



December 17, 2013

VIA E-MAIL AND OVERNIGHT MAIL

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan
Consumer Fraud Bureau
500 South Second Street
Springfield, IL 62706
lisamadigan@atg.state.il.us

Re: TEFL Institute's false and deceptive marketing

Dear Attorney General Madigan:

I am writing to you on behalf of Truth in Advertising, Inc. (TINA.org), a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to protecting consumers from deceptive advertising. I wrote to inform you of a false and deceptive marketing issue concerning the TEFL Institute Corporation, an Illinois company selling "Teaching English as a Foreign Language" training and certification to consumers looking for future employment in the education sector.

On its website, the company claims to be accredited by NATEFLAC, a "leading TEFL accrediting organization based in the United States." *See* http://www.teflinstitute.com/tefl_institute_difference.php, last visited on Dec. 17, 2013 (a copy of this webpage is attached hereto as Exhibit A). Based on a consumer complaint, TINA.org investigated this statement and was unable to find any organization by the name of NATEFLAC (there is no listing for NATEFLAC on any search engine and the links provided on the TEFL Institute's website for the organization do not connect to any such organization). In fact, to TINA.org's knowledge, there are currently no U.S.-based agencies that specifically accredit independent short-term TEFL certificate programs. *See* e-mail from J. Segota of the TESOL International Association to F. Silverman, dated Nov. 22, 2013 (attached hereto as Exhibit B).

Further, when TINA.org contacted the TEFL Institute to inquire about the accreditation statement on its website, the TEFL Institute's President, Ti Ron Gibbs, informed TINA.org that "TEFL is undergoing accreditation" and that the "information on [its] final accreditation will be made public once it is done. Please

check back within two months.” See e-mail from T. Gibbs to F. Silverman, dated Nov. 21, 2013 (attached hereto as Exhibit C). Mr. Gibbs did not provide any information about NATEFLAC and stated during a telephone conversation with TINA.org’s editor on November 21, 2013 that he would delete all references to NATEFLAC and its alleged accreditation of the TEFL Institute on its website.

When such a deletion did not occur, TINA.org sent Mr. Gibbs a formal letter informing him that his company was violating Illinois’s Uniform Deceptive Trade Practices Act (815 Ill. Comp. Stat., 510/2) by posting false and deceptive information on its website regarding its alleged accreditation, and requesting that it correct the representation by December 16, 2013. See letter from L. Smith to T. Gibbs, dated Dec. 5, 2013 (attached hereto as Exhibit D).

To date, the TEFL Institute has not corrected the false and deceptive accreditation information on its website, which continues to state that it is accredited by the apparently fictional NATEFLAC. As your office is surely aware, the use of false accreditation programs as a way to market companies that sell educational training is unfortunately all too common. The effect is to give the deceptive impression that the company is well regarded and more legitimate than it really is, and to take advantage of unsuspecting consumers who are seeking to further their education. We urge your office to move quickly in order to halt the TEFL Institute’s false marketing and to protect consumers from this form of deception.

Sincerely,



Laura Smith, Esq.
Legal Director
Truth in Advertising, Inc.



Bonnie Patten, Esq.
Executive Director
Truth in Advertising, Inc.