further enforcement proceedings and any failure to make a required payment will result in the filing of a **Certificate of Debt**.

Dated: _____

By: _____
SIGN NAME

Name: _____
PRINT NAME

(OPTION 3)

_____ I CONTEST THE VIOLATIONS ALLEGED and request a formal Administrative Hearing. I understand that I am required to attend a **Pre-Hearing Conference on August 21, 2020 at 10:00 a.m., at 124 Halsey Street, 7th Floor, Newark, New Jersey 07102**, at which the issues in this matter will be discussed. **I am aware that I may be represented by an attorney at the Pre-Hearing Conference.**

If the Division and I agree upon any essential settlement terms at the **Pre-Hearing Conference**, I understand that:

1. These terms will be included in a document (“Pre-Hearing Settlement Sheet”);
2. The Division representative and I will sign the Pre-Hearing Settlement Sheet and Bravo Supermarket, Inc. will be bound by it; and
3. The Division will send me a **Consent Order**, which will include all settlement terms. I also understand that **I must sign and return the Consent Order and any required payment to the Division within thirty (30) days** of the date that the Division sends it to me.

I further understand that if I fail to do so, the Division will present this matter to the Acting Director of the Division based upon the **Notice**, and a **Final Decision and Order After NOV (“Order”)** will be issued. **I will receive no further notice from the Division prior to issuance of an Order.**

If the Division and I do not agree upon settlement terms at the **Pre-Hearing Conference**, I will thereafter be advised of the time, date and place for the **Administrative Hearing** if a determination has been made that there are material facts in dispute. **I am aware that I may be represented by an attorney at the Administrative Hearing.** I am also aware that at the time of the **Administrative Hearing**, I may offer testimony, documentation and legal argument relevant to the alleged violations. **I understand that in making a final decision, the Director of the Division may, if unlawful activity has been proven, assess civil penalties, restoration of donor contributions, as well as attorneys’ fees and investigative costs and/or issue a cease and desist order exceeding the settlement offer in the Notice**, and may order such other remedies as deemed appropriate. I am also aware that this proceeding is a matter of public record and that the **Notice** and this **Answering Certification** are public documents.

Dated: _____

By: _____
SIGN NAME

Name: _____
PRINT NAME

Bravo Supermarket, Inc.
1567 E. State Street
Trenton, NJ 08609
Attn: Radhames Almonte, Registered Agent

INVESTIGATIVE CERTIFICATION

I, April Amisson, being of full age, do hereby certify as follows:

1. I am employed as an Investigator by the Office of the Attorney General, Division of Consumer Affairs, Office of Consumer Protection ("Division"), located at 124 Halsey Street, Newark, New Jersey 07101, and have held that position at all times relevant to this Certification.
2. On March 12, 2020, the Division commenced an Investigation with respect to Bravo Supermarket, Inc., located at 1567 E. State Street, Trenton, NJ 08609, after receiving consumer complaints.
3. On March 14, 2020, I conducted an inspection of merchandise being offered for sale to ensure that a tag/label containing the total selling price was affixed to each item or at the point where the merchandise was offered for sale, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 56:8-2.5 to -2.6, including Poland Spring Water Cases (35 count) ("Poland Spring Water Cases"). After an inspection of the usual location of Poland Spring Water Cases within the store, I noted that the total selling price was not affixed at the point where the Poland Spring Water Cases were offered for sale, and there were no Poland Spring Water Cases on display for sale. See Exhibit A. I also asked the manager, Sandy Almonte, about the price of the Poland Spring Water Cases, and was informed that the regular price of each Poland Spring Water Case was \$9.99, and the sales price was \$6.99 for the said product.
4. Certain of the above-referenced exhibits contain personal identifying information. That information has been redacted.

I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.


April Amisson

Dated: August 11, 2020
Newark, New Jersey

Bravo Supermarket, Inc.
1567 E. State Street
Trenton, NJ 08609
Attn: Radhames Almonte, Registered Agent

INVESTIGATIVE CERTIFICATION

I, Katelyn Robertello, being of full age, do hereby certify as follows:

1. I am employed as an Investigator by the Office of the Attorney General, Division of Consumer Affairs, Office of Consumer Protection (“Division”), located at 124 Halsey Street, Newark, New Jersey 07101, and have held that position at all times relevant to this Certification.
2. On March 12, 2020, the Division commenced an Investigation with respect to Bravo Supermarket, Inc., located at 1567 E. State Street, Trenton, NJ 08609, after receiving consumer complaints.
3. As part of the Division’s investigation, a subpoena, dated March 18, 2020, was issued to Bravo Supermarket, Inc., to which the company partially responded. See Exhibit B. Bravo Supermarket, Inc. provided invoices for the purchase of Poland Spring Water Cases (35 count) (“Poland Spring Water Cases”) on February 6, 2020, March 17, 2020, April 2, 2020, and April 27, 2020. See Exhibit C. According to the invoices, Bravo Supermarket, Inc. purchased the Poland Spring Water Cases at \$4.58 per item on February 17, 2020 through April 2, 2020, and purchased the product for \$4.99 on April 27, 2020. The company also provided a sales summary report, which represented that Bravo Supermarket, Inc. sold Poland Spring Water Cases for \$6.99 per item from February 17, 2020 through March 7, 2020, \$9.99 from March 8, 2020 through March 9, 2020, \$10.99 on March 10, 2020, and between \$10.99 to \$12.99 from March 11, 2020 through May 8, 2020. See Exhibit C. In fact, Bravo Supermarket, Inc. sold Poland Spring Water Cases for at least \$10.99 a total of twenty-seven (27) times between March 11, 2020 through May 8, 2020. Id.
4. A review of the above-listed documents reveals incidents of price gouging with respect to Poland Spring Water Cases at Bravo Supermarket, Inc., as defined by **N.J.S.A. 56:8-109**. See Exhibits C. The \$4.00 increase in price of Poland Spring Water Cases from \$8.99 to \$12.99 per item represents a 44.49% increase in price, while the increase in cost to Bravo Supermarket, Inc. from \$4.58 per item to \$4.99 represents an 8.95% increase in supply cost. Thus, Bravo Supermarket, Inc. increased the price of each Poland Spring Water Case by 35.54%. This constitutes price gouging under the CFA as this 35.54% increase in price exceeds the statutorily permitted 10% price increase.

5. Bravo Supermarket, Inc.'s sales summary report also demonstrated that Bravo Supermarket, Inc. sold Poland Spring Water Cases at inconsistent prices during the same day on at least one occasion. According to the sales summary report, Bravo Supermarket, Inc. sold Poland Spring Water Cases for \$9.99, \$10.99, and \$12.99 on March 11, 2020.
6. Certain of the above-referenced exhibits contain personal identifying information. That information has been redacted.

I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.



Katelyn Robertello

Dated: August 11, 2020
Newark, New Jersey