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VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

An Act to amend and reenact § 2.2-517 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Division of Consumer Counsel; duties; artificial intelligence fraud and abuse.

[H 580]

Approved

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:
1. That § 2.2-517 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:
§ 2.2-517. Division of Consumer Counsel created; duties.

A. There is created in the Department of Law a Division of Consumer Counsel (the Division) that shall represent the interests of the people as consumers.

B. The duties of the Division shall be to:

1. Appear before governmental commissions, agencies, and departments, including the State Corporation Commission, to represent and be heard on behalf of consumers' interests, and investigate such matters relating to such appearance.

2. Make such studies related to enforcing consumer laws of the Commonwealth as deemed necessary to protect the interests of the consumer and recommend to the Governor and General Assembly the enactment of such legislation deemed necessary to promote and protect the interests of the people as consumers.

C. In addition, the Division shall:

1. Establish mechanisms by which to receive complaints and related inquiries from the Commonwealth's consumers involving violations or alleged violations of any law designed to protect the integrity of consumer transactions in the Commonwealth. Such mechanisms shall include establishing a statewide, toll-free telephone hotline to be administered by the Division; publicizing the existence of such hotline through public service announcements on television and radio and in newspapers and other media deemed necessary, convenient, or appropriate; and enhancing electronic communication with the Division through the Internet;

2. Establish and administer programs that facilitate resolution of complaints and related inquiries from the Commonwealth's consumers involving violations or alleged violations of any law designed to protect the integrity of consumer transactions in the Commonwealth. Such programs may utilize paid or unpaid personnel, law schools or other institutions of higher education, community dispute resolution centers, or any other private or public entity, including any local offices of consumer affairs established pursuant to § 15.2-963 that volunteer to participate in a program;

3. Promote consumer education in cooperation with the Department of Education and inform the public of policies, decisions, and legislation affecting consumers;

4. Serve as a central coordinating agency and clearinghouse for receiving and investigating complaints by the Commonwealth's consumers of illegal, fraudulent, deceptive, or dangerous practices and referring appropriate complaints to the federal, state, and local departments or agencies charged with enforcement of consumer laws;

5. Maintain records of consumer complaints and their eventual disposition, which records shall be open for public inspection, provided that information disclosing the business interests of any person, trade secrets, or the names of customers shall be held confidential except to the extent that disclosure of such matters may be necessary for the enforcement of laws; ~~and~~

6. Have the authority, in the same manner as provided in § 59.1-308.2, to inquire into consumer complaints regarding violations of § 46.2-1231 or 46.2-1233.1 involving businesses engaged in towing vehicles or to refer the complaint directly to the appropriate local enforcement officials; *and*

7. Establish mechanisms for receiving and investigating complaints by the Commonwealth's consumers involving emerging technologies, including referring appropriate complaints to the federal, state, and local departments or agencies charged with the enforcement of applicable consumer laws.

D. In addition, the Division may inquire into consumer complaints involving towing and recovery operators and tow truck drivers regarding violations of § 46.2-118, 46.2-1217, 46.2-1231, or 46.2-1233.1.

E. The Division, in all investigations connected with enforcing consumer laws and appearances before governmental bodies shall, on behalf of the interests of the consumer, cooperate and coordinate its efforts with such commissions, agencies, and departments in ensuring that any matters adversely affecting the interests of the consumer are properly controlled and regulated. The appearance of a representative of the Division before any governmental body shall in no way limit or alter the duties of such governmental body.

F. The Attorney General may employ and fix the salaries of such attorneys, employees, and consultants, within the amounts appropriated to the Attorney General for providing legal service for the Commonwealth, and other services as may be provided for by law, as he may deem necessary in the operation of the Division

57 of Consumer Counsel to carry out its functions.