Public Law 103-297
103d Congress

An Act

To strengthen the authority of the Federal Trade Commission to protect consumers in connection with sales made with a telephone, and for other purposes.

Aug. 16, 1994
[H.R. 868]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act. 15 USC 6101 note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

15 USC 6101.

The Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Telemarketing differs from other sales activities in that it can be carried out by sellers across State lines without direct contact with the consumer. Telemarketers also can be very mobile, easily moving from State to State.

(2) Interstate telemarketing fraud has become a problem of such magnitude that the resources of the Federal Trade Commission are not sufficient to ensure adequate consumer protection from such fraud.

(3) Consumers and others are estimated to lose $40 billion a year in telemarketing fraud.

(4) Consumers are victimized by other forms of telemarketing deception and abuse.

(5) Consequently, Congress should enact legislation that will offer consumers necessary protection from telemarketing deception and abuse.

SEC. 3. TELEMARKETING RULES.

15 USC 6102.

(a) IN GENERAL.—

(1) The Commission shall prescribe rules prohibiting deceptive telemarketing acts or practices and other abusive telemarketing acts or practices.

(2) The Commission shall include in such rules respecting deceptive telemarketing acts or practices a definition of deceptive telemarketing acts or practices which may include acts or practices of entities or individuals that assist or facilitate deceptive telemarketing, including credit card laundering.

(3) The Commission shall include in such rules respecting other abusive telemarketing acts or practices—

(A) a requirement that telemarketers may not undertake a pattern of unsolicited telephone calls which the reasonable consumer would consider coercive or abusive of such consumer's right to privacy,

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(B) restrictions on the hours of the day and night when unsolicited telephone calls can be made to consumers, and

(C) a requirement that any person engaged in telemarketing for the sale of goods or services shall promptly and clearly disclose to the person receiving the call that the purpose of the call is to sell goods or services and make such other disclosures as the Commission deems appropriate, including the nature and price of the goods and services.

In prescribing the rules described in this paragraph, the Commission shall also consider recordkeeping requirements.

(b) RULEMAKING.—The Commission shall prescribe the rules under subsection (a) within 365 days after the date of enactment of this Act. Such rules shall be prescribed in accordance with section 553 of title 5, United States Code.

(c) ENFORCEMENT.—Any violation of any rule prescribed under subsection (a) shall be treated as a violation of a rule under section 18 of the Federal Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. 57a) regarding unfair or deceptive acts or practices.

(d) SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION RULES.—

(1) PROMULGATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), not later than 6 months after the effective date of rules promulgated by the Federal Trade Commission under subsection (a), the Securities and Exchange Commission shall promulgate, or require any national securities exchange or registered securities association to promulgate, rules substantially similar to such rules to prohibit deceptive and other abusive telemarketing acts or practices by persons described in paragraph (2).

(B) EXCEPTION.—The Securities and Exchange Commission is not required to promulgate a rule under subparagraph (A) if it determines that—

(i) Federal securities laws or rules adopted by the Securities and Exchange Commission thereunder provide protection from deceptive and other abusive telemarketing by persons described in paragraph (2) substantially similar to that provided by rules promulgated by the Federal Trade Commission under subsection (a); or

(ii) such a rule promulgated by the Securities and Exchange Commission is not necessary or appropriate in the public interest, or for the protection of investors, or would be inconsistent with the maintenance of fair and orderly markets.

Federal Register, publication.

If the Securities and Exchange Commission determines that an exception described in clause (i) or (ii) applies, the Securities and Exchange Commission shall publish in the Federal Register its determination with the reasons for it.

(2) APPLICATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The rules promulgated by the Securities and Exchange Commission under paragraph (1)(A) shall apply to a broker, dealer, transfer agent, municipal securities dealer, municipal securities broker, government securities broker, government securities dealer, investment

adviser or investment company, or any individual associated with a broker, dealer, transfer agent, municipal securities dealer, municipal securities broker, government securities broker, government securities dealer, investment adviser or investment company. The rules promulgated by the Federal Trade Commission under subsection (a) shall not apply to persons described in the preceding sentence.

(B) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of subparagraph (A)—

(i) the terms "broker", "dealer", "transfer agent", "municipal securities dealer", "municipal securities broker", "government securities broker", and "government securities dealer" have the meanings given such terms by paragraphs (4), (5), (25), (30), (31), (43), and (44) of section 3(a) of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934 (15 U.S.C. 78c(a)(4), (5), (25), (30), (31), (43), and (44));

(ii) the term "investment adviser" has the meaning given such term by section 202(a)(11) of the Investment Advisers Act of 1940 (15 U.S.C. 80b–2(a)(11)); and

(iii) the term "investment company" has the meaning given such term by section 3(a) of the Investment Company Act of 1940 (15 U.S.C. 80a–3(a)).

(e) COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION RULES.—

(1) APPLICATION.—The rules promulgated by the Federal Trade Commission under subsection (a) shall not apply to persons described in subsection (f)(1) of section 6 of the Commodity Exchange Act (7 U.S.C. 8, 9, 15, 13b, 9a).

(2) PROMULGATION.—Section 6 of the Commodity Exchange Act (7 U.S.C. 8, 9, 15, 13b, 9a) is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(f)(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), not later than six months after the effective date of rules promulgated by the Federal Trade Commission under section 3(a) of the Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act, the Commission shall promulgate, or require each registered futures association to promulgate, rules substantially similar to such rules to prohibit deceptive and other abusive telemarketing acts or practices by any person registered or exempt from registration under this Act in connection with such person's business as a futures commission merchant, introducing broker, commodity trading advisor, commodity pool operator, leverage transaction merchant, floor broker, or floor trader, or a person associated with any such person. 7 USC 9b.

"(2) The Commission is not required to promulgate rules under paragraph (1) if it determines that—

"(A) rules adopted by the Commission under this Act provide protection from deceptive and abusive telemarketing by persons described under paragraph (1) substantially similar to that provided by rules promulgated by the Federal Trade Commission under section 3(a) of the Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act; or

"(B) such a rule promulgated by the Commission is not necessary or appropriate in the public interest, or for the protection of customers in the futures and options markets, or would be inconsistent with the maintenance of fair and orderly markets.

Federal Register, publication.

If the Commission determines that an exception described in subparagraph (A) or (B) applies, the Commission shall publish in the Federal Register its determination with the reasons for it.".

15 USC 6103.

SEC. 4. ACTIONS BY STATES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Whenever an attorney general of any State has reason to believe that the interests of the residents of that State have been or are being threatened or adversely affected because any person has engaged or is engaging in a pattern or practice of telemarketing which violates any rule of the Commission under section 3, the State, as parens patriae, may bring a civil action on behalf of its residents in an appropriate district court of the United States to enjoin such telemarketing, to enforce compliance with such rule of the Commission, to obtain damages, restitution, or other compensation on behalf of residents of such State, or to obtain such further and other relief as the court may deem appropriate.

(b) NOTICE.—The State shall serve prior written notice of any civil action under subsection (a) or (f)(2) upon the Commission and provide the Commission with a copy of its complaint, except that if it is not feasible for the State to provide such prior notice, the State shall serve such notice immediately upon instituting such action. Upon receiving a notice respecting a civil action, the Commission shall have the right (1) to intervene in such action, (2) upon so intervening, to be heard on all matters arising therein, and (3) to file petitions for appeal.

(c) CONSTRUCTION.—For purposes of bringing any civil action under subsection (a), nothing in this Act shall prevent an attorney general from exercising the powers conferred on the attorney general by the laws of such State to conduct investigations or to administer oaths or affirmations or to compel the attendance of witnesses or the production of documentary and other evidence.

(d) ACTIONS BY THE COMMISSION.—Whenever a civil action has been instituted by or on behalf of the Commission for violation of any rule prescribed under section 3, no State may, during the pendency of such action instituted by or on behalf of the Commission, institute a civil action under subsection (a) or (f)(2) against any defendant named in the complaint in such action for violation of any rule as alleged in such complaint.

(e) VENUE; SERVICE OF PROCESS.—Any civil action brought under subsection (a) in a district court of the United States may be brought in the district in which the defendant is found, is an inhabitant, or transacts business or wherever venue is proper under section 1391 of title 28, United States Code. Process in such an action may be served in any district in which the defendant is an inhabitant or in which the defendant may be found.

(f) ACTIONS BY OTHER STATE OFFICIALS.—

(1) Nothing contained in this section shall prohibit an authorized State official from proceeding in State court on the basis of an alleged violation of any civil or criminal statute of such State.

(2) In addition to actions brought by an attorney general of a State under subsection (a), such an action may be brought by officers of such State who are authorized by the State to bring actions in such State on behalf of its residents.

SEC. 5. ACTIONS BY PRIVATE PERSONS. 15 USC 6104.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Any person adversely affected by any pattern or practice of telemarketing which violates any rule of the Commission under section 3, or an authorized person acting on such person's behalf, may, within 3 years after discovery of the violation, bring a civil action in an appropriate district court of the United States against a person who has engaged or is engaging in such pattern or practice of telemarketing if the amount in controversy exceeds the sum or value of $50,000 in actual damages for each person adversely affected by such telemarketing. Such an action may be brought to enjoin such telemarketing, to enforce compliance with any rule of the Commission under section 3, to obtain damages, or to obtain such further and other relief as the court may deem appropriate.

(b) NOTICE.—The plaintiff shall serve prior written notice of the action upon the Commission and provide the Commission with a copy of its complaint, except in any case where such prior notice is not feasible, in which case the person shall serve such notice immediately upon instituting such action. The Commission shall have the right (A) to intervene in the action, (B) upon so intervening, to be heard on all matters arising therein, and (C) to file petitions for appeal.

(c) ACTION BY THE COMMISSION.—Whenever a civil action has been instituted by or on behalf of the Commission for violation of any rule prescribed under section 3, no person may, during the pendency of such action instituted by or on behalf of the Commission, institute a civil action against any defendant named in the complaint in such action for violation of any rule as alleged in such complaint.

(d) COST AND FEES.—The court, in issuing any final order in any action brought under subsection (a), may award costs of suit and reasonable fees for attorneys and expert witnesses to the prevailing party.

(e) CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section shall restrict any right which any person may have under any statute or common law.

(f) VENUE; SERVICE OF PROCESS.—Any civil action brought under subsection (a) in a district court of the United States may be brought in the district in which the defendant is found, is an inhabitant, or transacts business or wherever venue is proper under section 1391 of title 28, United States Code. Process in such an action may be served in any district in which the defendant is an inhabitant or in which the defendant may be found.

SEC. 6. ADMINISTRATION AND APPLICABILITY OF ACT. 15 USC 6105.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as otherwise provided in sections 3(d), 3(e), 4, and 5, this Act shall be enforced by the Commission under the Federal Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. 41 et seq.). Consequently, no activity which is outside the jurisdiction of that Act shall be affected by this Act.

(b) ACTIONS BY THE COMMISSION.—The Commission shall prevent any person from violating a rule of the Commission under section 3 in the same manner, by the same means, and with the same jurisdiction, powers, and duties as though all applicable terms and provisions of the Federal Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. 41 et seq.) were incorporated into and made a part of this Act. Any person who violates such rule shall be subject to

the penalties and entitled to the privileges and immunities provided in the Federal Trade Commission Act in the same manner, by the same means, and with the same jurisdiction, power, and duties as though all applicable terms and provisions of the Federal Trade Commission Act were incorporated into and made a part of this Act.

(c) EFFECT ON OTHER LAWS.—Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to limit the authority of the Commission under any other provision of law.

15 USC 6106.

SEC. 7. DEFINITIONS.

For purposes of this Act:

(1) The term "attorney general" means the chief legal officer of a State.

(2) The term "Commission" means the Federal Trade Commission.

(3) The term "State" means any State of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, and any territory or possession of the United States.

(4) The term "telemarketing" means a plan, program, or campaign which is conducted to induce purchases of goods or services by use of one or more telephones and which involves more than one interstate telephone call. The term does not include the solicitation of sales through the mailing of a catalog which—

(A) contains a written description, or illustration of the goods or services offered for sale,

(B) includes the business address of the seller,

(C) includes multiple pages of written material or illustrations, and

(D) has been issued not less frequently than once a year,

where the person making the solicitation does not solicit customers by telephone but only receives calls initiated by customers in response to the catalog and during those calls takes orders only without further solicitation.

SEC. 8. FALSE ADVERTISEMENTS CONCERNING SERVICES.

Section 12(a) of the Federal Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. 52(a)) is amended by inserting "services," immediately after "devices," each place it appears.

15 USC 6107.

SEC. 9. ENFORCEMENT OF ORDERS.

(a) GENERAL AUTHORITY.—Subject to subsections (b) and (c), the Federal Trade Commission may bring a criminal contempt action for violations of orders of the Commission obtained in cases brought under section 13(b) of the Federal Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. 53(b)).

(b) APPOINTMENT.—An action authorized by subsection (a) may be brought by the Federal Trade Commission only after, and pursuant to, the appointment by the Attorney General of an attorney employed by the Commission, as a special assistant United States Attorney.

(c) REQUEST FOR APPOINTMENT.—

(1) APPOINTMENT UPON REQUEST OR MOTION.—A special assistant United States Attorney may be appointed under subsection (b) upon the request of the Federal Trade Commission

or the court which has entered the order for which contempt is sought or upon the Attorney General's own motion.

(2) TIMING.—The Attorney General shall act upon any request made under paragraph (1) within 45 days of the receipt of the request.

(d) TERMINATION OF AUTHORITY.—The authority of the Federal Trade Commission to bring a criminal contempt action under subsection (a) expires 2 years after the date of the first promulgation of rules under section 3. The expiration of such authority shall have no effect on an action brought before the expiration date.

SEC. 10. REVIEW.

Reports.
15 USC 6108.

Upon the expiration of 5 years following the date of the first promulgation of rules under section 3, the Commission shall review the implementation of this Act and its effect on deceptive telemarketing acts or practices and report the results of the review to the Congress.

Approved August 16, 1994.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 868 (S. 568):

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 103-20 (Comm. on Energy and Commerce).
SENATE REPORTS: No. 103-80 accompanying S. 568 (Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transportation).
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:
Vol. 139 (1993): Mar. 2, considered and passed House.
June 30, considered and passed Senate, amended.
Vol. 140 (1994): July 25, House concurred in Senate amendment with an amendment.
Aug. 2, Senate concurred in House amendment.