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**HOUSE BILL NO. 35**

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 information privacy; credit report security freezes; penalties.*

Patrons—Oder, Athey, Carrico, Cole, Cosgrove, Gilbert, Massie, Merricks and Sherwood

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;

121 40. Violating any provision of Chapter 10.2 (§ 6.1-363.2 et seq.) of Title 6.1;  
 122 41. Violating any provision of the Virginia Post-Disaster Anti-Price Gouging Act, Chapter 46  
 123 (§ 59.1-525 et seq.) of this title;  
 124 42. Violating any provision of Chapter 47 (§ 59.1-530 et seq.) of this title;  
 125 43. Violating any provision of § 59.1-443.2 or 59.1-443.3;  
 126 44. Violating any provision of Chapter 48 (§ 59.1-533 et seq.) of this title; and  
 127 45. (Effective January 1, 2007) Violating any provision of Chapter 20 (§ 6.1-474 et seq.) of Title 6.1.  
 128 B. Nothing in this section shall be construed to invalidate or make unenforceable any contract or  
 129 lease solely by reason of the failure of such contract or lease to comply with any other law of the  
 130 Commonwealth or any federal statute or regulation, to the extent such other law, statute, or regulation  
 131 provides that a violation of such law, statute, or regulation shall not invalidate or make unenforceable  
 132 such contract or lease.  
 133 § 59.1-443.3. *Freezing access to credit reports.*  
 134 A. As used in this section:  
 135 "Consumer" means any individual who is utilizing or seeking credit for personal, family, or  
 136 household purposes.  
 137 "Consumer reporting agency" has the meaning assigned by § 603(f) of the Fair Credit Reporting Act,  
 138 15 U.S.C. § 1681a(f).  
 139 "Credit report" means any written or oral report, recommendation, or representation of a consumer  
 140 reporting agency as to the creditworthiness, credit standing, or credit capacity of any consumer and  
 141 includes any information that is sought or given for the purpose of serving as the basis for determining  
 142 eligibility for credit to be used primarily for personal, family, or household purposes.  
 143 "Security freeze" means a notice, at the request of the consumer and subject to certain exceptions,  
 144 that prohibits the consumer reporting agency from releasing all or any part of the consumer's credit  
 145 report or any information derived from it without the express authorization of the consumer.  
 146 B. A consumer may elect to place a security freeze on his credit report by requesting a consumer  
 147 reporting agency, by certified mail or such other secure method as authorized by a consumer reporting  
 148 agency, to place a security freeze on such consumer's credit report. If a consumer requests a security  
 149 freeze, the consumer reporting agency shall disclose the process of placing and temporarily lifting a  
 150 freeze and the process for allowing access to information from the consumer's credit report for a  
 151 specific party or period of time while the freeze is in place. A consumer reporting agency shall require  
 152 proper identification of the person making a request to establish a security freeze. The consumer  
 153 reporting agency shall place a security freeze on a consumer's credit report not later than five business  
 154 days after receipt of such request. When a security freeze is in place, a consumer reporting agency shall  
 155 not release the consumer's credit report or information therein to a third party without prior  
 156 authorization from the consumer made as set forth in subsection D. This subsection does not prevent a  
 157 consumer reporting agency from advising a third party that a security freeze is in effect with respect to  
 158 the consumer's credit report.  
 159 C. The consumer reporting agency shall send a written confirmation of such security freeze to such  
 160 consumer within five business days and shall provide the consumer with a unique personal identification  
 161 number or password to be used by the consumer when providing authorization for the release of such  
 162 consumer's credit report to a specific party or for a period of time.  
 163 D. If the consumer wishes to authorize the disclosure of his credit report to a third party or for a  
 164 period of time while such security freeze is in effect, the consumer shall contact the consumer reporting  
 165 agency and provide:  
 166 1. Proper identification;  
 167 2. The unique personal identification number or password described in subsection C; and  
 168 3. Proper information regarding the third party who is to receive the credit report or the time period  
 169 for which the credit report shall be available.  
 170 E. Any consumer reporting agency that receives a request from a consumer to temporarily lift his  
 171 security freeze shall do so within 24 hours after receipt of the request.  
 172 F. A consumer reporting agency shall remove or temporarily lift a security freeze placed on a  
 173 consumer's credit report only upon consumer request pursuant to subsection D or H or if the consumer's  
 174 credit report was frozen due to a material misrepresentation of fact by the consumer. If a consumer  
 175 reporting agency intends to remove a security freeze because the credit report was frozen due to a  
 176 material misrepresentation of fact by the consumer, the consumer reporting agency shall notify the  
 177 consumer in writing prior to removing the security freeze.  
 178 G. If a third party requests access to a credit report on which a security freeze is in effect, and this  
 179 request is in connection with an application for credit or any other use, and the consumer does not  
 180 allow his credit report to be accessed for that specific party or period of time, the third party may treat  
 181 the application as incomplete.

182 H. A security freeze shall remain in place until the consumer requests that the security freeze be  
183 removed. A consumer reporting agency shall remove a security freeze within 24 hours of receiving a  
184 request for removal from the consumer, which request shall include both proper identification of the  
185 person making a request to remove the security freeze and the unique personal identification number or  
186 password provided to the consumer by the consumer reporting agency as described in subsection C.

187 1. The provisions of this section shall not apply to the use of a credit report by any of the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

205 7. A person for the purposes of prescreening as defined by the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C.  
206 § 1681, et seq.;

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

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

211 10. Any depository financial institution for checking, savings, and investment accounts; and

212 11. Any property and casualty insurance company for use in setting or adjusting a rate, adjusting a  
213 claim, or underwriting for property and casualty insurance purposes.

214 J. This section shall not prevent a consumer reporting agency from charging a fee of no more than  
215 \$5 to a consumer for establishing a security freeze, removing a security freeze, temporarily lifting a  
216 security freeze for a period of time, or temporarily lifting a security freeze for a specific party,  
217 regarding access to a credit report, except that a consumer reporting agency shall not charge any fee to  
218 (i) a victim of identity theft who has submitted a copy of a valid investigative or incident report or  
219 complaint with a law-enforcement agency about the unlawful use of the victim's identifying information  
220 by another person or (ii) a consumer who, at the time he establishes a security freeze, removes a  
221 security freeze, or temporarily lifts a security freeze, has attained 65 years of age.

222 K. The following persons are not required to place a security freeze on a consumer's credit report  
223 pursuant to this section; however, any person who is not required to place a security freeze on a credit  
224 report under the provisions of subdivision 3 of this subsection shall be subject to any security freeze  
225 placed on a credit report by another consumer reporting agency from which it obtains information:

226 1. A check services or fraud prevention services company that reports on incidents of fraud or that  
227 issues authorizations for the purpose of approving or processing negotiable instruments, electronic fund  
228 transfers, or similar methods of payment;

229 2. A deposit account information service company that issues reports regarding account closures due  
230 to fraud, substantial overdrafts, ATM abuse, or other similar negative information regarding a consumer  
231 to inquiring banks or other financial institutions for use only in reviewing a consumer request for a  
232 deposit account at the inquiring bank or financial institution; and

233 3. A consumer reporting agency that does all of the following:

234 a. Acts only to resell credit information by assembling and merging information contained in a  
235 database of one or more credit reporting agencies; and

236 b. Does not maintain a permanent database of credit information from which new credit reports are  
237 produced.

238 L. A consumer reporting agency shall not suggest or otherwise state or imply to a third party that  
239 the consumer's security freeze reflects a negative credit score, history, report, or rating.

240 M. If a security freeze is in place, a consumer reporting agency shall not change any of the official  
241 information in a credit report regarding the name, date of birth, social security number, or address of a  
242 consumer without sending a written confirmation of the change to the consumer within 30 days of the  
243 change being posted to the consumer's file. Written confirmation is not required for technical

244 *modifications of a consumer's official information, including name and street abbreviations, complete*  
245 *spellings, or transposition of numbers or letters. In the case of an address change, the written*  
246 *confirmation shall be sent to both the new address and the former address.*

247 *N. A violation of this section shall constitute a prohibited practice pursuant to the provisions of*  
248 *§ 59.1-200 and shall be subject to any and all of the enforcement provisions of the Virginia Consumer*  
249 *Protection Act (§ 59.1-196 et seq.).*

250 *§ 59.1-444. Damages.*

251 *A person aggrieved by a violation of any provision of this chapter, except §§ 59.1-443.2 and*  
252 *59.1-443.3, shall be entitled to institute an action to recover damages in the amount of \$100 per*  
253 *violation. In addition, if the aggrieved party prevails, he may be awarded reasonable attorney's fees and*  
254 *court costs. Actions under this section shall be brought in the general district court for the city or county*  
255 *in which the transaction or other violation that gave rise to the action occurred. A violation of the*  
256 *provisions of § 59.1-443.2 or 59.1-443.3 is a prohibited practice under the Virginia Consumer Protection*  
257 *Act (§ 59.1-196 et seq.).*