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SENATE BILL NO. 324

Offered January 14, 2004

Prefiled January 14, 2004

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 59.1-198 and 59.1-204 of the Code of Virginia, relating to cure offers for consumer disputes involving motor vehicle purchases.

Patron—Stolle

Referred to Committee on Commerce and Labor

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That §§ 59.1-198 and 59.1-204 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

§ 59.1-198. Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

"Business opportunity" means the sale of any products, equipment, supplies or services which are sold to an individual for the purpose of enabling such individual to start a business to be operated out of his residence, but does not include a business opportunity which is subject to the Business Opportunity Sales Act, Chapter 21 (§ 59.1-262 et seq.) of this title.

"Consumer transaction" means:

1. The advertisement, sale, lease, license or offering for sale, lease or license, of goods or services to be used primarily for personal, family or household purposes;

2. Transactions involving the advertisement, offer or sale to an individual of a business opportunity that requires both his expenditure of money or property and his personal services on a continuing basis and in which he has not been previously engaged;

3. Transactions involving the advertisement, offer or sale to an individual of goods or services relating to the individual's finding or obtaining employment; and

4. A layaway agreement, whereby part or all of the price of goods is payable in one or more payments subsequent to the making of the layaway agreement and the supplier retains possession of the goods and bears the risk of their loss or damage until the goods are paid in full according to the layaway agreement.

"Cure offer" means a written offer of one or more things of value, including but not limited to the payment of money, that is made by a supplier and that is delivered to a person claiming to have suffered a loss as a result of a consumer transaction or to the attorney for such person. A cure offer shall be reasonably calculated to remedy a loss claimed by the person and it shall include a minimum additional amount equaling 10 percent of the value of the cure offer or \$500, whichever is greater, as compensation for inconvenience, any attorney's or other fees, expenses, or other costs of any kind that such person may incur in relation to such loss; provided, however that the minimum additional amount need not exceed \$2,500.

"Goods" means all real, personal or mixed property, tangible or intangible. For purposes of this chapter, intangible property includes but shall not be limited to "computer information" and "informational rights" in computer information as defined in § 59.1-501.2.

"Person" means any natural person, corporation, trust, partnership, association and any other legal entity.

"Services" includes but shall not be limited to (i) work performed in the business or occupation of the supplier, (ii) work performed for the supplier by an agent whose charges or costs for such work are transferred by the supplier to the consumer or purchaser as an element of the consumer transaction, or (iii) the subject of an "access contract" as defined in § 59.1-501.2.

"Supplier" means a seller, lessor or licensor who advertises, solicits or engages in consumer transactions, or a manufacturer, distributor or licensor who advertises and sells, leases or licenses goods or services to be resold, leased or sublicensed by other persons in consumer transactions.

§ 59.1-204. Individual action for damages or penalty.

A. Any person who suffers loss as the result of a violation of this chapter shall be entitled to initiate an action to recover actual damages, or \$500, whichever is greater. If the trier of fact finds that the violation was willful, it may increase damages to an amount not exceeding three times the actual damages sustained, or \$1,000, whichever is greater.

B. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, in addition to any damages awarded, such person also may be awarded reasonable attorney's fees and court costs.

C. No cure offer shall be admissible in any proceeding initiated under this section unless the cure offer is delivered by a supplier to the person claiming loss or to any attorney representing such person

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59 prior to the filing of the supplier's initial responsive pleading in such proceeding. If the requirements of
60 the definition of cure offer are met and the cure offer is delivered by the supplier as required by this
61 subsection, the cure offer shall be admissible when offered by the supplier. The supplier shall not be
62 liable for such person's attorney's fees and court costs incurred following delivery of the cure offer
63 unless the actual damages found to have been sustained and awarded, without consideration of
64 attorney's fees and court costs, exceed the value of the last cure offer that was not accepted by the
65 person claiming loss.