COMMERCE AND TRADE Selling and Other Trade Practices: Prohibit Nonlocal Businesses from Listing a Local Telephone Number Under Certain Circumstances; Prohibit Certain Practices Relating to Telemarketing Transactions; Provide for Civil and Criminal Penalties and for Vicarious Liability Under Certain Circumstances

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COMMERCE AND TRADE

Selling and Other Trade Practices: Prohibit Nonlocal Businesses from Listing a Local Telephone Number Under Certain Circumstances; Prohibit Certain Practices Relating to Telemarketing Transactions; Provide for Civil and Criminal Penalties and for Vicarious Liability Under Certain Circumstances

CODE SECTIONS: O.C.G.A. §§ 10-1-393 (amended), -393.6 (new), 10-5B-2, -4, 16-8-12 (amended)
BILL NUMBER: HB 1420
ACT NUMBER: 800
SUMMARY: The Act generally addresses deceptive and fraudulent practices involved in telemarketing transactions. It prohibits nonlocal businesses from listing a local telephone number in any nonclassified local directory without also listing their nonlocal address when calls are routinely forwarded to the nonlocal address. The Act also prohibits telemarketers from engaging in certain fraudulent practices involving credit records, the recovery of money lost in a prior telemarketing transaction, and the use of courier services to receive immediate payment. Further, the Act defines telemarketing to include charitable solicitations and prohibits the use of a courier to receive such contributions. Finally, the Act provides for civil and criminal penalties, including penalties for a felony offense, and for vicarious liability for certain telemarketing transactions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 1998
History

Every year, American consumers lose an estimated forty billion dollars to fraudulent telemarketing transactions. Due in part to Georgia’s abundance of inexpensive office space, many telemarketing companies engaging in fraudulent schemes relocate to the state every year, contributing to Georgia’s ranking in 1996 as the sixth highest state in the nation in telemarketing fraud and the tenth highest in complaints about such fraud. A more alarming statistic is that over seventy-five percent of that fraud is targeted at the State’s elderly citizens. Over the past few years, the Georgia General Assembly has enacted legislation designed to protect the elderly and others who are frequent targets of telemarketing fraud.

In 1996 and 1997, the General Assembly passed legislation targeting telemarketing fraud in Georgia by providing for more effective prosecution and increased consumer protection. The 1996 legislation amended the Fair Business Practices Act of 1975 (FBPA) by expanding the definition of unlawful and deceptive trade practices to include telemarketing transactions and similar activity over the Internet. Similarly, the 1997 legislation amended the FBPA by prohibiting specified fraudulent telemarketing transactions and by allowing for more efficient prosecutions. In addition, in both years, Georgia lawmakers expanded the scope of those subject to criminal penalties for engaging in telemarketing fraud.

8. See Selected 1996 Legislation, supra note 6, at 34.
10. See id. at 34; Selected 1996 Legislation, supra note 6, at 34-35. But see Selected
In 1998, the General Assembly, working in conjunction with advocacy groups for Georgia’s elderly, introduced HB 1420, as part of the continued effort to provide the Governor’s Office of Consumer Affairs with the means to gather information about telemarketing fraud and to aid in the prosecution of such fraud. The bill was the result of a national effort by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and was based upon the organization’s model legislation. However, even before introducing the bill, legislators removed some sections of the model act, such as telemarketer bond requirements and registration with the Office of the Secretary of State, that either did not apply to Georgia or that might have hindered the bill’s passage.

Introduction

Representative Michael Polak, of the 67th District, sponsored the bill and introduced it on January 27, 1998. The bill was assigned to the House Industry Committee, which recommended a “do pass” by substitute. The House unanimously passed a floor amendment on March 6, 1998, and it was sent to the Senate Consumer Affairs Committee, which also recommended a “do pass” by substitute. On March 13, 1998, that substitute was amended on the Senate floor and

1997 Legislation, supra note 6, at 36 (discussing reduction in criminal penalties for violations from those established by previous year’s Act).
11. See Daniel Interview, supra note 3; Polak Interview, supra note 5. The advocacy groups for Georgia’s elderly involved with HB 1420 were the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Co-AGE, and the Consumer Law Center of the South. See Daniel Interview, supra note 3.
13. See Daniel Interview, supra note 3.
14. See Neel Interview, supra note 12.
18. See Polak Interview, supra note 5. This version was not made available for public circulation because it only “cleaned up” the language of the bill without making substantive changes. See id.
unanimously passed. The House concurred with the Senate amendments on March 19, 1998, and the bill was forwarded to Governor Zell Miller, who signed HB 1420 into law on April 6, 1998.

The Act

Section 1

Section 1 of the Act originated as HB 1333, a completely separate bill, sponsored by Representative Don Parsons of the 40th District, that targeted deceptive advertising connected with certain telephone transactions. The House Industry Committee recommended a “do pass” substitute to that bill on February 19, 1998; however, the substitute stalled in the House Rules Committee until March 6, 1998, when Representative Polak attached it to HB 1420 on the last day that bills originating in the House could be sent to the Senate for consideration. Although Section 1 does not target the same type of telemarketing transactions as the remaining sections of HB 1420, Representative Polak allowed the inclusion of HB 1333 because it affected the same Code title as HB 1420 and because both bills would come under the enforcement arm of the Governor’s Office of Consumer Affairs.

Section 1 responds to complaints made largely by local businesses and florists that customers were being deceived into believing that nonlocal businesses were providing local services. The problem was that telephone companies allowed nonlocal businesses to list a local telephone number in directories without also listing their nonlocal location; the directories would even list the nonlocal business as a local one. As a result, consumers searching a local directory for a local business might unknowingly contact a nonlocal business based

25. See Parsons Interview, supra note 23.
26. See id.
27. See id.
28. See id.
solely upon the directory listing. 29 That problem was compounded when the nonlocal businesses enlisted a local business to complete the service and added a fee for their involvement, thus raising the price to the ultimate consumers who thought they were dealing with a local business all along.20

Section 1 remedies this problem by amending Code section 10-1-393 of the FBPA,21 relating to unfair or deceptive consumer transactions. The Act requires nonlocal businesses that list a local telephone number for their services to also list their nonlocal business location when calls will be routinely forwarded to that location.22 While existing language already required nonlocal businesses to disclose their locations in local telephone classified advertising directories,23 such as the “Yellow Pages,” this amendment targets the nonclassified directories, which are distributed by local towns and generally list more local businesses.24 The Act further amends Code section 10-1-393 by adding a definition for nonclassified local telephone directories25 and by making technical changes to accommodate the new language.26

Section 2

Section 2 further amends the FBPA by adding new Code section 10-1-393.6, which prohibits three specific types of telemarketing schemes aimed particularly at the elderly.27 The purpose behind this addition was to make prosecutions for telemarketing fraud more efficient by codifying the schemes as unlawful, thereby relieving prosecutors of

29. See id.
30. See id.
33. See 1996 Ga. Laws 1030, § 1, at 1035 (formerly found at O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393(b)(4) (Supp. 1997)).
34. See Parsons Interview, supra note 23. While the “White Pages” are also considered nonclassified directories, this Code section really targets the local directories distributed by towns because they cover a smaller geographical area and list more local businesses. See id.
36. These minor changes included: a general renumbering and restructuring of the subsection’s organization, see id. § 10-1-393(b)(4); the striking of “classified advertising,” see id. § 10-1-393(b)(4)(B)(i); and the addition of “or listing,” see id. § 10-1-393(b)(4)(B)(v).
37. See Polak Interview, supra note 5; see also text accompanying infra notes 43-51 (discussing three targeted schemes).
the need to prove fraud as an element of the offense.\textsuperscript{38} For that same purpose, legislators drafted the language in the section quite broadly.\textsuperscript{39}

Subsection (a) of Code section 10-1-393.6 refers to the existing definition of telemarketing within the FBPA, which is codified at Code section 10-1-393.5(a).\textsuperscript{40} Georgia's FBPA references the federal telemarketing definition, "a plan, program, or campaign which is conducted to induce the purchase of goods or services by use of one or more telephones and which involves more than one interstate telephone call,"\textsuperscript{41} but includes calls made in intrastate commerce as well.\textsuperscript{42}

Subsection (b) of Code section 10-1-393.6 prohibits telemarketer participation in three specific fraudulent schemes that the AARP identified as causing particular harm to the elderly.\textsuperscript{43} All three involve attempts by telemarketers to receive advance payments for promised services that they never perform.\textsuperscript{44} First, the Act prohibits a telemarketer from requesting an advanced fee for the removal of damaging information from a consumer's credit record.\textsuperscript{45}

The second prohibited scheme involves what is called "boiler room fraud," a two-step transaction whereby the consumer is actually defrauded twice.\textsuperscript{46} This type of fraud occurs when a telemarketer steals money through the first call and then places a second call to the same victim a few weeks later, this time posing as a government agent offering to recover the previously stolen money for a sizeable fee.\textsuperscript{47} The Act prohibits the telemarketer from requesting or receiving in advance the fee charged for supposedly recovering the funds stolen in the "prior telemarketing transaction."\textsuperscript{48} However, to keep the language consistent with federal legislation, the Act continues to allow advanced

\textsuperscript{38} See Neel Interview, supra note 12.
\textsuperscript{39} See id.
\textsuperscript{40} See O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.6(a) (Supp. 1998); 1997 Ga. Laws 1507, § 2, at 1508-09 (codified at O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.5(a) (Supp. 1997)); see also text accompanying infra notes 60-61 (involving creation of a new definition for telemarketing within the Code).
\textsuperscript{41} 16 C.F.R. § 310.2(u) (1998).
\textsuperscript{42} See 1997 Ga. Laws 1507, § 2, at 1508 (codified at O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.5(a) (1994)).
\textsuperscript{43} See Polak Interview, supra note 5.
\textsuperscript{44} See id.
\textsuperscript{45} See id.; O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.6(b)(1) (Supp. 1998).
\textsuperscript{46} Polak Interview, supra note 5.
\textsuperscript{47} See Record of Proceedings, supra note 4.
\textsuperscript{48} O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.6(b)(2) (Supp. 1998); see Polak Interview, supra note 5.
fees charged when attorneys legitimately offer to recover the stolen money.\textsuperscript{49}

Finally, the Act prohibits telemarketer participation in a third fraudulent scheme that involves sending an associate or a courier to the consumer's home to intimidate the consumer into immediate payment for promised services.\textsuperscript{50} However, an exception allows the use of a courier to receive payment in a situation when goods are first delivered and offered for inspection.\textsuperscript{51}

Subsection (c) of Code section 10-1-393.6 creates criminal penalties, beyond any civil penalties, for those intentionally violating subsection (b) and refers to Code section 16-8-12 for the applicable punishment.\textsuperscript{52} Legislators referred to Code section 16-8-12 because that Code section already codified a criminal penalty for other telemarketing transactions prohibited by the Code.\textsuperscript{53} Supporters of the bill chose not to pursue more serious criminal penalties for violations because the General Assembly, in the previous legislative session, had already reduced the maximum prison sentence for telemarketing fraud from twenty years to ten years.\textsuperscript{54} Finally, subsection (c) creates vicarious liability for those constituents possessing "prior actual knowledge" of a violation when the entity itself is charged with the violation, including liability for the officers and directors of a corporation, the owner of a sole proprietorship, and partners.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{Section 3}

Section 3 of the Act amends Chapter 5B of Title 10 of the Code, relating to deceptive, fraudulent, and abusive telemarketing transactions, by adding definitions that bring charitable solicitations under the Code's regulation.\textsuperscript{56} Although nonprofit telemarketers asked to be exempted from regulation, their inclusion in the Act provides

\textsuperscript{49} See O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.6(b)(2) (Supp. 1998); Polak Interview, supra note 5.

\textsuperscript{50} See O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.6(b)(3) (Supp. 1998); Polak Interview, supra note 5.

\textsuperscript{51} See O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.6(b)(3) (Supp. 1998); Polak Interview, supra note 5.

\textsuperscript{52} See O.C.G.A. §§ 10-1-393.6(c), 16-8-12(a)(4) (Supp. 1998).

\textsuperscript{53} See Neel Interview, supra note 12.

\textsuperscript{54} See id.; see also Selected 1997 Legislation, supra note 6, at 36 (discussing reduction in penalties for violations under the Act).

\textsuperscript{55} O.C.G.A. § 10-1-393.6(c) (Supp. 1998).

“teeth” to efforts designed to curb fraudulent telemarketing
transactions overall.\textsuperscript{57}

The first amendment to Code section 10-5B-2 adds a new subsection
that defines the scope of a charitable contribution to include “money
or property of any kind or value to be used for any charitable
purpose,”\textsuperscript{58} and references Code section 43-17-2 to define “charitable
purpose.”\textsuperscript{59} The second amendment creates new language that defines
telemarketing, and other terms related to telemarketing, to include “a
sale or offer to sell a security” and “a solicitation of a charitable
contribution.”\textsuperscript{60} Prior to the Act, no definition for telemarketing
existed in Chapter 5B, and its inclusion should complement the
definition of telemarketing in the FBPA.\textsuperscript{61} Legislators made other
minor changes to Code section 10-5B-2 to accommodate the language
of the added definitions.\textsuperscript{62}

\textit{Section 4}

The regulation of charitable solicitations receives further attention
in Section 4, which also amends Chapter 5B of Title 10 of the Code.\textsuperscript{63}
This time, however, legislators amended Code section 10-5B-4 by
adding nonprofit telemarketers to the list of those prohibited from
using a courier to receive payment for certain transactions.\textsuperscript{64} The
prohibition applies to the use of “any person” as a courier, but is

\textsuperscript{57} Daniel Interview, \textit{supra} note 3.

\textsuperscript{58} O.C.G.A. § 10-5B-2(a)(1) (Supp. 1998).

(“‘Charitable purpose’ means any charitable, benevolent, philanthropic, patriotic, or
religious purpose for religion, health, education, social welfare, arts and
humanities, environment, civic, or public interest; and any purpose which is falsely
represented to be a charitable purpose as defined by this paragraph.”).

\textsuperscript{60} O.C.G.A. § 10-5B-2(a)(6) (Supp. 1998).

\textsuperscript{61} See Neel Interview, \textit{supra} note 12. Before this Act, the Code’s definition of
telemarketing merely referred to the federal definition in 16 C.F.R. § 130.2(u). See text
accompanying \textit{supra} notes 40-42.

\textsuperscript{62} These minor changes included a general renumbering of the subsections and the
additions of the following language: “or charitable sale or contribution” to O.C.G.A. § 10-
5B-2(a)(8)(A) (Supp. 1998); “or contribute” to § 10-5B-2(a)(8)(B); and “in the case of a sale
of goods or services only” to § 10-5B-2(a)(8)(C). \textit{Compare} 1994 Ga. Laws 536, § 1, at 537-38

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Compare} 1994 Ga. Laws 536, § 1, at 539-40 (formerly found at O.C.G.A. § 10-5B-4

\textsuperscript{64} See O.C.G.A. § 10-5B-4(a)(6) (Supp. 1998); Polak Interview, \textit{supra} note 5; \textit{see also}
text accompanying \textit{supra} notes 50-51 (noting prohibitions against the use of couriers by
for-profit telemarketers).
limited to the collection of a “monetary contribution from a residence.” The purpose behind the limitation was to allow the continued use of couriers to receive non-monetary contributions, such as clothing donations to the Salvation Army, and to receive contributions of any type from businesses because these transactions did not involve the use of intimidation against the elderly.

Section 5

Section 5 codifies the criminal punishment associated with violations of Code section 10-1-393.6(b) by amending Code section 16-8-12, which imposes a sentence of “imprisonment for not less than one nor more than ten years” for enumerated crimes. The amendment simply adds violations of Code section 10-1-393.6(b) to the list of crimes already covered, including motor vehicle theft and telemarketing transactions prohibited by Chapter 5B of Title 10 of the Code. Further, Code section 16-8-12 subjects those telemarketers found guilty of subsequent violations of Code section 10-1-393.6(b) to more severe punishments.

HB 1420

House Committee Substitute

The introduced version of HB 1420 would simply have codified prohibitions against certain telemarketing transactions and punishments for violators. However, the House Industry Committee offered a substitute to HB 1420 that resulted in major changes to the introduced version of the bill. First, as introduced in the House, the bill proposed an amendment that would have prevented telemarketers

66. See Polak Interview, supra note 5.
70. See HB 1420, as introduced, 1998 Ga. Gen. Assem. (proposing the prohibitions in Code section 10-1-393.6(b) and the punishments in Code section 16-8-12(a)(4)).
from eliciting bank account information from an unsuspecting consumer and then taking that information to the bank to draw on the consumer’s account. The amendment would have prevented such fraud by requiring banks to obtain the consumer’s written authorization before releasing money from his or her account to the telemarketer; however, at the urging of the banking lobby, the House Industry Committee removed the amendment in its substitute to the bill.

One reason for the failure of the account fraud amendment was that legitimate telemarketers often elicited account information from their customers to obtain payment for services. Therefore, the banking lobby argued that regulating this practice would restrict the legitimate interests of many telemarketers and would result in the loss of banking revenues. The removal of the amendment also reflected a compromise with the banking lobby, whereby banks would fund programs to educate consumers and tellers about the dangers of bank account fraud. These programs would reach consumers, for example, via information mailed with bank statements and would warn against providing routing numbers and other account information to telemarketers over the phone. Other opposition to the account fraud amendment came from the direct-marketing business lobby.

Second, the House Committee substitute included definitions that would amend Code section 10-5B-2 by adding charitable solicitations to the list of telemarketing activities regulated by the Code. Third, the Committee substitute proposed language that would amend Code section 10-5B-4 by prohibiting nonprofit telemarketers from using a courier to collect monetary charitable contributions. Finally, the substitute added language that would continue allowing attorneys to

72. See Neel Interview, supra note 12.
74. See Neel Interview, supra note 12.
75. See id.
76. See id.
77. See id.; Daniel Interview, supra note 3; Polak Interview, supra note 5.
78. See Neel Interview, supra note 12.
79. See Polak Interview, supra note 5.
80. See HB 1420 (HCS), 1998 Ga. Gen. Assem.; see also text accompanying supra notes 56-82 (referring to changes to Code section 10-5B-2).
contact consumers regarding the recovery of funds lost to a prior telemarketing transaction.\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{House Floor Amendment}

Representatives amended the Committee substitute on the House floor in the waning hours of March 6, 1998, the last day that bills originating in that chamber could pass to the Senate for consideration.\textsuperscript{83} The only change made to the substitute was the inclusion of HB 1333, which prohibited nonlocal businesses from listing local telephone numbers in nonclassified directories without also listing their nonlocal addresses when the calls would be forwarded to that location.\textsuperscript{84} Legislators included that prohibition as part of proposed Code section 10-1-393.6(b), with the definition of “nonclassified local directory” added to proposed Code section 10-5B-2(a).\textsuperscript{85}

\textit{Senate Committee Substitute}

The Senate Consumer Affairs Committee offered a substitute to the House version of HB 1420, but made only minor changes to “clean up” the bill’s language.\textsuperscript{86} The Committee did not make any substantive changes to HB 1420.\textsuperscript{87}

\textit{Senate Floor Amendment}

Senators amended the Consumer Affairs Committee substitute on the Senate floor with only minor changes that reorganized the bill and some of its language.\textsuperscript{88} First, the floor amendment relocated the language of HB 1333, referring to telephone listings placed by nonlocal

\textsuperscript{82} See HB 1420 (HCS), 1998 Ga. Gen. Assem.; see also text accompanying supra notes 46-49 (referring to changes to Code section 10-1-393.6(b)(2)).

\textsuperscript{83} See Parsons Interview, supra note 23.

\textsuperscript{84} See HB 1420 (HCSFA), 1998 Ga. Gen. Assem.; see also text accompanying supra notes 23-26 (discussing inclusion of HB 1333 to HB 1420).

\textsuperscript{85} See HB 1420 (HCSFA), 1998 Ga. Gen. Assem. (proposing Code section 10-1-393.6(b)(4) to codify the prohibition and Code section 10-5B-2(a)(9) to codify the definition).

\textsuperscript{86} Polak Interview, supra note 5. Incidentally, no version of HB 1420 (SCS) was made available for public circulation. See also text accompanying supra note 18.

\textsuperscript{87} See Polak Interview, supra note 5.

businesses in nonclassified local directories, to proposed Code section 10-1-393. This move placed the nonclassified directory language in the same Code section as existing language relating to classified directories. While that move also placed the HB 1333 language in the first section of the bill, it did not reflect any intent to reprioritize the various amendments. Rather, the relocation was merely an effort to fit this language into the appropriate Code section. Second, the floor amendment also added language to proposed Code section 10-1-393.6(b) that limited the prohibition against requesting an advanced fee for removing damaging information from a consumer’s credit report to those transactions involving telemarketers.

House Concurrence

On the last day of the 1998 session, the House unanimously adopted the Senate floor amendment to HB 1420 without any further changes. Governor Miller signed the bill into law on April 6, 1998.

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89. See text accompanying supra notes 22-36 (discussing inclusion of HB 1333 to HB 1420).
92. See Parsons Interview, supra note 23.
93. See id.; Polak Interview, supra note 5.