

CHAPTER 317

[Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5838]

HEALTH STUDIOS

AN ACT Relating to health studios; adding a new chapter to Title 19 RCW; and prescribing penalties.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Washington:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. The legislature finds that there exist in connection with a substantial number of contracts for health studio services certain practices and business methods which have worked undue financial hardship upon some of the citizens of the state and that existing legal remedies are inadequate to correct existing problems in the industry. The legislature declares that it is a matter of public interest that the citizens of our state be assured reasonable protection when contracting for health studio services.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter:

(1) "Business day" means any day except a Sunday or a legal holiday.

(2) "Buyer" or "member" means a person who purchases health studio services.

(3) "Health studio" includes any person or entity engaged in the sale of instruction, training, assistance or use of facilities which purport to assist patrons to improve their physical condition or appearance through physical exercise, body building, weight loss, figure development, or any other similar activity. For the purposes of this chapter, "health studio" does not include: (a) Public common schools, private schools approved under RCW 28A.02-.201, and public or private institutions of higher education; (b) persons providing professional services within the scope of a person's license under Title 18 RCW; (c) bona fide nonprofit organizations which have been granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service, the functions of which as health studios are only incidental to their overall functions and purposes; (d) a person or entity which offers physical exercise, body building, figure development or similar activities as incidental features of a plan of instruction or assistance relating to diet or control of eating habits; (e) bona fide nonprofit corporations organized under chapter 24.03 RCW which have members and whose members have meaningful voting rights to elect and remove a board of directors which is responsible for the operation of the health club and corporation; and (f) a preexisting facility primarily offering aerobic classes, where the initiation fee is less than fifty dollars and no memberships are sold which exceed one year in duration. For purposes of this subsection, "preexisting facility" means an existing building used for health studio services covered by the fees collected.

(4) "Health studio services" means instruction, services, privileges, or rights offered for sale by a health studio. "Health studio services" do not include: (a) Instruction or assistance relating to diet or control of eating habits not involving substantial on-site physical exercise, body building, figure development, or any other similar activity; or (b) recreational or social programs which either involve no physical exercise or exercise only incidental to the program.

(5) "Initiation or membership fee" means a fee paid either in a lump sum or installments on a one-time basis when a person first joins a health studio for the privilege of belonging to the health studio.

(6) "Special offer or discount" means any offer of health studio services at a reduced price or without charge to a prospective member.

(7) "Use fees or dues" means fees paid on a regular periodic basis for use of a health studio. This does not preclude prepayment of use fees at the buyer's option.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. (1) Each health studio shall prepare and provide to each prospective buyer a written comprehensive list of all membership plans of health studio services offered for sale by the health studio. The list shall contain a description and the respective price of each membership plan of health studio services offered.

(2) A health studio is prohibited from selling a membership plan of health studio services not included in the list.

(3) A health studio is prohibited from making a special offer or offering a discount unless such special offer or discount is made in writing and available to all prospective members: **PROVIDED**, That a special offer or discount offered to groups need not be available to all similarly-situated prospective members.

(4) A health studio is prohibited from making any misrepresentation to any prospective buyer or current member regarding qualifications of staff, availability or quality of facilities or services, or results obtained through exercise, body building, figure development, or weight loss programs, or the present or maximum number of customers who may contract to use the facilities or services.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 4. A contract for the sale of health studio services shall be in writing. A copy of the contract, as well as the rules of the health studio if not stated in the contract, shall be given to the buyer when the buyer signs the contract.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 5. A contract for health studio services shall include all of the following:

(1) The name and address of the health studio facilities operator;

(2) The date the buyer signed the contract;

(3) A description of the health studio services and general equipment to be provided, or acknowledgement in a conspicuous form that the buyer

has received a written description of the health studio services and equipment to be provided. If any of the health studio services or equipment are to be delivered at a planned facility, at a facility under construction, or through substantial improvements to an existing facility, the description shall include a date for completion of the facility, construction, or improvement. Health studio services must begin within twelve months from the date the contract is signed unless the completion of the facility, construction, or improvement is delayed due to war, or fire, flood, or other natural disaster;

(4) A statement of the duration of the contract. No contract for health studio services may require payments or financing by the buyer over a period in excess of thirty-six months from the date of the contract, nor may any contract term be measured by or be for the life of the buyer;

(5) The use fees or dues to be paid by the buyer and if such fees are subject to periodic adjustment. Use fees or dues may not be raised more than once in any calendar year;

(6) A complete statement of the rules of the health studio or an acknowledgement in a conspicuous form that the buyer has received a copy of the rules;

(7) Clauses which notify the buyer of the right to cancel:

(a) If the buyer dies or becomes totally disabled. The contract may require that the disability be confirmed by an examination of a physician agreeable to the buyer and the health studio;

(b) (i) Subject to (b)(ii) of this subsection, if the buyer moves his or her permanent residence to a location more than twenty-five miles from the health studio or an affiliated health studio offering the same or similar services and facilities at no additional expense to the buyer and the buyer cancels after one year from signing the contract if the contract extends for more than one year. The health studio may require reasonable evidence of relocation;

(ii) If at the time of signing the contract requiring payment of an initiation or membership fee the buyer lived more than twenty-five miles from the health studio, the buyer may cancel under (7)(b)(i) of this section only if the buyer moves an additional five miles or more from the health studio.

(c) If a contract extends for more than one year or requires payment of an initiation or membership fee, in which case the buyer may cancel the contract for any reason upon thirty days' written notice to the health studio;

(d) If the health studio facilities are permanently closed and comparable facilities owned and operated by the seller are not made available within a ten-mile radius of the closed facility;

(e) If a facility, construction, or improvement is not completed by the date represented by the contract;

(f) If the contract for health studio services was sold prior to the opening of the facility, the buyer may cancel within the first five business days

the facility opens for use of the buyer and the health studio begins to provide the agreed upon health studio services;

(8) Clauses explaining the buyer's right to a refund and relief from future payment obligations after cancellation of the contract;

(9) A provision under a conspicuous caption in capital letters and boldface type stating substantially the following:

"BUYER'S RIGHT TO CANCEL

If you wish to cancel this contract without penalty, you may cancel it by delivering or mailing a written notice to the health studio. The notice must say that you do not wish to be bound by the contract and must be delivered or mailed before midnight of the third business day after you sign this contract. The notice must be mailed to (insert name and mailing address of health studio). If you cancel within the three days, the health studio will return to you within thirty days all amounts you have paid."

NEW SECTION. Sec. 6. After receipt of a written notice of cancellation, the health studio shall provide a refund to the buyer within thirty days. The health studio may require the buyer to return any membership card or other materials which evidence membership in the health studio. The buyer is entitled to a refund and relief from future obligations for payments of initiation or membership fees and use fees or dues as follows:

(1) The buyer is entitled to a refund of the unused portion of any prepaid use fees or dues and relief from future obligations to pay use fees or dues concerning use after the date of cancellation.

(2) (a) Subject to (b) of this subsection, if a contract includes a one-time only initiation or membership fee and the buyer cancels pursuant to section 5(7)(a) of this act, the buyer is entitled to a pro rata refund of the fee less a predetermined amount not to exceed one-half of the initial initiation or membership fee if the contract clearly states what percentage of the fee is nonrefundable or refundable.

(b) If a contract includes a one-time only initiation or membership fee and the buyer cancels pursuant to section 5(7)(a) of this act three years or more after the signing of the contract requiring payment of such fee, such fee is nonrefundable.

(3) If a contract includes a one-time only initiation or membership fee and the buyer cancels pursuant to section 5(7) (b) or (c) of this act, the buyer is entitled to a pro rata refund of the fee less a predetermined amount not to exceed one-half of the initial initiation or membership fee unless the contract clearly states that the initiation or membership fee is nonrefundable, and the clause is separately signed by the buyer.

(4) If a contract includes a one-time only initiation or membership fee and the buyer cancels pursuant to section 5(7)(d) of this act, the buyer is entitled to a pro rata refund of the fee.

(5) If a contract includes a one-time only initiation or membership fee and the buyer cancels pursuant to section 5(7) (e) or (f) of this act, the buyer is entitled to a full refund of the fee.

If a buyer is entitled to a pro rata refund under this section, the amount shall be computed by dividing the contract price by the number of weeks in the contract term and multiplying the result by the number of weeks remaining in the contract term.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 7. (1) All moneys paid to a health studio prior to the opening of the facility shall immediately be deposited in a trust account of a federally insured financial institution located in this state. The trust account shall be designated and maintained for the benefit of health studio members. Moneys maintained in the trust account shall be exempt from execution, attachment, or garnishment. A health studio shall not in any way encumber the corpus of the trust account or commingle any other operating funds with trust account funds. Withdrawals from the trust account shall be made no sooner than thirty days after the opening of the entire facility.

(2) The health studio shall within seven days of the first deposit notify the office of the attorney general in writing, of the name, address, and location of the depository and any subsequent change thereof.

(3) The health studio shall provide the buyer with a written receipt for the money and shall provide written notice of the name, address, and location of the depository and any subsequent change thereof.

(4) The health studio shall maintain a record of each trust account deposit, including the name and address of each member whose funds are being deposited, the amount paid and the date of the deposit. Upon request of the attorney general's office, upon five days' notice, such records shall be produced for inspection.

(5) If prior to the opening of the facility the status of the health studio is transferred to another, any sums in the trust account affected by the transfer shall simultaneously be transferred to an equivalent trust account of the successor, and the successor shall promptly notify the buyer and the office of the attorney general of the transfer and of the name, address, and location of the new depository.

(6) The buyer's claim to any money under this section is prior to that of any creditor of the health studio, including a trustee in bankruptcy or receiver.

(7) After the health studio receives a notice of cancellation of the contract, or if the health studio fails to open a facility at the stated date of completion and if the buyer so requests, then the health studio shall provide a refund within thirty days.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 8. The requirements of section 7 of this act do not apply to any health studios which, prior to any preopening sales, have provided a bond guaranteeing the completion or opening of any facility for which contracts for health studio services were sold prior to the opening of the facility. The bond shall be drawn upon a surety in the amount of one hundred fifty thousand dollars, running to the state of Washington. An action on the bond may be brought by the office of the attorney general or by any buyer of a contract for health studio services sold prior to the opening of the facility.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 9. Failure to furnish a bond as required by section 8 of this act or to maintain a trust account as required by section 7 of this act shall constitute a class C felony punishable as provided in chapter 9A.20 RCW.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 10. A health studio shall not request a buyer to waive any provision of this chapter. Any contract for health studio services which does not comply with the provisions of this chapter or in which a buyer waives any provision of this chapter is void and unenforceable as contrary to public policy.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 11. A violation of this chapter constitutes an unfair or deceptive act or practice and is a per se violation of the consumer protection act, chapter 19.86 RCW.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 12. Buyers who prevail in any cause of action under this chapter are entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 13. The provisions of this chapter are cumulative and nonexclusive and do not affect any other remedy available at law.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 14. The provisions of this chapter shall not apply to any contracts for health studio services entered into before the effective date of this act.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 15. Sections 1 through 14 of this act shall constitute a new chapter in Title 19 RCW.

Passed the Senate April 25, 1987.

Passed the House April 25, 1987.

Approved by the Governor May 11, 1987.

Filed in Office of Secretary of State May 11, 1987.

CHAPTER 318

[Senate Bill No. 5948]

MOTOR VEHICLE RETAIL INSTALLMENT CONTRACT SERVICE CHARGES

AN ACT Relating to interest rates on retail installment contracts for the purchase of motor vehicles; amending RCW 63.14.130; and providing an effective date.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Washington: