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HOUSE BILL NO. 175

Offered January 9, 2008

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A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 59.1-200 and 59.1-444 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 59.1-443.3, relating to freezing access to the credit reports of military personnel and their spouses and barring the creation of unauthorized credit accounts.

Patrons—Ware, O. and Watts

Referred to Committee on Commerce and Labor

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 59.1-200 and 59.1-444 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 59.1-443.3 as follows:

§ 59.1-200. Prohibited practices.

A. The following fraudulent acts or practices committed by a supplier in connection with a consumer transaction are hereby declared unlawful:

1. Misrepresenting goods or services as those of another;
2. Misrepresenting the source, sponsorship, approval, or certification of goods or services;
3. Misrepresenting the affiliation, connection, or association of the supplier, or of the goods or services, with another;
4. Misrepresenting geographic origin in connection with goods or services;
5. Misrepresenting that goods or services have certain quantities, characteristics, ingredients, uses, or benefits;
6. Misrepresenting that goods or services are of a particular standard, quality, grade, style, or model;
7. Advertising or offering for sale goods that are used, secondhand, repossessed, defective, blemished, deteriorated, or reconditioned, or that are "seconds," irregulars, imperfects, or "not first class," without clearly and unequivocally indicating in the advertisement or offer for sale that the goods are used, secondhand, repossessed, defective, blemished, deteriorated, reconditioned, or are "seconds," irregulars, imperfects or "not first class";
8. Advertising goods or services with intent not to sell them as advertised, or with intent not to sell at the price or upon the terms advertised.

In any action brought under this subdivision, the refusal by any person, or any employee, agent, or servant thereof, to sell any goods or services advertised or offered for sale at the price or upon the terms advertised or offered, shall be prima facie evidence of a violation of this subdivision. This paragraph shall not apply when it is clearly and conspicuously stated in the advertisement or offer by which such goods or services are advertised or offered for sale, that the supplier or offeror has a limited quantity or amount of such goods or services for sale, and the supplier or offeror at the time of such advertisement or offer did in fact have or reasonably expected to have at least such quantity or amount for sale;

9. Making false or misleading statements of fact concerning the reasons for, existence of, or amounts of price reductions;

10. Misrepresenting that repairs, alterations, modifications, or services have been performed or parts installed;

11. Misrepresenting by the use of any written or documentary material that appears to be an invoice or bill for merchandise or services previously ordered;

12. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, using in any manner the words "wholesale," "wholesaler," "factory," or "manufacturer" in the supplier's name, or to describe the nature of the supplier's business, unless the supplier is actually engaged primarily in selling at wholesale or in manufacturing the goods or services advertised or offered for sale;

13. Using in any contract or lease any liquidated damage clause, penalty clause, or waiver of defense, or attempting to collect any liquidated damages or penalties under any clause, waiver, damages, or penalties that are void or unenforceable under any otherwise applicable laws of the Commonwealth, or under federal statutes or regulations;

14. Using any other deception, fraud, false pretense, false promise, or misrepresentation in connection with a consumer transaction;

15. Violating any provision of § 3.1-796.78, 3.1-796.79, or 3.1-796.82, relating to the sale of certain animals by pet dealers which is described in such sections, is a violation of this chapter;

16. Failing to disclose all conditions, charges, or fees relating to:

- a. The return of goods for refund, exchange, or credit. Such disclosure shall be by means of a sign

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59 attached to the goods, or placed in a conspicuous public area of the premises of the supplier, so as to be
60 readily noticeable and readable by the person obtaining the goods from the supplier. If the supplier does
61 not permit a refund, exchange, or credit for return, he shall so state on a similar sign. The provisions of
62 this subdivision shall not apply to any retail merchant who has a policy of providing, for a period of not
63 less than 20 days after date of purchase, a cash refund or credit to the purchaser's credit card account
64 for the return of defective, unused, or undamaged merchandise upon presentation of proof of purchase.
65 In the case of merchandise paid for by check, the purchase shall be treated as a cash purchase and any
66 refund may be delayed for a period of 10 banking days to allow for the check to clear. This subdivision
67 does not apply to sale merchandise that is obviously distressed, out of date, post season, or otherwise
68 reduced for clearance; nor does this subdivision apply to special order purchases where the purchaser
69 has requested the supplier to order merchandise of a specific or unusual size, color, or brand not
70 ordinarily carried in the store or the store's catalog; nor shall this subdivision apply in connection with a
71 transaction for the sale or lease of motor vehicles, farm tractors, or motorcycles as defined in
72 § 46.2-100;

73 b. A layaway agreement. Such disclosure shall be furnished to the consumer (i) in writing at the time
74 of the layaway agreement, or (ii) by means of a sign placed in a conspicuous public area of the
75 premises of the supplier, so as to be readily noticeable and readable by the consumer, or (iii) on the bill
76 of sale. Disclosure shall include the conditions, charges, or fees in the event that a consumer breaches
77 the agreement;

78 16a. Failing to provide written notice to a consumer of an existing open-end credit balance in excess
79 of \$5 (i) on an account maintained by the supplier and (ii) resulting from such consumer's overpayment
80 on such account. Suppliers shall give consumers written notice of such credit balances within 60 days of
81 receiving overpayments. If the credit balance information is incorporated into statements of account
82 furnished consumers by suppliers within such 60-day period, no separate or additional notice is required;

83 17. If a supplier enters into a written agreement with a consumer to resolve a dispute that arises in
84 connection with a consumer transaction, failing to adhere to the terms and conditions of such an
85 agreement;

86 18. Violating any provision of the Virginia Health Spa Act, Chapter 24 (§ 59.1-294 et seq.) of this
87 title;

88 19. Violating any provision of the Virginia Home Solicitation Sales Act, Chapter 2.1 (§ 59.1-21.1 et
89 seq.) of this title;

90 20. Violating any provision of the Automobile Repair Facilities Act, Chapter 17.1 (§ 59.1-207.1 et
91 seq.) of this title;

92 21. Violating any provision of the Virginia Lease-Purchase Agreement Act, Chapter 17.4
93 (§ 59.1-207.17 et seq.) of this title;

94 22. Violating any provision of the Prizes and Gifts Act, Chapter 31 (§ 59.1-415 et seq.) of this title;

95 23. Violating any provision of the Virginia Public Telephone Information Act, Chapter 32
96 (§ 59.1-424 et seq.) of this title;

97 24. Violating any provision of § 54.1-1505;

98 25. Violating any provision of the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers' Warranty Adjustment Act, Chapter
99 17.6 (§ 59.1-207.34 et seq.) of this title;

100 26. Violating any provision of § 3.1-949.1, relating to the pricing of merchandise;

101 27. Violating any provision of the Pay-Per-Call Services Act, Chapter 33 (§ 59.1-429 et seq.) of this
102 title;

103 28. Violating any provision of the Extended Service Contract Act, Chapter 34 (§ 59.1-435 et seq.) of
104 this title;

105 29. Violating any provision of the Virginia Membership Camping Act, Chapter 25 (§ 59.1-311 et
106 seq.) of this title;

107 30. Violating any provision of the Comparison Price Advertising Act, Chapter 17.7 (§ 59.1-207.40 et
108 seq.) of this title;

109 31. Violating any provision of the Virginia Travel Club Act, Chapter 36 (§ 59.1-445 et seq.) of this
110 title;

111 32. Violating any provision of §§ 46.2-1231 and 46.2-1233.1;

112 33. Violating any provision of Chapter 40 (§ 54.1-4000 et seq.) of Title 54.1;

113 34. Violating any provision of Chapter 10.1 (§ 58.1-1031 et seq.) of Title 58.1;

114 35. Using the consumer's social security number as the consumer's account number with the supplier,
115 if the consumer has requested in writing that the supplier use an alternate number not associated with
116 the consumer's social security number;

117 36. Violating any provision of Chapter 18 (§ 6.1-444 et seq.) of Title 6.1;

118 37. Violating any provision of § 8.01-40.2;

119 38. Violating any provision of Article 7 (§ 32.1-212 et seq.) of Chapter 6 of Title 32.1;

120 39. Violating any provision of Chapter 34.1 (§ 59.1-441.1 et seq.) of this title;

40. Violating any provision of Chapter 10.2 (§ 6.1-363.2 et seq.) of Title 6.1;
41. Violating any provision of the Virginia Post-Disaster Anti-Price Gouging Act, Chapter 46 (§ 59.1-525 et seq.) of this title;
42. Violating any provision of Chapter 47 (§ 59.1-530 et seq.) of this title;
43. Violating any provision of § 59.1-443.2;
44. Violating any provision of Chapter 48 (§ 59.1-533 et seq.) of this title; ~~and~~
45. (Effective January 1, 2007) Violating any provision of Chapter 20 (§ 6.1-474 et seq.) of Title 6.1; *and*
46. *Violating any provision of § 59.1-443.3.*
- B. Nothing in this section shall be construed to invalidate or make unenforceable any contract or lease solely by reason of the failure of such contract or lease to comply with any other law of the Commonwealth or any federal statute or regulation, to the extent such other law, statute, or regulation provides that a violation of such law, statute, or regulation shall not invalidate or make unenforceable such contract or lease.
- § 59.1-443.3. *Credit records of members of the armed services and their spouses.*
- A. *As used in this section:*
- "Consumer" means any individual domiciled in the Commonwealth who is (i) a member of the armed services or (ii) the spouse of a member of the armed services.
- "Consumer reporting agency" means any entity that, for monetary fees or dues or on a cooperative nonprofit basis, regularly engages in whole or in part in the practice of assembling or evaluating consumer credit information or other information on consumers for the purpose of furnishing credit reports to third parties.
- "Credit report" means any written, oral, or other communication of any information by a consumer reporting agency bearing on a consumer's credit worthiness, credit standing, credit capacity, character, general reputation, personal characteristics, or mode of living that is used or expected to be used or collected in whole or in part for the purpose of serving as a factor in establishing the consumer's eligibility for (i) credit or insurance to be used primarily for personal, family, or household purposes; (ii) employment purposes; or (iii) any other purpose authorized under 15 U.S.C. § 1681b.
- "Reviewing the account" or "account review" includes activities related to account maintenance, monitoring, credit line increases, and account upgrades and enhancements.
- "Security freeze" means a notice, at the request of the consumer and subject to certain exceptions, that prohibits the consumer reporting agency from releasing all or any part of the consumer's credit report or any information derived from it without the express authorization of the consumer.
- B. A consumer may elect to place a security freeze on his credit report by requesting a consumer reporting agency to place a security freeze on his credit report, which request shall be submitted by mail or telephone, or by secure electronic mail connection if made available by the consumer reporting agency, and shall include certain personal identification. If a consumer requests a security freeze, the consumer reporting agency shall disclose the process of placing and temporarily lifting a freeze and the process for allowing access to information from the consumer's credit report by a specific party or for a specific period of time while the freeze is in place. A consumer reporting agency shall require proper identification of the person making a request to establish a security freeze. The consumer reporting agency shall place a security freeze on a consumer's credit report not later than two business days after receipt of a request by mail or telephone, or three business days after receiving a secure electronic mail request.
- C. The consumer reporting agency shall send a written confirmation of the security freeze to such consumer within five business days and shall provide the consumer with a unique personal identification number or password to be used by the consumer when providing authorization for the release of such consumer's credit report to a specific party or for a period of time or when permanently lifting the freeze.
- D. If the consumer wishes to authorize the disclosure of his credit report to a third party, or for a period of time, while such security freeze is in effect, the consumer shall contact the consumer reporting agency via telephone, mail, or secure electronic mail with a request that the freeze be temporarily lifted and provide:
1. Proper identification, including verification that the consumer is a member of the armed services or the spouse of a member of the armed services;
 2. The unique personal identification number or password provided by the consumer reporting agency as described in subsection C; and
 3. Proper information regarding the third party who is to receive the credit report or the time period for which the credit report shall be available to users of the credit report.
- E. Any consumer reporting agency that receives a request from a consumer to temporarily lift his security freeze shall do so no later than two business days after receiving the request.

182 F. A consumer reporting agency shall remove or temporarily lift a security freeze placed on a
183 consumer's credit report only upon a consumer request pursuant to subsection D or H or if the
184 consumer's credit report was frozen due to a material misrepresentation of fact by the consumer. If a
185 consumer reporting agency intends to remove a security freeze because the credit report was frozen due
186 to a material misrepresentation of fact by the consumer, the consumer reporting agency shall notify the
187 consumer in writing two business days prior to removing the security freeze.

188 G. If a third party requests access to a credit report on which a security freeze is in effect:

189 1. In connection with an application for credit or any other use, and if the consumer does not allow
190 his credit report to be accessed for that specific party or period of time, the third party may treat the
191 application as incomplete; or

192 2. For the purpose of receiving, extending, or otherwise utilizing the credit within, and not solely for
193 the purpose of account review, the consumer reporting agency shall notify the consumer that an attempt
194 has been made to access the credit report.

195 H. A security freeze shall remain in effect until the consumer requests that it be removed. A
196 consumer reporting agency shall remove a security freeze within two business days of receiving a
197 request for removal from the consumer, which request shall include both proper identification of the
198 person making the request to remove the security freeze and the unique personal identification number
199 or password provided by the consumer reporting agency as described in subsection C.

200 I. The provisions of this section, other than subsection K, shall not apply to the use of a credit
201 report by any of the following:

202 1. A person with whom the consumer has or has had an account, contract, or debtor-creditor
203 relationship, or the person's subsidiary, affiliate, agent, or assignee, for the purpose of (i) reviewing the
204 account, including activities related to account maintenance, monitoring, credit line increases, and
205 account upgrades and enhancements; (ii) conducting activities related to account maintenance,
206 monitoring, credit line increases, and account upgrades and enhancements; or (iii) collecting the
207 financial obligation owing for the account, contract, or debt;

208 2. A subsidiary, affiliate, agent, assignee, or prospective assignee of a person to whom access has
209 been granted under subsection F for purposes of facilitating the extension of credit or other permissible
210 use;

211 3. Any person acting pursuant to a court order, warrant, or subpoena;

212 4. A state or local agency, or its agents or assigns, that administers a program for establishing and
213 enforcing child support obligations;

214 5. A state or local agency, or its agents or assigns, acting to investigate fraud, including Medicaid
215 fraud, or acting to investigate or collect delinquent taxes or assessments, including interest and
216 penalties, unpaid court orders, or to fulfill any of its other statutory responsibilities;

217 6. A federal, state, or local governmental entity, including law-enforcement agency or court or its
218 agents or assigns;

219 7. A person for the purposes of prescreening as defined by the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C.
220 § 1681 et seq.;

221 8. Any person for the sole purpose of providing for a credit file monitoring subscription service to
222 which the consumer has subscribed; and

223 9. A consumer reporting agency for the purpose of providing a consumer with a copy of the
224 consumer's credit report upon the consumer's request.

225 J. This section shall not prevent a consumer reporting agency from charging a fee of no more than
226 \$5 to a consumer for establishing a security freeze, removing a security freeze, temporarily lifting a
227 security freeze for a period of time, or temporarily lifting a security freeze for a specific party,
228 regarding access to a credit report.

229 K. A credit account shall not be opened in the name of a consumer who has a security freeze in
230 effect with respect to his credit report without the express prior written authorization of the consumer. A
231 consumer that had a credit freeze in effect at the time of the opening of a credit account shall not be
232 liable for any charges billed by any individual other than the consumer to a credit account that was
233 opened in violation of the requirements of this subsection.

234 § 59.1-444. Damages.

235 A person aggrieved by a violation of any provision of this chapter, except § 59.1-443.2 or
236 59.1-443.3, shall be entitled to institute an action to recover damages in the amount of \$100 per
237 violation. In addition, if the aggrieved party prevails, he may be awarded reasonable attorney's fees and
238 court costs. Actions under this section shall be brought in the general district court for the city or county
239 in which the transaction or other violation that gave rise to the action occurred. A violation of the
240 provisions of § 59.1-443.2 or 59.1-443.3 is a prohibited practice under the Virginia Consumer Protection
241 Act (§ 59.1-196 et seq.).