

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2015 SESSION

CHAPTER 236

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 46.2-1500, 46.2-1566, 46.2-1568, and 46.2-1569 of the Code of Virginia, relating to coercion of motor vehicle dealers by franchisors and affiliates.

[H 1935]

Approved March 17, 2015

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 46.2-1500, 46.2-1566, 46.2-1568, and 46.2-1569 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 46.2-1500. Definitions.

As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Affiliate" means any entity in which a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch has voting control or owns at least 51 percent of the ownership equity, or any entity in which another entity has voting control or owns at least 51 percent of the ownership equity and also has voting control and owns at least 51 percent of the ownership of a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch. An entity that provides vehicle purchase or lease financing that uses the name of the manufacturer or distributor, or the name of any line make of the manufacturer or distributor, in the name of the entity under which it transacts business with a consumer, other than in the name of an individual product offered by the entity, shall be considered an "affiliate."

"Board" means the Motor Vehicle Dealer Board.

"Certificate of origin" means the document provided by the manufacturer of a new motor vehicle, or its distributor, which is the only valid indication of ownership between the manufacturer, its distributor, its franchised motor vehicle dealers, and the original purchaser not for resale.

"Dealer-operator" means the individual who works at the established place of business of a dealer and who is responsible for and in charge of day-to-day operations of that place of business.

"Demonstrator" means a new motor vehicle having a gross vehicle weight rating of less than 16,000 pounds that (i) has more than 750 miles accumulated on its odometer that has been driven by dealer personnel or by prospective purchasers during the course of selling, displaying, demonstrating, showing, or exhibiting it and (ii) may be sold as a new motor vehicle, provided the dealer complies with the provisions of subsection D of § 46.2-1530.

"Distributor" means a person who is licensed by the Department of Motor Vehicles under Chapter 19 (§ 46.2-1900 et seq.) and who sells or distributes new motor vehicles pursuant to a written agreement with the manufacturer, to franchised motor vehicle dealers in the Commonwealth.

"Distributor branch" means a branch office licensed by the Department of Motor Vehicles under Chapter 19 (§ 46.2-1900 et seq.) and maintained by a distributor for the sale of motor vehicles to motor vehicle dealers or for directing or supervising, in whole or in part, its representatives in the Commonwealth.

"Distributor representative" means a person who is licensed by the Department of Motor Vehicles under Chapter 19 (§ 46.2-1900 et seq.) and employed by a distributor or by a distributor branch, for the purpose of making or promoting the sale of motor vehicles or for supervising or contacting its dealers, prospective dealers, or representatives in the Commonwealth.

"Factory branch" means a branch office maintained by a person for the sale of motor vehicles to distributors or for the sale of motor vehicles to motor vehicle dealers, or for directing or supervising, in whole or in part, its representatives in the Commonwealth.

"Factory representative" means a person who is licensed by the Department of Motor Vehicles under Chapter 19 (§ 46.2-1900 et seq.) and employed by a person who manufactures or assembles motor vehicles or by a factory branch for the purpose of making or promoting the sale of its motor vehicles or for supervising or contacting its dealers, prospective dealers, or representatives in the Commonwealth.

"Factory repurchase motor vehicle" means a motor vehicle sold, leased, rented, consigned, or otherwise transferred to a person under an agreement that the motor vehicle will be resold or otherwise retransferred only to the manufacturer or distributor of the motor vehicle, and which is reacquired by the manufacturer or distributor, or its agents.

"Family member" means a person who either (i) is the spouse, child, grandchild, spouse of a child, spouse of a grandchild, brother, sister, or parent of the dealer or owner or (ii) has been employed continuously by the dealer for at least five years.

"Franchise" means a written contract or agreement between two or more persons whereby one person, the franchisee, is granted the right to engage in the business of offering and selling, offering and delivering pursuant to a lease, servicing, or offering, selling, and servicing new motor vehicles of a particular line-make or late model or used motor vehicles of a particular line-make manufactured or

distributed by the grantor of the right, the franchisor, and where the operation of the franchisee's business is substantially associated with the franchisor's trademark, trade name, advertising, or other commercial symbol designating the franchisor, the motor vehicle or its manufacturer or distributor. "Franchise" includes any severable part or parts of a franchise agreement which separately provides for selling and servicing different line-makes of the franchisor.

"Franchised late model or franchised used motor vehicle dealer" means a dealer selling used motor vehicles, including vehicles purchased from the franchisor, under the trademark of a manufacturer or distributor that has a franchise agreement with a manufacturer or distributor.

"Franchised motor vehicle dealer" means a dealer in new motor vehicles that has a franchise agreement with a manufacturer or distributor of new motor vehicles, trailers, or semitrailers to sell new motor vehicles or to sell used motor vehicles under the trademark of a manufacturer or distributor regardless of the age of the motor vehicles, trailers, or semitrailers.

"Fund" means the Motor Vehicle Dealer Board Fund.

"Independent motor vehicle dealer" means a dealer in used motor vehicles.

"Late model motor vehicle" means a motor vehicle of the current model year and the immediately preceding model year.

"Line-make" means the name of the motor vehicle manufacturer or distributor and a brand or name plate marketed by the manufacturer or distributor.

"Manufacturer" means a person who is licensed by the Department of Motor Vehicles under Chapter 19 (§ 46.2-1900 et seq.) and engaged in the business of constructing or assembling new motor vehicles and, in the case of trucks, also means a person engaged in the business of manufacturing engines, transmissions, power trains, or rear axles, when such engines, transmissions, power trains, or rear axles are not warranted by the final manufacturer or assembler of the truck.

"Motor vehicle" means the same as provided in § 46.2-100, except, for the purposes of this chapter, "motor vehicle" does not include (i) trailers and semitrailers; (ii) manufactured homes, sales of which are regulated under Chapter 4.2 (§ 36-85.16 et seq.) of Title 36; (iii) motor homes; (iv) motorcycles; (v) autocycles; (vi) nonrepairable vehicles, as defined in § 46.2-1600; (vii) salvage vehicles, as defined in § 46.2-1600; or (viii) mobile cranes that exceed the size or weight limitations as set forth in § 46.2-1105, 46.2-1110, or 46.2-1113 or Article 17 (§ 46.2-1122 et seq.) of Chapter 10.

"Motor vehicle dealer" or "dealer" means any person who:

1. For commission, money, or other thing of value, buys, sells, exchanges, either outright or on conditional sale, bailment lease, chattel mortgage, or otherwise or arranges or offers or attempts to solicit or negotiate on behalf of others a sale, purchase, or exchange of an interest in new motor vehicles, new and used motor vehicles, or used motor vehicles alone, whether or not the motor vehicles are owned by him; or

2. Is wholly or partly engaged in the business of selling new motor vehicles, new and used motor vehicles, or used motor vehicles only, whether or not the motor vehicles are owned by him; or

3. Offers to sell, sells, displays, or permits the display for sale, of five or more motor vehicles within any 12 consecutive months.

"Motor vehicle dealer" or "dealer" does not include:

1. Receivers, trustees, administrators, executors, guardians, conservators or other persons appointed by or acting under judgment or order of any court or their employees when engaged in the specific performance of their duties as employees.

2. Public officers, their deputies, assistants, or employees, while performing their official duties.

3. Persons other than business entities primarily engaged in the leasing or renting of motor vehicles to others when selling or offering such vehicles for sale at retail, disposing of motor vehicles acquired for their own use and actually so used, when the vehicles have been so acquired and used in good faith and not for the purpose of avoiding the provisions of this chapter.

4. Persons dealing solely in the sale and distribution of funeral vehicles, including motor vehicles adapted therefor; however, this exemption shall not exempt any person from the provisions of §§ 46.2-1519, 46.2-1520, and 46.2-1548.

5. Any financial institution chartered or authorized to do business under the laws of the Commonwealth or the United States which may have received title to a motor vehicle in the normal course of its business by reason of a foreclosure, other taking, repossession, or voluntary reconveyance to that institution occurring as a result of any loan secured by a lien on the vehicle.

6. An employee of an organization arranging for the purchase or lease by the organization of vehicles for use in the organization's business.

7. Any person licensed to sell real estate who sells a manufactured home or similar vehicle in conjunction with the sale of the parcel of land on which the manufactured home or similar vehicle is located.

8. Any person who permits the operation of a motor vehicle show or permits the display of motor vehicles for sale by any motor vehicle dealer licensed under this chapter.

9. An insurance company authorized to do business in the Commonwealth that sells or disposes of vehicles under a contract with its insured in the regular course of business.

10. Any publication, broadcast, or other communications media when engaged in the business of advertising, but not otherwise arranging for the sale of vehicles owned by others.

11. Any person dealing solely in the sale or lease of vehicles designed exclusively for off-road use.

12. Any credit union authorized to do business in Virginia, provided the credit union does not receive a commission, money, or other thing of value directly from a motor vehicle dealer.

13. Any person licensed as a manufactured home dealer, broker, manufacturer, or salesperson under Chapter 4.2 (§ 36-85.16 et seq.) of Title 36.

14. The State Department of Social Services or local departments of social services.

"Motor vehicle salesperson" or "salesperson" means (i) any person who is hired as an employee by a motor vehicle dealer to sell or exchange motor vehicles and who receives or expects to receive a commission, fee, or any other consideration from the dealer; (ii) any person who supervises salespersons employed by a motor vehicle dealer, whether compensated by salary or by commission; (iii) any person, compensated by salary or commission by a motor vehicle dealer, who negotiates with or induces a customer to enter into a security agreement on behalf of a dealer; or (iv) any person who is licensed as a motor vehicle dealer and who sells or exchanges motor vehicles. For purposes of this section, any person who is an independent contractor as defined by the United States Internal Revenue Code shall be deemed not to be a motor vehicle salesperson.

"Motor vehicle show" means a display of motor vehicles to the general public at a location other than a dealer's location licensed under this chapter where the vehicles are not being offered for sale or exchange during or as part of the display.

"New motor vehicle" means any vehicle that is in the possession of the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or motor vehicle dealer and for which an original title has not been issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles of the Commonwealth or by the issuing agency of any other state and has less than 7,500 miles accumulated on its odometer.

"Original license" means a motor vehicle dealer license issued to an applicant who has never been licensed as a motor vehicle dealer in Virginia or whose Virginia motor vehicle dealer license has been expired for more than 30 days.

"Relevant market area" means as follows:

1. In metropolitan localities, the relevant market area shall be a circular area around an existing franchised dealer with a population of 250,000, not to exceed a radius of 10 miles, but in no case less than seven miles.

2. If the population in an area within a radius of 10 miles around an existing franchised dealer is less than 250,000, but the population in an area within a radius of 15 miles around an existing franchised dealer is 150,000 or more, the relevant market area shall be that area within the 15-mile radius.

3. In all other cases the relevant market area shall be an area within a radius of 20 miles around an existing franchised dealer or the area of responsibility defined in the franchise, whichever is greater. In any case where the franchise agreement is silent as to area of responsibility, the relevant market area shall be the greater of an area within a radius of 20 miles around an existing franchised dealer or that area in which the franchisor otherwise requires the franchisee to make significant retail sales or sales efforts.

Notwithstanding the foregoing provision of this section, in the case of dealers in motor vehicles with gross vehicle weight ratings of 26,000 pounds or greater, the relevant market area with respect to the dealer's franchise for all such vehicles shall be a circular area around an existing franchised dealer with a radius of 25 miles, except where the population in such circular area is less than 250,000, in which case the relevant market area shall be a circular area around an existing franchised dealer with a radius of 50 miles, or the area of responsibility defined in the franchise, whichever is greater.

In determining population for this definition, the most recent census by the U.S. Bureau of the Census or the most recent population update, either from the National Planning Data Corporation or other similar recognized source, shall be accumulated for all census tracts either wholly or partially within the relevant market area.

"Retail installment sale" means every sale of one or more motor vehicles to a buyer for his use and not for resale, in which the price of the vehicle is payable in one or more installments and in which the seller has either retained title to the goods or has taken or retained a security interest in the goods under form of contract designated either as a security agreement, conditional sale, bailment lease, chattel mortgage, or otherwise.

"Sale at retail" or "retail sale" means the act or attempted act of selling, bartering, exchanging, or otherwise disposing of a motor vehicle to a buyer for his personal use and not for resale.

"Sale at wholesale" or "wholesale" means a sale to motor vehicle dealers or wholesalers other than to consumers; a sale to one who intends to resell.

"Used motor vehicle" means any vehicle other than a new motor vehicle as defined in this section.

"Wholesale auction" means an auction of motor vehicles restricted to sales at wholesale.

§ 46.2-1566. Filing of franchises.

A. It shall be the responsibility of each motor vehicle manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or subsidiary thereof to file with the Commissioner by certified mail a true copy of

each new, amended, modified, or different form or addendum offered to more than one dealer which affects the rights, responsibilities, or obligations of the parties of a franchise or sales, service, or sales and service agreement to be offered to a motor vehicle dealer or prospective motor vehicle dealer in the Commonwealth no later than ~~sixty~~ 60 days prior to the date the franchise or sales agreement is offered. In no event shall a new, amended, modified, or different form of franchise or sales, service, or sales and service agreement be offered a motor vehicle dealer in the Commonwealth until the form has been determined by the Commissioner as not containing terms inconsistent with the provisions of this chapter. At the time a filing is made with the Commissioner pursuant to this section, the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or subsidiary shall also give written notice together with a copy of the papers so filed to the affected dealer or dealers.

B. The Department shall inform the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or subsidiary and the dealer or dealers or other parties named in the agreement of a preliminary recommendation as to the consistency of the agreement with the provisions of this chapter. If any of the parties involved have comments on the preliminary recommendation, they must be submitted to the Commissioner within ~~thirty~~ 30 days of receiving the preliminary recommendation. The Commissioner shall render his decision within ~~fifteen~~ 15 days of receiving comments from the parties involved. If the Commissioner does not receive comments within the ~~thirty-day~~ 30-day time period, he shall make the final determination as to the consistency of the agreement with the provisions of this chapter.

C. *Any form or addendum that is not filed as required by this section may not be the basis for (i) any reduction in compensation due to a dealer from the franchisor, (ii) any franchisor demand or requirement by which a dealer must abide, or (iii) any penalty or detriment a franchisor imposes or attempts to impose on a motor vehicle dealer. This section shall not apply to any dealer program or dealer incentive that is not inconsistent with any form or addendum already on file by the manufacturer with the state or that expires within 12 months of its start date, or the continuation, renewal, or modification of any dealer program or dealer incentive that was in place as of July 1, 2015. This section shall not apply to any consumer program or consumer incentive, including discount pricing programs.*

§ 46.2-1568. Coercion of retail dealer by manufacturer or distributor with respect to retail installment sales contracts, extended service contracts or extended maintenance plans, financing, or leasing prohibited; penalty.

A. It shall be unlawful for any manufacturer or distributor, or any officer, agent, ~~or~~ representative, or affiliate of either to coerce or attempt to coerce any retail motor vehicle dealer or prospective retail motor vehicle dealer in the Commonwealth to (i) offer to sell or sell any extended service contract or extended maintenance plan offered, sold, backed by, or sponsored by the manufacturer or distributor or affiliate of either or (ii) sell, assign, or transfer any retail installment sales contract or lease obtained by the dealer in connection with the sale or lease by him in the Commonwealth of motor vehicles manufactured or sold by the manufacturer or distributor, to a specified finance company or class of finance companies, affiliate, leasing company or class of leasing companies, or ~~to~~ any other specified persons by any of the following:

1. By any statement, suggestion, promise, or threat that the manufacturer or distributor will in any manner benefit or injure the dealer, whether the statement, suggestion, threat, or promise is express or implied or made directly or indirectly.

2. By any act that will benefit or injure the dealer.

3. By any contract, or any express or implied offer of contract, made directly or indirectly to the dealer, for handling the motor vehicle on the condition that the dealer shall offer to sell or sell any extended service contract or extended maintenance plan offered, sold, backed by, or sponsored by the manufacturer or distributor or that the dealer sell, assign, or transfer his retail installment sales contract on or lease of the vehicle, in the Commonwealth, to a specified finance company or class of finance companies, leasing company or class of leasing companies, or ~~to~~ any other specified person.

4. By any express or implied statement or representation made directly or indirectly that the dealer is under any obligation whatsoever to offer to sell or sell any extended service contract or extended maintenance plan offered, sold, backed by, or sponsored by the manufacturer or distributor or to sell, assign, or transfer any of his retail sales contracts or leases in the Commonwealth on motor vehicles manufactured or sold by the manufacturer or distributor to a finance company or class of finance companies, leasing company or class of leasing companies, or other specified person, because of any relationship or affiliation between the manufacturer or distributor and the finance company or companies, leasing company or leasing companies, or the specified person or persons.

B. Any such statements, threats, promises, acts, contracts, or offers of contracts, when their effect may be to lessen or eliminate competition or tend to create a monopoly, are declared unfair trade practices and unfair methods of competition and are prohibited.

C. To further avoid any acts or practices, the effect of which may be to lessen or eliminate competition, it shall be unlawful for any manufacturer or distributor, or any officer, agent, or representative thereof, or any person or company affiliated therewith, to condition the provision of lead information to a dealer upon the agreement of the dealer to sell or lease a vehicle to the prospective

customer only if the financing or leasing connected with the transaction is effected through a specified finance company or class of finance companies or leasing company or class of leasing companies. For the purposes of this section, "lead information" means information concerning a prospective customer who contacts or is contacted by the manufacturer or distributor or any person or company affiliated therewith concerning the manufacturer's or distributor's products. The provisions of this subsection, however, shall not prohibit a manufacturer or distributor from so conditioning the provision of lead information concerning any prospective customer who qualifies for any manufacturer-sponsored or distributor-sponsored factory employee, factory retiree, or factory vendor new vehicle purchase program.

D. *It shall be unlawful for any manufacturer or distributor or any affiliate thereof to coerce or require a dealer that is a franchisee of the manufacturer or distributor to sell products sponsored, sold, or offered by the manufacturer, distributor, or affiliate in connection with sales of vehicles whether or not in connection with any retail installment sales contract or lease; however, this subsection shall not apply to used motor vehicles sold under a manufacturer used vehicle certification program. For purposes of this section, the refusal by an affiliate of a manufacturer or distributor to accept assignment of a retail installment sales contract or lease solely because it includes a product in connection with the sale of the vehicle not sponsored, sold, or offered by the manufacturer or distributor, or any affiliate thereof, shall be unlawful; but an affiliate of a manufacturer or distributor may establish standards for products in connection with a sale of a vehicle to be included in retail installment sales contracts or leases it will accept, provided the standards, including the establishment of maximum prices for products, are equally enforceable and enforced with respect to products in connection with the sale of a vehicle sponsored, sold, or offered by the manufacturer, distributor, or affiliate and products that are not. Nothing in this section prohibits a manufacturer, distributor, or affiliate from offering dealer or consumer incentive programs directly related to the sale of products sponsored, sold, or offered by the manufacturer, distributor, or affiliate whether or not in connection with any retail installment sales contract or lease. A dealer that chooses not to participate in these programs shall not be penalized as a result. Non-payment of the incentive due to non-participation in the incentive programs directly related to the sale of products sponsored, sold, or offered by the manufacturer, distributor, or affiliate by the dealer shall not qualify as a penalty.*

E. Any person aggrieved by an action prohibited by this section may seek a hearing, pursuant to § 46.2-1573, against any manufacturer or distributor licensed under this title.

~~E.~~ F. Nothing contained in this section shall prohibit a manufacturer or distributor from offering or providing incentive benefits or bonus programs to a retail motor vehicle dealer or prospective retail motor vehicle dealer in the Commonwealth who makes the voluntary decision to offer to sell or sell any extended service contract or extended maintenance plan offered, sold, backed, or sponsored by the manufacturer or distributor or to sell, assign, or transfer any retail installment sale or lease by him in the Commonwealth of motor vehicles manufactured or sold by the manufacturer or distributor to a specified finance company or leasing company controlled by or affiliated with the manufacturer or distributor.

§ 46.2-1569. Other coercion of dealers; transfer, grant, succession to and cancellation of dealer franchises; delivery of vehicles, parts, and accessories.

Notwithstanding the terms of any franchise agreement, it shall be unlawful for any manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, ~~or distributor branch,~~ *or affiliate,* or any field representative, officer, agent, or their representatives: *to do any of the following. It shall further be unlawful for any manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or any field representative, officer, agent, or their representatives to engage in conduct prohibited under this section through an affiliate.*

1. To coerce or attempt to coerce any dealer to accept delivery of any motor vehicle or vehicles, parts or accessories therefor, or any other commodities, which have not been ordered by the dealer.

2. To coerce or attempt to coerce any dealer to enter into an agreement with the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch, or representative thereof by threat to take or by taking any action in violation of the chapter, or by any other act unfair or injurious to the dealer. If a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch conditions the grant of a new franchise to a dealer on the dealer's consent (i) to provide a site control agreement as defined in subdivision 10, (ii) to provide a written agreement containing an option to purchase the franchise of the dealer, provided, however, that agreements pursuant to § 46.2-1569.1 shall be permitted, or (iii) to provide a termination agreement to be held by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch for subsequent use, it shall be considered coercion and an act that is unfair and injurious to the dealer; provided, however, that the provisions of § 46.2-1572.3 related to the good faith settlement of disputes shall apply to the agreements described in clauses (i), (ii), and (iii) of this subdivision, *mutatis mutandis*. This subdivision shall not apply to any agreement the enforcement of which is subject to the jurisdiction of a United States Bankruptcy Court.

2a. To coerce or attempt to coerce any dealer to join, contribute to, or affiliate with any advertising association.

2b. To coerce or require any dealer to establish in connection with the sale of a motor vehicle prices at which the dealer shall sell products or services not manufactured or distributed by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch, whether by agreement, program, incentive provision, or

otherwise.

2c. To coerce or require any dealer, whether by agreement, program, incentive provision, or otherwise, to construct improvements to its facilities or to install new signs or other franchisor image elements that replace or substantially alter those improvements, signs, or franchisor image elements completed within the preceding 10 years that were required or approved by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch or one of its affiliates. If a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch offers incentives, or other payments under a program offered after the effective date of this subdivision and available to more than one dealer in the Commonwealth that are premised wholly or in part on dealer facility improvements or installation of franchisor signs or other franchisor image elements, a dealer that constructed improvements or installed signs or other franchisor image elements required by or approved by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch and completed within the 10 years preceding the program shall be deemed to be in compliance with the program requirements pertaining to construction of facilities or installation of signs or other franchisor image elements that would replace or substantially alter those previously constructed or installed within that 10-year period. This subdivision shall not apply to a program that provides lump sum payments to assist dealers in making facility improvements or to pay for signs or franchisor image elements when such payments are not dependent on the dealer selling or purchasing specific numbers of new vehicles and shall not apply to a program that is in effect with more than one dealer in the Commonwealth on the effective date of this subdivision, nor to any renewal or modification of such a program.

3. To prevent or refuse to approve the sale or transfer of the ownership of a dealership by the sale of the business, stock transfer, or otherwise, or the transfer, sale, or assignment of a dealer franchise, or a change in the executive management or principal operator of the dealership, unless the franchisor provides written notice to the dealer of its objection and the reasons therefor by certified mail or overnight delivery or other method designed to ensure delivery to the dealer at least 30 days prior to the proposed effective date of the transfer, sale, assignment, or change. No such objection shall be sufficient unless the failure to approve is reasonable. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection D of § 46.2-1573, the only grounds that may be considered reasonable for a failure to approve are that an individual who is the applicant or is in control of an entity that is an applicant (i) lacks good moral character, (ii) lacks reasonable motor vehicle dealership management experience and qualifications, (iii) lacks financial ability to be the dealer, or (iv) fails to meet the standards otherwise established by this title to be a dealer. No such objection shall be effective to prevent the sale, transfer, assignment, or change if the Commissioner has determined, if requested in writing by the dealer within 30 days after receipt of an objection to the proposed sale, transfer, or change, and after a hearing on the matter, that the failure to permit or honor the sale, transfer, assignment, or change is unreasonable under the circumstances. No franchise may be sold, assigned, or transferred unless (a) the franchisor has been given at least 90 days' prior written notice by the dealer as to the identity, financial ability, and qualifications of the proposed transferee on forms generally utilized by the franchisor to conduct its review, as well as the full agreement for the proposed transaction, and (b) the sale or transfer of the franchise and business will not involve, without the franchisor's consent, a relocation of the business.

3a. To impose a condition on the approval of the sale or transfer of the ownership of a dealership by the sale of the business, stock transfer, or otherwise if the condition would violate the provisions of this title if imposed on the existing dealer.

In the event the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor or distributor branch takes action to prevent or refuse to approve the sale or transfer of the ownership of a dealership by the sale of the business, stock transfer, or otherwise, or the transfer, sale or assignment of a dealer franchise, or a change in the executive management or principal operator of the dealership, without a statement of specific grounds for doing so that is consistent with subdivision 3 hereof or imposes a condition in violation of subdivision 3a hereof, that shall constitute a violation of this section. The existing dealer may request review of the action or imposition of the condition in a hearing by the Commissioner. If the Commissioner finds that the action or the imposition of the condition was a violation of this section, the Commissioner may order that the sale or transfer be approved by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch, without imposition of the condition. If the existing dealer does not request a hearing by the Commissioner concerning the action or the condition imposed by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch, and the action or condition was the proximate cause of the failure of the contract for the sale or transfer of ownership of the dealership, the applicant for approval of the sale or transfer or the existing dealer, or both, may commence an action at law for violation of this section. The action may be commenced in the circuit court of the city or county in which the dealer is located, or in any other circuit court with permissible venue, within two years following the action or the imposition of the condition by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch for the damages suffered by the applicant or the dealer as a result of the violation of this section by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch, plus the applicant's or dealer's reasonable attorney fees and costs of litigation. Notwithstanding the foregoing, an exercise of the right of first refusal by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch pursuant to

§ 46.2-1569.1 shall not be considered the imposition of a condition prohibited by this section.

4. To grant an additional franchise for a particular line-make of motor vehicle in a relevant market area in which a dealer or dealers in that line-make are already located unless the franchisor has first advised in writing all other dealers in the line-make in the relevant market area. No such additional franchise may be established at the proposed site unless the Commissioner has determined, if requested by a dealer of the same line-make in the relevant market area within 30 days after receipt of the franchisor's notice of intention to establish the additional franchise, and after a hearing on the matter, that the franchisor can show by a preponderance of the evidence that after the grant of the new franchise, the relevant market area will support all of the dealers in that line-make in the relevant market area. Establishing a franchised dealer in a relevant market area to replace a franchised dealer that has not been in operation for more than two years shall constitute the establishment of a new franchise subject to the terms of this subdivision. The two-year period for replacing a franchised dealer shall begin on the day the franchise was terminated, or, if a termination hearing was held, on the day the franchisor was legally permitted finally to terminate the franchise. The relocation of a franchise in a relevant market area, whether by an existing dealer or by a dealer who is acquiring the franchise, shall constitute the establishment of a new franchise subject to the terms of this subdivision. This subdivision shall not apply to (i) the relocation of an existing dealer within that dealer's relevant market area if the relocation site is to be more than ten 10 miles distant from any other dealer for the same line-make; (ii) the relocation of an existing dealer within that dealer's relevant market area if the relocation site is to be more distant than the existing site from all other dealers of the same line-make in that relevant market area; or (iii) the relocation of an existing new motor vehicle dealer within two miles of the existing site of the relocating dealer.

5. Except as otherwise provided in this subdivision and notwithstanding the terms of any franchise, to terminate, cancel, or refuse to renew the franchise of any dealer without good cause and unless (i) the dealer and the Commissioner have received written notice of the franchisor's intentions at least 60 days prior to the effective date of such termination, cancellation, or the expiration date of the franchise, setting forth the specific grounds for the action, and (ii) the Commissioner has determined, if requested in writing by the dealer within the 60-day period prior to the effective date of such termination, cancellation, or the expiration date of the franchise and, after a hearing on the matter, that the franchisor has shown by a preponderance of the evidence that there is good cause for the termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal of the franchise. If any manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch takes action that will have the effect of terminating, canceling, or refusing to renew the franchise of any dealer (a) by use of a termination agreement executed by the dealer and obtained more than 90 days before the purported date of use, (b) by exercise of rights under a written option to purchase the franchise of a dealer, or (c) by exercise of rights under a site control agreement as defined in subdivision 10, that action shall be considered a termination, cancellation, or refusal to renew pursuant to the terms of this subdivision and subject to the rights, provisions, and procedures provided herein. In any case where a petition is made to the Commissioner for a determination as to good cause for the termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal of a franchise, the franchise in question shall continue in effect pending the Commissioner's decision or, if that decision is appealed to the circuit court, pending the decision of the circuit court. Where the termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal of a franchise will result from use of a termination agreement executed by the dealer and obtained more than 90 days before the purported date of use, exercise of rights under a written option to purchase the franchise of a dealer, or exercise of rights under a site control agreement as defined in subdivision 10, such use or exercise shall be stayed pending the Commissioner's decision or, if that decision is appealed to the circuit court, pending the decision of the circuit court, and its use or exercise will be allowed only where the franchisor has shown by a preponderance of the evidence that there is good cause for the termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal of the franchise. In any case in which a franchisor neither advises a dealer that it does not intend to renew a franchise nor takes any action to renew a franchise beyond its expiration date, the franchise in question shall continue in effect on the terms last agreed to by the parties. Notwithstanding the other provisions of this subdivision notice of termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal may be provided to a dealer by a franchisor not less than 15 days prior to the effective date of such termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal when the grounds for such action are any of the following:

a. Insolvency of the franchised motor vehicle dealer or filing of any petition by or against the franchised motor vehicle dealer, under any bankruptcy or receivership law, leading to liquidation or which is intended to lead to liquidation of the franchisee's business.

b. Failure of the franchised motor vehicle dealer to conduct its customary sales and service operations during its posted business hours for seven consecutive business days, except where the failure results from acts of God or circumstances beyond the direct control of the franchised motor vehicle dealer.

c. Revocation of any license which the franchised motor vehicle dealer is required to have to operate a dealership.

d. Conviction of the dealer or any principal of the dealer of a felony.

The change or discontinuance of a marketing or distribution system of a particular line-make product by a manufacturer or distributor, while the name identification of the product is continued in substantial form by the same or a different manufacturer or distributor, may be considered to be a franchise termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal. The provisions of this paragraph shall apply to changes and discontinuances made after January 1, 1989, but they shall not be considered by any court in any case in which such a change or discontinuance occurring prior to that date has been challenged as constituting a termination, cancellation or nonrenewal.

5a. To fail to provide continued parts and service support to a dealer which holds a franchise in a discontinued line-make for at least five years from the date of such discontinuance. This requirement shall not apply to a line-make which was discontinued prior to January 1, 1989.

5b. Upon the involuntary or voluntary termination, nonrenewal, or cancellation of the franchise of any dealer, by either the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch or by the dealer, notwithstanding the terms of any franchise whether entered into before or after the enactment of this section, to fail to pay the dealer for at least the following:

(1) The dealer cost plus any charges by the franchisor for distribution, delivery, and taxes paid by the dealer, less all allowances paid to the dealer by the franchisor, for new and undamaged motor vehicles in the dealer's inventory acquired from the franchisor or from another dealer of the same line - make in the ordinary course of business within 18 months of termination;

(2) The dealer cost as shown in the price catalog of the franchisor current at the time of repurchase of each new, unused, undamaged, and unsold part or accessory if such part or accessory is in the current parts catalog and is still in the original, resalable merchandising package and in unbroken lots, except that in the case of sheet metal, a comparable substitute for the original package may be used;

(3) The fair market value of each undamaged sign owned by the dealer that bears a trademark, trade name or commercial symbol used or claimed by the franchisor if such sign was purchased from or at the request of the franchisor;

(4) The fair market value of all special tools and automotive service equipment owned by the dealer that were recommended and designated as special tools or equipment by the franchisor, if the tools and equipment are in usable and good condition, normal wear and tear excepted; and

(5) The reasonable cost of transporting, handling, packing, and loading of motor vehicles, parts, signs, tools, and special equipment subject to repurchase hereunder.

The provisions of this subdivision do not apply to a dealer who is unable to convey clear title to the property identified in this subdivision.

For purposes of this subdivision, a voluntary termination shall not include the transfer of the terminating dealer's franchised business in connection with a transfer of that business by means of sale of the equity ownership or assets thereof to another dealer.

5c. If the termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal of the dealer's franchise is the result of the termination, elimination, or cessation of a line-make by the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch, then, in addition to the payments to the dealer pursuant to subdivision 5b, the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch shall be liable to the dealer for the following:

(1) An amount at least equivalent to the fair market value of the franchise for the line-make, which shall be the greater of that value determined as of (i) the date the franchisor announces the action that results in termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal, (ii) the date the action that resulted in the termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal first became general knowledge, or (iii) the day 12 months prior to the date on which the notice of termination, cancellation, or nonrenewal is issued. In determining the fair market value of a franchise for a line-make, if the line-make is not the only line-make for which the dealer holds a franchise in the dealership facilities, the dealer shall also be entitled to compensation for the contribution of the line-make to payment of the rent or to covering obligation for the fair rental value of the dealership facilities for the period set forth in subdivision 5c (2). Fair market value of the franchise for the line-make shall only include the goodwill value of the dealer's franchise for that line-make in the dealer's relevant market area.

(2) If the line-make is the only line-make for which the dealer holds a franchise in the dealership facilities, the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch shall also pay assistance with respect to the dealership facilities leased or owned by the dealer as follows: (i) the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch shall pay the dealer a sum equivalent to the rent for the unexpired term of the lease or three years' rent, whichever is the lesser, or (ii) if the dealer owns the dealership facilities, the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch shall pay the dealer a sum equivalent to the reasonable rental value of the dealership facilities for three years.

To be entitled to facilities assistance from the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch, the dealer shall have the obligation to mitigate damages by listing the dealership facilities for lease or sublease with a licensed real estate agent within 30 days after the effective date of the termination of the franchise and thereafter by reasonably cooperating with such real estate agent in the performance of the agent's duties and responsibilities. If the dealer is able to lease or sublease the dealership facilities on terms that are consistent with local zoning requirements to preserve the right to sell motor vehicles from the dealership facilities and the terms of the dealer's lease, the dealer shall be obligated to pay the

manufacturer the net revenue received from such mitigation, but only following receipt of facilities assistance payments pursuant to clause (i) or (ii) of subdivision 5c (2), and only up to the total amount of facilities assistance payments that the dealer has received.

6. To fail to allow a dealer the right at any time to designate a member of his family as a successor to the dealership in the event of the death or incapacity of the dealer. Such designation may be made by the dealer or, in the event of the death or incapacity of the dealer, by the qualified executor or personal representative of the dealer. It shall be unlawful to prevent or refuse to honor the succession to a dealership by a member of the family of a deceased or incapacitated dealer if the franchisor has not provided to the member of the family designated the dealer's successor written notice of its objections to the succession and of such person's right to seek a hearing on the matter before the Commissioner pursuant to this article, and the Commissioner determines, if requested in writing by such member of the family within 30 days of receipt of such notice from the franchisor, and after a hearing on the matter before the Commissioner pursuant to this article, that the failure to permit or honor the succession is unreasonable under the circumstances. No member of the family may succeed to a franchise unless (i) the franchisor has been given written notice as to the identity, financial ability, and qualifications of the member of the family in question, and (ii) the succession to the franchise will not involve, without the franchisor's consent, a relocation of the business.

7. To delay, refuse, or fail to deliver to any dealer, if ordered by the dealer, in reasonable quantities and within a reasonable time, any new vehicles of each series and model sold or distributed by the franchisor as covered by such franchise and which are publicly advertised by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch in the Commonwealth to be available for immediate delivery, provided, however, that the failure to deliver any motor vehicle shall not be considered a violation of this chapter if such failure is due to an act of God, a work stoppage or delay due to a strike or labor difficulty, a shortage of materials, a lack of available manufacturing capacity, a freight embargo, or other cause over which the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch shall have no control. If ordered by a dealer, a franchisor shall deliver an equitable supply of new vehicles during the model year of each series and model under the dealer's franchise in proportion to the sales objectives or goals established by the franchisor for the dealer compared to the sales objectives or goals established by the other same line-make dealers in the Commonwealth, provided, however, that the failure to deliver any motor vehicle shall not be considered a violation of this chapter if such failure is due to a cause over which the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch shall have no control. Upon the written request of any dealer holding its sales or sales and service franchise, the manufacturer or distributor shall disclose to the dealer in writing the basis upon which new motor vehicles of the same line-make are allocated, scheduled, and delivered to dealers in the Commonwealth, and the basis upon which the current allocation or distribution is being made or will be made to such dealer. In the event that allocation is at issue in a request for a hearing, the dealer may demand the Commissioner to direct that the manufacturer or distributor provide to the dealer, within 30 days of such demand, all records of sales and all records of distribution of all motor vehicles to the same line-make dealers who compete with the dealer requesting the hearing.

7a. To fail or refuse to offer to its same line-make franchised dealers all models manufactured for the line-make, or require a dealer to pay any extra fee, or remodel, renovate, or recondition the dealer's existing facilities, or purchase unreasonable advertising displays or other materials as a prerequisite to receiving a model or a series of vehicles.

7b. To require or otherwise coerce a dealer to underutilize the dealer's facilities by requiring or otherwise coercing a dealer to exclude or remove from the dealer's facilities operations for selling or servicing of a line-make of vehicles for which the dealer has a franchise agreement to utilize the facilities.

7c. To require a dealer to purchase goods or services from a vendor selected, identified, or designated by a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or one of its affiliates by agreement, program, incentive provision, or otherwise without making available to the dealer the option to obtain the goods or services of substantially similar quality from a vendor chosen by the dealer. For purposes of this subdivision, the term "goods" does not include moveable displays, brochures, and promotional materials containing material subject to intellectual property rights of, or special tools and training as required by the manufacturer, or parts to be used in repairs under warranty obligations of, a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch.

7d. To fail to provide a notice to a dealer when notifying it of the requirement to purchase goods or services from a vendor selected, identified, or designated by a manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch of the dealer's rights pursuant to subdivision 7c.

7e. To fail to provide to a dealer, when the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch claims that a vendor chosen by the dealer cannot supply goods and services of substantially similar quality, a disclosure concerning the vendor selected, identified, or designated by the franchisor stating (i) whether the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or one of its affiliates, or any officer, director, or employee of the same, has an ownership interest, actual or beneficial, in the vendor and, if so, the percentage of the ownership interest and (ii) whether the

manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or one of its affiliates has an agreement or arrangement by which the vendor pays to the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or one of its affiliates, or any officer, director, or employee of the same, any compensation and, if so, the basis and amount of the compensation to be paid as a result of any purchases by the dealer, whether it is to be paid by direct payment by the vendor or by credit from the vendor for the benefit of the recipient.

7f. To fail to provide to a dealer, if the goods and services to be supplied to the dealer by a vendor selected, identified, or designated by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch are signs or other franchisor image elements to be leased to the dealer, the right to purchase the signs or other franchisor image elements of like kind and quality from a vendor selected by the dealer. If the vendor selected by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch is the only available vendor, the dealer must be given the opportunity to purchase the signs or other franchisor image elements at a price substantially similar to the capitalized lease costs thereof. This subdivision shall not be construed to allow a dealer to impair or eliminate the intellectual property rights of the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch, nor to permit a dealer to erect or maintain signs that do not conform to the intellectual property usage guidelines of the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch.

8. To include in any franchise with a motor vehicle dealer terms that are contrary to, prohibited by, or otherwise inconsistent with the requirements of this chapter.

8a. For any franchise agreement, to require a motor vehicle dealer to pay the ~~attorney's~~ attorney fees of the manufacturer or distributor related to hearings and appeals brought under this article.

9. To fail to include in any franchise with a motor vehicle dealer the following language: "If any provision herein contravenes the laws or regulations of any state or other jurisdiction wherein this agreement is to be performed, or denies access to the procedures, forums, or remedies provided for by such laws or regulations, such provision shall be deemed to be modified to conform to such laws or regulations, and all other terms and provisions shall remain in full force," or words to that effect.

10. To enter into any agreement with a motor vehicle dealer in which the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, distributor branch, or one of its affiliates is given site control over the premises of a dealer that does not terminate upon the occurrence of any of the following events: (i) the right of the franchisor to manufacture or distribute the line-make of vehicles covered by the dealer's franchise is sold, assigned, or otherwise transferred by the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch to another; (ii) the final termination of the dealer's franchise for any reason; or (iii) the manufacturer, factory branch, distributor, or distributor branch of its affiliate fails for any reason to exercise its right of first refusal to purchase the assets or ownership of the business of the dealer when given the opportunity to do so by virtue of its franchise agreement, another agreement, or as set forth in § 46.2-1569. For purposes of this subdivision, the term "site control" shall mean the contractual right to control in any way the commercial use and development of the premises upon which a dealer's business operations are located, including the right to approve of additional or different uses for the property beyond those of its franchise, the right to lease or sublease the dealer's property, or the right or option to purchase the dealer's property.

2. That the General Assembly finds that the motor vehicle franchise relationship promotes a stable local business atmosphere, enhances business development opportunities, creates employment, provides vehicle purchase and vehicle service opportunities for consumers, and promotes the general economic well-being of the Commonwealth and its citizens. Accordingly, it is appropriate to exercise the General Assembly's power to regulate commerce to protect the citizens of the Commonwealth.