WEST virginia legislature

2021 regular session

Introduced

Senate Bill 401

By Senator Nelson

[Introduced February 23, 2021; referred
to the Committee on the Judiciary]

A BILL to amend and reenact §46A-1-102 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended; to amend and reenact §46A-2-122 of said code; to amend and reenact §46A-5-101, §46A-5-104, and §46A-5-106 of said code; and to amend and reenact §46A-6-106 of said code, all relating to the Consumer Credit and Protection Act; excluding checking, savings, and other depository accounts from the definition of “services”; excluding a party collecting on its own debt from the definition of “debt collector”; establishing an actual loss threshold of $5,000 for the certification of a class action; limiting recovery of each individual within a class to the greater of $1,000 per claim penalty or the total outstanding indebtedness; reducing the current statute of limitations from four years to one year; reducing stator penalties to $1,000 per claim from $1,000 per violation; limiting recoverable attorney’s fees to four times the award; updating the adjustment for inflation from September 2015 to September 2021; and prohibiting class actions under article 6 of the act.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 1. SHORT TITLE, DEFINITIONS AND GENERAL PROVISIONS.

§46A-1-102. General definitions.

In addition to definitions appearing in subsequent articles, in this chapter:

(1) “Actuarial method” means the method, defined by rules adopted by the commissioner, of allocating payments made on a debt between principal or amount financed and loan finance charge or sales finance charge pursuant to which a payment is applied first to the accumulated loan finance charge or sales finance charge and the balance is applied to the unpaid principal or unpaid amount financed.

(2) “Agreement” means the bargain of the parties in fact as found in their language or by implication from other circumstances including course of dealing or usage of trade or course of performance. A “consumer credit agreement” is an agreement where credit is granted.

(3) “Agricultural purpose” means a purpose related to the production, harvest, exhibition, marketing, transportation, processing or manufacture of agricultural products by a natural person who cultivates, plants, propagates or nurtures the agricultural products. “Agricultural products” includes agricultural, horticultural, viticultural and dairy products, livestock, wildlife, poultry, bees, forest products, fish and shellfish, and any products thereof, including processed and manufactured products, and any and all products raised or produced on farms and any processed or manufactured products thereof.

(4) “Amount financed” means the total of the following items to the extent that payment is deferred:

(a) The cash price of the goods, services or interest in land, less the amount of any down payment whether made in cash or in property traded in;

(b) The amount actually paid or to be paid by the seller pursuant to an agreement with the buyer to discharge a security interest in or a lien on property traded in; and

(c) If not included in the cash price:

(i) Any applicable sales, use, privilege, excise or documentary stamp taxes;

(ii) Amounts actually paid or to be paid by the seller for registration, certificate of title or license fees; and

(iii) Additional charges permitted by this chapter.

(5) “Average daily balance” in a billing cycle for which a sales finance charge or loan finance charge is made is the sum of the amount unpaid each day during that cycle divided by the number of days in that cycle. The amount unpaid on a day is determined by adding to the balance, if any, unpaid as of the beginning of that day all purchases and other debits and deducting all payments and other credits made or received as of that day.

(6) The “cash price” of goods, services or an interest in land means the price at which the goods, services or interest in land are offered for sale by the seller to cash buyers in the ordinary course of business, and may include: (a) Applicable sales, use, privilege, and excise and documentary stamp taxes; (b) the cash price of accessories or related services such as delivery, installation, servicing, repairs, alterations and improvements; and (c) amounts actually paid or to be paid by the seller for registration, certificate of title or license fees.

(7) “Closing costs” with respect to a debt secured by an interest in land include:

(a) Fees or premiums for title examination, title insurance or similar purposes including surveys;

(b) Fees for preparation of a deed, deed of trust, mortgage, settlement statement or other documents;

(c) Escrows for future payments of taxes and insurance;

(d) Official fees and fees for notarizing deeds and other documents;

(e) Appraisal fees; and

(f) Credit reports.

(8) “Code” means the official Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended.

(9) “Commercial facsimile transmission” means the electronic or telephonic transmission in the state to a facsimile device to encourage a person to purchase goods, realty or services.

(10) “Commissioner” means the commissioner of banking of West Virginia.

(11) “Conspicuous” A term or clause is conspicuous when it is so written that a reasonable person against whom it is to operate ought to have noticed it. Whether a term or clause is conspicuous or not is for decision by the court.

(12) “Consumer” means a natural person who incurs debt pursuant to a consumer credit sale or a consumer loan, or debt or other obligations pursuant to a consumer lease.

(13) (a) Except as provided in paragraph (b), "consumer credit sale" is a sale of goods, services or an interest in land in which:

(i) Credit is granted either by a seller who regularly engages as a seller in credit transactions of the same kind or pursuant to a seller credit card;

(ii) The buyer is a person other than an organization;

(iii) The goods, services or interest in land are purchased primarily for a personal, family, household or agricultural purpose;

(iv) Either the debt is payable in installments or a sales finance charge is made; and

(v) With respect to a sale of goods or services, the amount financed does not exceed $45,000 or the sale is of a factory-built home as defined in §37-15-2 of this code.

(b) “Consumer credit sale” does not include a sale in which the seller allows the buyer to purchase goods or services pursuant to a lender credit card or similar arrangement.

(14) (a) “Consumer lease” means a lease of goods:

(i) Which a lessor regularly engaged in the business of leasing makes to a person, other than an organization, who takes under the lease primarily for a personal, family, household or agricultural purpose;

(ii) In which the total of payments under the lease, excluding payments for options to renew or buy, do not exceed $45,000 or in which the lease is of a factory-built home as defined in §37-15-2 of this code; and

(iii) Which is for a term exceeding four months.

(b) “Consumer lease” does not include a lease made pursuant to a lender credit card or similar arrangement.

(15) “Consumer loan” is a loan made by a person regularly engaged in the business of making loans in which:

(a) The debtor is a person other than an organization;

(b) The debt is incurred primarily for a personal, family, household or agricultural purpose;

(c) Either the debt is payable in installments or a loan finance charge is made; and

(d) Either the principal does not exceed $45,000 or the debt is secured by an interest in land or a factory-built home as defined in §37-15-2 of this code.

(16) “Cosigner” means a natural person who assumes liability for the obligation on a consumer credit sale or consumer loan without receiving goods, services or money in return for the obligation or, in the case of a revolving charge account or revolving loan account of a consumer, without receiving the contractual right to obtain extensions of credit under the account. The term cosigner includes any person whose signature is requested as a condition to granting credit to a consumer or as a condition for forbearance on collection of a consumer's obligation that is in default. The term cosigner does not include a spouse whose signature is required to perfect a security interest. A person who meets the definition in this paragraph is a “cosigner” whether or not the person is designated as such on the credit obligation.

(17) “Credit” means the privilege granted by a creditor to a debtor to defer payment of debt or to incur debt and defer its payment.

(18) “Earnings” means compensation paid or payable to an individual or for his or her account for personal services rendered or to be rendered by him or her, whether denominated as wages, salary, commission, bonus or otherwise, and includes periodic payments pursuant to a pension, retirement or disability program.

(19) “Facsimile device” means a machine that receives and copies reproductions or facsimiles of documents or photographs that have been transmitted electronically or telephonically over telecommunications lines.

(20) “Federal Consumer Credit Protection Act” means the “Consumer Credit Protection Act” (Public Law 90-321; 82 Stat. 146), as amended, and includes regulations issued pursuant to that act.

(21) “Goods” includes goods not in existence at the time the transaction is entered into and gift and merchandise certificates, but excludes money, chattel paper, documents of title and instruments.

(22) “Home solicitation sale” means a consumer credit sale in excess of $25 in which the buyer receives a solicitation of the sale at a place other than the seller's business establishment at a fixed location and the buyer’s agreement or offer to purchase is there given to the seller or a person acting for the seller. The term does not include a sale made pursuant to a preexisting open-end credit account with the seller in existence for at least three months prior to the transaction, a sale made pursuant to prior negotiations between the parties at the seller’s business establishment at a fixed location, a sale of motor vehicles, mobile homes or farm equipment or a sale which may be rescinded under the federal Truth in Lending Act (being Title I of the federal Consumer Credit Protection Act). A sale which would be a home solicitation sale if credit were extended by the seller is a home solicitation sale although the goods or services are paid for, in whole or in part, by a consumer loan in which the creditor is subject to claims and defenses arising from the sale.

(23) Except as otherwise provided, “lender” includes an assignee of the lender’s right to payment but use of the term does not in itself impose on an assignee any obligation of the lender.

(24) “Lender credit card or similar arrangement” means an arrangement or loan agreement, other than a seller credit card, pursuant to which a lender gives a debtor the privilege of using a credit card, letter of credit or other credit confirmation or identification in transactions out of which debt arises:

(a) By the lender’s honoring a draft or similar order for the payment of money drawn or accepted by the consumer;

(b) By the lender’s payment or agreement to pay the consumer’s obligations; or

(c) By the lender’s purchase from the obligee of the consumer's obligations.

(25) “Loan” includes:

(a) The creation of debt by the lender's payment of or agreement to pay money to the consumer or to a third party for the account of the consumer other than debts created pursuant to a seller credit card;

(b) The creation of debt by a credit to an account with the lender upon which the consumer is entitled to draw immediately;

(c) The creation of debt pursuant to a lender credit card or similar arrangement; and

(d) The forbearance of debt arising from a loan.

(26) (a) “Loan finance charge” means the sum of: (i) All charges payable directly or indirectly by the debtor and imposed directly or indirectly by the lender as an incident to the extension of credit, including any of the following types of charges which are applicable: Interest or any amount payable under a point, discount or other system of charges, however denominated, premium or other charge for any guarantee or insurance protecting the lender against the consumer's default or other credit loss; and (ii) charges incurred for investigating the collateral or credit worthiness of the consumer or for commissions or brokerage for obtaining the credit, irrespective of the person to whom the charges are paid or payable, unless the lender had no notice of the charges when the loan was made. The term does not include charges as a result of default, additional charges, delinquency charges or deferral charges.

(b) If a lender makes a loan to a consumer by purchasing or satisfying obligations of the consumer pursuant to a lender credit card or similar arrangement, and the purchase or satisfaction is made at less than the face amount of the obligation, the discount is not part of the loan finance charge.

(27) “Merchandise certificate” or “gift certificate” means a writing issued by a seller or issuer of a seller credit card, not redeemable in cash and usable in its face amount in lieu of cash in exchange for goods or services.

(28) “Official fees” means:

(a) Fees and charges prescribed by law which actually are or will be paid to public officials for determining the existence of or for perfecting, releasing, terminating or satisfying a security interest related to a consumer credit sale or consumer loan; or

(b) Premiums payable for insurance or fees escrowed in a special account for the purpose of funding self-insurance or its equivalent in lieu of perfecting a security interest otherwise required by the creditor in connection with the sale, lease or loan, if such premium or fee does not exceed the fees and charges described in paragraph (a) of this subdivision which would otherwise be payable.

(29) “Organization” means a corporation, government or governmental subdivision or agency, trust, estate, partnership, cooperative or association.

(30) “Payable in installments” means that payment is required or permitted by agreement to be made in: (a) Two or more periodic payments, excluding a down payment, with respect to a debt arising from a consumer credit sale pursuant to which a sales finance charge is made; (b) four or more periodic payments, excluding a down payment, with respect to a debt arising from a consumer credit sale pursuant to which no sales finance charge is made; or (c) two or more periodic payments with respect to a debt arising from a consumer loan. If any periodic payment other than the down payment under an agreement requiring or permitting two or more periodic payments is more than twice the amount of any other periodic payment, excluding the down payment, the consumer credit sale or consumer loan is “payable in installments”.

(31) “Person” or “party” includes a natural person or an individual, and an organization.

(32) “Person related to” with respect to an individual means: (a) The spouse of the individual; (b) a brother, brother-in-law, sister or sister-in-law of the individual; (c) an ancestor or lineal descendant of the individual or his or her spouse; and (d) any other relative, by blood or marriage, of the individual or his or her spouse who shares the same home with the individual. “Person related to” with respect to an organization means: (a) A person directly or indirectly controlling, controlled by or under common control with the organization; (b) an officer or director of the organization or a person performing similar functions with respect to the organization or to a person related to the organization; (c) the spouse of a person related to the organization; and (d) a relative by blood or marriage of a person related to the organization who shares the same home with him or her.

(33) “Precomputed loan”. A loan, refinancing or consolidation is “precomputed” if:

(A) The debt is expressed as a sum comprising the principal and the amount of the loan finance charge computed in advance; or

(B) The loan is expressed in terms of the principal amount; the loan installment payments are a scheduled, fixed amount including principal and interest and assume payment on the installment due date; and interest payments will not vary or result in an adjustment during the term of the loan or at its final payment as a result of the actual installment payment dates.

(34) “Precomputed sale”. A sale, refinancing or consolidation is “precomputed” if:

(A) The debt is expressed as a sum comprising the amount financed and the amount of the sales finance charge computed in advance; or

(B) The debt is expressed in terms of the principal amount; the debt installment payments are a scheduled, fixed amount including principal and interest and assume payment on the installment due date; and interest payments will not vary or result in an adjustment during the term of the debt or at its final payment as a result of the actual installment payment dates.

(35) “Presumed” or “presumption” means that the trier of fact must find the existence of the fact presumed unless and until evidence is introduced which would support a finding of its nonexistence.

(36) “Principal” of a loan means the total of:

(a) The net amount paid to, receivable by or paid or payable for the account of the debtor;

(b) The amount of any discount excluded from the loan finance charge; and

(c) To the extent that payment is deferred:

(i) Amounts actually paid or to be paid by the lender for registration, certificate of title or license fees if not included in paragraph (a) of this subdivision; and

(ii) Additional charges permitted by this chapter.

(37) “Regulated consumer lender” means a person authorized to make or take assignments of regulated consumer loans.

(38) “Regulated consumer loan” means a consumer loan, including a loan made pursuant to a revolving loan account, in which the rate of the loan finance charge exceeds eighteen percent per year as determined according to the actuarial method, except where the loan qualifies for federal law preemption from state interest rate limitations, including federal law bank parity provisions, or where the lender is specifically permitted by state law other than article four of this chapter to make the loan at that rate without a requirement the lender hold a regulated consumer lender license.

(39) “Revolving charge account” means an agreement between a seller and a buyer by which: (a) The buyer may purchase goods or services on credit or a seller credit card; (b) the balances of amounts financed and the sales finance and other appropriate charges are debited to an account; (c) a sales finance charge if made is not precomputed but is computed periodically on the balances of the account from time to time; and (d) there is the privilege of paying the balances in installments.

(40) “Revolving loan account” means an arrangement between a lender and a consumer including, but not limited to, a lender credit card or similar arrangement, pursuant to which: (a) The lender may permit the consumer to obtain loans from time to time; (b) the unpaid balances of principal and the loan finance and other appropriate charges are debited to an account; (c) a loan finance charge if made is not precomputed but is computed periodically on the outstanding unpaid balances of the principal of the consumer's account from time to time; and (d) there is the privilege of paying the balances in installments.

(41) “Sale of goods” includes any agreement in the form of a bailment or lease of goods if the bailee or lessee agrees to pay as compensation for use a sum substantially equivalent to or in excess of the aggregate value of the goods involved and it is agreed that the bailee or lessee will become, or for no other or a nominal consideration has the option to become, the owner of the goods upon full compliance with his or her obligations under the agreement.

(42) “Sale of an interest in land” includes a lease in which the lessee has an option to purchase the interest and all or a substantial part of the rental or other payments previously made by him or her are applied to the purchase price.

(43) “Sale of services” means furnishing or agreeing to furnish services and includes making arrangements to have services furnished by another.

(44) “Sales finance charge” means the sum of: (a) All charges payable directly or indirectly by the buyer and imposed directly or indirectly by the seller or issuer of a seller credit card as an incident to the extension of credit, including any of the following types of charges which are applicable: Time-price differential, however denominated, including service, carrying or other charge, premium or other charge for any guarantee or insurance protecting the seller against the buyer's default or other credit loss; and (b) charges incurred for investigating the collateral or credit worthiness of the buyer or for commissions or brokerage for obtaining the credit, irrespective of the person to whom the charges are paid or payable; unless the seller had no notice of the charges when the credit was granted. The term does not include charges as a result of default, additional charges, delinquency charges or deferral charges. If the seller or issuer of a seller credit card purchases or satisfies obligations of the consumer and the purchase or satisfaction is made at less than the face amount of the obligation, the discount is not part of the sales finance charge.

(45) Except as otherwise provided, “seller” includes an assignee of the seller’s right to payment but use of the term does not in itself impose on an assignee any obligation of the seller.

(46) “Seller credit card” means an arrangement pursuant to which a person gives to a buyer or lessee the privilege of using a credit card, letter of credit, or other credit confirmation or identification primarily for the purpose of purchasing or leasing goods or services from that person, that person and any other person or persons, a person related to that person, or others licensed or franchised or permitted to do business under his or her business name or trade name or designation or on his or her behalf.

(47) “Services” includes: (a) Work, labor and other personal services; (b) privileges with respect to transportation, use of vehicles, hotel and restaurant accommodations, education, entertainment, recreation, physical culture, hospital accommodations, funerals, cemetery accommodations, and the like; and (c) insurance: *Provided,* That “services” does not include any time, savings or demand deposit accounts.

(48) “Supervised financial organization” means any organization, corporation or person, other than an insurance company or other organization primarily engaged in an insurance business, which is required under state law to register or obtain a license from the commissioner of banking before conducting business in this state; or which is authorized under federal law to make consumer loans without a license from the state commissioner of banking, provided such loans are subject to supervision and examination by an official or agency of the United States.

ARTICLE 2. CONSUMER CREDIT PROTECTION.

§46A-2-122. Definitions.

For the purposes of this section and §46A-2-123, §46A-2-124, §46A-2-125, §46A-2-126, §46A-2-127, §46A-2-128, §46A-2-129, and §46A-2-129a of this code, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

(a) “Consumer” means any natural person obligated or allegedly obligated to pay any debt.

(b) “Claim” means any obligation or alleged obligation of a consumer to pay money arising out of a transaction in which the money, property, insurance or service which is the subject of the transaction is primarily for personal, family or household purposes, whether or not such obligation has been reduced to judgment.

(c) “Debt collection” means any action, conduct or practice of soliciting claims for collection or in the collection of claims owed or due or alleged to be owed or due by a consumer.

(d) “Debt collector” means any person or organization engaging directly or indirectly in debt collection on behalf of another person or organization. The term includes any person or organization who sells or offers to sell forms which are, or are represented to be, a collection system, device or scheme, and are intended or calculated to be used to collect claims. The term excludes attorneys representing creditors provided the attorneys are licensed in West Virginia or otherwise authorized to practice law in the State of West Virginia and handling claims and collections in their own name as an employee, partner, member, shareholder or owner of a law firm and not operating a collection agency under the management of a person who is not a licensed attorney.

ARTICLE 5. CIVIL LIABILITY AND CRIMINAL PENALTIES.

§46A-5-101. Effect of violations on rights of parties; limitation of actions.

(1) If a creditor or debt collector has violated the provisions of this chapter applying to collection of excess charges, security in sales and leases, disclosure with respect to consumer leases, receipts, statements of account and evidences of payment, limitations on default charges, assignment of earnings, authorizations to confess judgment, illegal, fraudulent or unconscionable conduct, any prohibited debt collection practice, or restrictions on interest in land as security, assignment of earnings to regulated consumer lender, security agreement on household goods for benefit of regulated consumer lender, and renegotiation by regulated consumer lender of a loan discharged in bankruptcy, the consumer has a cause of action to recover: (a) Actual damages; and (b) a right in an action to recover from the person violating this chapter a penalty of $1,000 ~~per violation:~~ *~~Provided,~~* ~~That the aggregate amount of the penalty awarded shall not exceed the greater of $175,000~~ or the total alleged outstanding indebtedness, whichever is greater: *Provided, ~~however~~* That no consumer class action can be certified unless the consumer class representative has suffered an ascertainable loss of money or property, real or personal, of at least $5,000, as a result of the violation of this article and in such a class action the aggregate limits on the amount of the penalty set forth above shall be applied severally to each named plaintiff and each class member such that no named plaintiff nor any class member may recover in excess of ~~the greater of $175,000~~ $1,000 or the total alleged outstanding indebtedness, whichever is greater. With respect to violations arising from consumer credit sales, consumer leases or consumer loans, or from sales as defined in article six of this chapter, no action pursuant to this subsection may be brought more than ~~four years~~ one year after the violations occurred: *Provided, ~~further~~* however, That no action pursuant to this subsection to set aside a foreclosure sale of any real estate securing a consumer loan may be brought more than one year after the foreclosure sale is final.

(2) If a creditor has violated the provisions of this chapter respecting authority to make regulated consumer loans, the loan is void and the consumer is not obligated to pay either the principal or the loan finance charge. If he has paid any part of the principal or of the finance charge, he has a right to recover in an action the payment from the person violating this chapter or from an assignee of that person’s rights who undertakes direct collection of payments or enforcement of rights arising from the debt. With respect to violations arising from regulated consumer loans made pursuant to revolving loan accounts, no action pursuant to this subsection may be brought more than four years one year after the violation occurred. With respect to violations of the provisions of this chapter respecting the authority to make arising from other regulated consumer loans, no action pursuant to this subsection may be brought more than four years after the violation occurred: *Provided*, That no action pursuant to this subsection to set aside a foreclosure sale of any real estate securing a consumer loan may be brought more than one year after the foreclosure sale is final.

(3) A consumer is not obligated to pay a charge in excess of that allowed by this chapter and if he has paid an excess charge, he has a right to a refund. A refund may be made by reducing the consumer’s obligation by the amount of the excess charge. If the consumer has paid an amount in excess of the lawful obligation under the agreement, the consumer may recover in an action the excess amount from the person who made the excess charge or from an assignee of that person’s rights who undertakes direct collection of payments from or enforcement of rights against the consumer arising from the debt.

(4) If a creditor or debt collector has contracted for or received a charge in excess of that allowed by this chapter, the consumer may, in addition to recovering such excess charge, also recover from the creditor or the person liable in an action a penalty of $1,000 per violation: *Provided,* That the aggregate amount of the penalty awarded shall not exceed the greater of $175,000 action or the total alleged outstanding indebtedness, whichever is greater: *Provided, however,* That in a class action the aggregate limits on the amount of the penalty set forth above shall be applied severally to each named plaintiff and each class member such that no named plaintiff nor any class member may recover in excess of the ~~greater of $175,000 or the~~ total alleged outstanding indebtedness: *Provided* further, That no action pursuant to this subsection to set aside a foreclosure sale of any real estate securing a consumer loan may be brought more than one year after said foreclosure sale is final.

(5) Except as otherwise provided, a violation of this chapter does not impair rights on a debt.

(6) If an employer discharges an employee in violation of the provisions prohibiting discharge, the employee may within 90 days bring a civil action for recovery of wages lost as a result of the violation and for an order requiring the reinstatement of the employee. Damages recoverable shall not exceed lost wages for six weeks.

(7) A creditor or debt collector has no liability for a penalty under subsection (1) or (4) of this section if, after discovering an error and prior to the institution of an action under this section or the receipt of written notice of the error, the creditor notifies the person concerned of the error and corrects the error: (a) Within 15 days if the error affects no more than two persons; or (b) within 60 days if the error affects more than two persons. If the violation consists of a prohibited agreement, giving the consumer a corrected copy of the writing containing the error is sufficient notification and correction. If the violation consists of an excess charge, correction shall be made by an adjustment or refund.

(8) If the creditor or debt collector establishes by a preponderance of evidence that a violation is unintentional or the result of a bona fide error of fact notwithstanding the maintenance of procedures reasonably adapted to avoid any such violation or error, no liability is imposed under subsections (1), (2) and (4) of this section and the validity of the transaction is not affected.

§46A-5-104. Attorney fees.

In any claim brought under this chapter applying to illegal, fraudulent or unconscionable conduct or any prohibited debt collection practice, the court may award all or a portion of the costs of litigation, including reasonable attorney fees, court costs and fees, to the consumer: *Provided,* That such award may not exceed four times, exclusive of court costs, of the statutory penalty awarded or the total alleged outstanding indebtedness cancelled, whichever is greater. On a finding by the court that a claim brought under this chapter applying to illegal, fraudulent or unconscionable conduct or any prohibited debt collection practice was brought in bad faith and for the purposes of harassment, the court may award to the defendant reasonable attorney fees.

§46A-5-106. Adjustment of damages for inflation.

In any claim brought under this chapter applying to illegal, fraudulent or unconscionable conduct or any prohibited debt collection practice, the court may adjust the damages awarded pursuant to section one hundred one of this article to account for inflation from 12:01 a.m. on September 1, ~~2015~~ 2021, to the time of the award of damages in an amount equal to the consumer price index. Consumer price index means the last consumer price index for all consumers published by the United States Department of Labor.

§46A-6-106. Adjustment of damages for inflation.

(a) Subject to subsections (b) and (c) of this section, any person who purchases or leases goods or services and thereby suffers an ascertainable loss of money or property, real or personal, as a result of the use or employment by another person of a method, act or practice prohibited or declared to be unlawful by the provisions of this article may bring an action in the circuit court of the county in which the seller or lessor resides or has his or her principal place of business or is doing business, or as provided for in sections one and two, article one, chapter fifty-six of this code, to recover actual damages or $200, whichever is greater. The court may, in its discretion, provide such equitable relief it considers necessary or proper. Any party to an action for damages under this subsection has the right to demand a jury trial: *Provided,* That because this article precludes any action, counterclaim, cross-claim or third party claim until the person has made a cure offer, actions hereunder may not be subject to class certification.

(b) No award of damages in an action pursuant to subsection (a) may be made without proof that the person seeking damages suffered an actual out-of-pocket loss that was proximately caused by a violation of this article. If a person seeking to recover damages for a violation of this article alleges that an affirmative misrepresentation is the basis for his or her claim then he or she must prove that the deceptive act or practice caused him or her to enter into the transaction that resulted in his or her damages. If a person seeking to recover damages for a violation of this article alleges that the concealment or omission of information is the basis for his or her claim, then he or she must prove that the person's loss was proximately caused by the concealment or omission.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) and (b) of this section, no action, counterclaim, cross-claim or third-party claim may be brought pursuant to the provisions of this section until the person has informed the seller or lessor in writing and by certified mail, return receipt requested, of the alleged violation and provided the seller or lessor 20 days from receipt of the notice of violation but 10 days in the case a cause of action has already been filed to make a cure offer: *Provided*, That the person shall have 10 days from receipt of the cure offer to accept the cure offer or it is deemed refused and withdrawn.

(d) If a cure offer is accepted, the seller or lessor has 10 days to begin effectuating the agreed upon cure and the cure must be completed within a reasonable time.

(e) Any applicable statute of limitations is tolled for the 20-day period set forth in subsection (c) of this section or for the period the effectuation of the cure offer is being performed, whichever is longer.

(f) Nothing in this section prevents a person that has accepted a cure offer from bringing a civil action against a seller or lessor for failing to timely effect the cure offer.

(g) Any permanent injunction, judgment or order of the court under section one hundred eight, article seven of this chapter for a violation of section one hundred four of this article is prima facie evidence in an action brought pursuant to the provisions of this section that the respondent used or employed a method, act or practice declared unlawful by section one hundred four of this article.

(h) Where an action is brought pursuant to the provisions of this section, it is a complete defense that a cure offer was made, accepted and the agreed upon cure was performed. If the finder of fact determines that the cure offer was accepted and the agreed upon cure performed, the seller or lessor is entitled to reasonable attorney’s fees and costs attendant to defending the action.

(i) No cure offer is admissible in any proceeding initiated pursuant to the provisions of this article unless the cure offer is delivered by a seller or lessor to the person claiming loss or to any attorney representing such person prior to the filing of the seller or lessee’s initial responsive pleading in such proceeding. If the cure offer is timely delivered by the seller or lessor, then the seller or lessee may introduce the cure offer into evidence at trial. The seller or lessor is not liable for the person’s attorney’s fees and court costs incurred following delivery of the cure offer unless the actual damages found to have been sustained and awarded, without consideration of attorney’s fees and court costs, exceed the value of the cure offer.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to amend the West Virginia Consumer Credit and Protection Act to exclude depository accounts from the definition of services; to remove a party collecting on its own debt from the definition of a debt collector; to establish a loss threshold of $5,000 for the certification of a class action; to limit recovery to members of a class to the greater of $1,000 per claim or the total outstanding indebtedness; to reduce the current statute of limitations from four years to one year; to reduce statutory penalties to $1,000 per claim; to limit attorney’s fees to four times the award; to update the adjustment for inflation to September of 2021; and to prohibit class actions under Article 6 of the Act.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.