

(PRE-FILED)

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By: **Chairman, Economic Matters Committee (Departmental - Labor,  
Licensing and Regulation)**

Requested: October 19, 2001

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Assigned to: Economic Matters

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Committee Report: Favorable

House action: Adopted

Read second time: February 5, 2002

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CHAPTER 492

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **New Home Builders - Regulation**

3 FOR the purpose of transferring certain responsibilities concerning surety bonds,  
4 letters of credit, and third party warranty plans from the Department of Labor,  
5 Licensing, and Regulation to the Consumer Protection Division of the Office of  
6 the Attorney General; clarifying certain disclosure requirements; correcting an  
7 oversight in the State Home Builder Registration Act; and generally relating to  
8 home builders.

9 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
10 Article - Business Regulation  
11 Section 4.5-203  
12 Annotated Code of Maryland  
13 (1998 Replacement Volume and 2001 Supplement)

14 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
15 Article - Real Property  
16 Section 10-302, 10-303, 10-303.1, 10-601, 10-602, 10-603, 10-604, 10-606,  
17 and 10-607  
18 Annotated Code of Maryland  
19 (1996 Replacement Volume and 2001 Supplement)

20 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF  
21 MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

1

**Article - Business Regulation**

2 4.5-203.

3 (a) (1) There is a Home Builder Registration Fund.

4 (2) The Division shall administer the Registration Fund.

5 (3) The Registration Fund shall be used to cover the actual documented  
6 direct and indirect costs incurred for the administration and enforcement of the  
7 Maryland Home Builder Registration Act.8 (4) The Registration Fund is a continuing, nonlapsing fund, and is  
9 subject to § 7-302 of the State Finance and Procurement Article.10 (5) Unspent assets of the Registration Fund shall remain in the  
11 Registration Fund and may not revert or be transferred to the General Fund of the  
12 State.13 (6) The Registration Fund may not be supported by appropriations of  
14 State funds.15 (b) (1) By regulation, the Division shall establish reasonable fees that may  
16 not exceed \$600 over a 2-year period, and a fee schedule for the issuance and renewal  
17 of registrations.18 (2) The fees charged shall approximate the direct and indirect costs of  
19 administering and enforcing the Maryland Home Builder Registration Act AND TITLE  
20 10, SUBTITLE 3, SUBTITLE 5, AND SUBTITLE 6 OF THE REAL PROPERTY ARTICLE.21 (c) The Division shall pay all funds collected under § 4.5-303 of this title to  
22 the Comptroller, who shall distribute the fees to the Registration Fund.23 (d) The Office of Legislative Audits shall audit the accounts and transactions  
24 of the Registration Fund under § 2-1220 of the State Government Article.

25

**Article - Real Property**

26 10-302.

27 (a) The bond shall be payable to the State for the use and benefit of every  
28 person protected by the provisions of this subtitle. The vendor or purchaser shall  
29 deposit the bond with the [Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation]  
30 CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION OF THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.31 (b) The corporate surety bond obtained pursuant to the provisions of §  
32 10-301(a) shall be in a form approved by the [Department of Labor, Licensing, and  
33 Regulation] CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION OF THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY  
34 GENERAL. The bond may be either in the form of an individual bond for each deposit  
35 accepted by a vendor or builder or if the total amount of money and deposits accepted

1 by the builder or vendor exceeds \$10,000, it may be in the form of a blanket bond  
 2 assuring the return of the deposits received by the vendor or builder.

3 (c) If the bond is a blanket bond, the penalty of the bond shall be in accordance  
 4 with the following schedule:

5 Total Amount of Deposits Held	Penalty of Bond
6 (1) \$10,000 to \$75,000	Full amount of
7	deposit held
8 (2) \$75,000 to \$200,000	\$75,000
9 (3) \$200,000 to \$500,000	\$200,000
10 (4) Over \$500,000	\$500,000

11 (d) For the purpose of determining the penalty of any blanket bond which the  
 12 vendor or builder maintains in any calendar year, the total amount of deposits  
 13 considered held by a vendor or builder shall be determined as of May 31 of any given  
 14 calendar year and the penalty of the bond shall be in accordance with the amount of  
 15 deposits held as of May 31.

16 10-303.

17 (a) An irrevocable letter of credit obtained under § 10-301 of this subtitle shall  
 18 be:

19 (1) Payable to the [Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation]  
 20 OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL for the use and benefit of every person protected  
 21 by the provisions of this subtitle; and

22 (2) In a form approved by the [Department] CONSUMER PROTECTION  
 23 DIVISION OF THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.

24 (b) An irrevocable letter of credit may be either in the form of an individual  
 25 letter of credit for each deposit accepted by a vendor or builder or if the total amount  
 26 of money and deposits accepted by the builder exceeds \$10,000, the letter of credit  
 27 may be in the form of a blanket letter of credit assuring the return of the deposits  
 28 received by the vendor or builder.

29 (c) If the letter of credit is a blanket letter of credit, the amount of the letter of  
 30 credit shall be in accordance with the following schedule:

31 Total Amount of Deposits Held	Amount of Letter of Credit
32 (1) \$10,000 to \$75,000	Full amount of
33	deposit held
34 (2) \$75,000 to \$200,000	\$75,000
35 (3) \$200,000 to \$500,000	\$200,000

1 (4) Over \$500,000     \$500,000

2     (d)     For the purpose of determining the amount of any blanket letter of credit  
3 which the vendor or builder maintains in any calendar year, the total amount of  
4 deposits considered held by a vendor or builder shall be determined as of May 31 of  
5 any given calendar year and the amount of the letter of credit shall be in accordance  
6 with the amount of deposits held as of May 31.

7 10-303.1.

8     The [Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation] CONSUMER  
9 PROTECTION DIVISION OF THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL shall adopt  
10 regulations for the administration of the provisions of this subtitle relating to bonds  
11 and letters of credit.

12 10-601.

13     (a)     In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.

14     (b)     "Appliances, fixtures, and items of equipment" means furnaces, boilers, oil  
15 tanks and fittings, air purifiers, air handling equipment, ventilating fans, air  
16 conditioning equipment, water heaters, pumps, stoves, refrigerators, garbage  
17 disposals, compactors, dishwashers, automatic door openers, washers and dryers,  
18 bathtubs, sinks, toilets, faucets and fittings, lighting fixtures, circuit breakers, and  
19 other similar items.

20     (c)     "Builder" means any person, corporation, partnership or other legal entity:

21             (1)     That is engaged in the business of erecting or otherwise constructing  
22 a new home; or

23             (2)     That purchases a completed new home for resale in the course of its  
24 business.

25     (d)     ["Department" means the Department of Labor, Licensing, and  
26 Regulation.] "DIVISION" MEANS THE CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION OF THE  
27 OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.

28     (e)     "Electrical systems" means all wiring, electrical boxes, switches, outlets  
29 and connections up to the public utility connection.

30     (f)     "Heating, cooling, and ventilating systems" means all duct work, steam,  
31 water and refrigerant lines, registers, convectors, radiation elements and dampers.

32     (g)     "Load-bearing portions of the home" means the load-bearing portions of  
33 the:

34             (1)     Foundation system and footings;

35             (2)     Beams;

- 1 (3) Girders;
- 2 (4) Lintels;
- 3 (5) Columns;
- 4 (6) Walls and partitions;
- 5 (7) Floor systems; and
- 6 (8) Roof framing system.

7 (h) "Local jurisdiction" means any county and any municipal corporation in  
8 Maryland subject to the provisions of Article XI-E of the Constitution.

9 (i) (1) "New home" means every newly constructed private dwelling unit in  
10 the State and the fixtures and structure that are made a part of a newly constructed  
11 private dwelling unit at the time of construction.

12 (2) "New home" does not include:

13 (i) Outbuildings, including detached garages and detached  
14 carports, except outbuildings that contain plumbing, electrical, heating, cooling, or  
15 ventilation systems serving the new home;

16 (ii) Driveways;

17 (iii) Walkways;

18 (iv) Patios and decks;

19 (v) Boundary walls;

20 (vi) Retaining walls not necessary for the structural stability of the  
21 new home;

22 (vii) Landscaping;

23 (viii) Fences;

24 (ix) Off-site improvements;

25 (x) Appurtenant recreational facilities; and

26 (xi) Other similar items as determined by the Secretary.

27 (j) "New home warranty" means a series of written promises made by a  
28 builder that meets the requirements of this subtitle.

29 (k) "New home warranty security plan" means a plan that meets the  
30 requirements of § 10-606 of this title.

1 (l) "Owner" means the purchaser of a new home who uses the home primarily  
2 for residential purposes during the warranty period.

3 (m) "Plumbing systems" means:

4 (1) Gas supply lines and fittings;

5 (2) Water supply, waste, and vent pipes and their fittings;

6 (3) Septic tanks and their drain fields; and

7 (4) (i) Water, gas, and sewer service piping and their extensions to the  
8 tie-in of a public utility connection; or

9 (ii) On-site wells and sewage disposal systems.

10 (n) ["Secretary" means the Secretary of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation or  
11 the Secretary's designee.

12 (o)] (1) "Structural defect" means any defect in the load-bearing portions of a  
13 new home that adversely affects its load-bearing function to the extent that the home  
14 becomes or is in serious danger of becoming unsafe, unsanitary, or otherwise  
15 uninhabitable.

16 (2) "Structural defect" includes damage due to subsidence, expansion, or  
17 lateral movement of soil that has been located or relocated by the builder.

18 (3) "Structural defect" does not include damage caused by movement of  
19 the soil:

20 (i) Resulting from a flood or earthquake; or

21 (ii) For which compensation has been provided.

22 [(p)] (O) "Warranty date" means the first day that the owner occupies the  
23 new home, settles on the new home, makes the final contract payment on the new  
24 home, or obtains an occupancy permit for the new home if the home is built on the  
25 owner's property, whichever is earlier.

26 10-602.

27 (a) Prior to entering into a contract for sale or construction of a new home, the  
28 builder shall disclose in writing to the owner whether:

29 (1) The builder participates in a new home warranty security plan  
30 through which:

31 (i) The builder must provide the owner with a new home warranty;  
32 or

1 (ii) The builder may provide a new home warranty to the owner at  
2 the owner's option; or

3 (2) The builder does not participate in a new home warranty security  
4 plan.

5 (b) The disclosure will be made on a form approved by the [Secretary]  
6 DIVISION.

7 10-603.

8 (a) If the builder does not participate in a new home warranty security plan:

9 (1) The builder must make a disclosure AT THE TIME OF THE PURCHASE  
10 OR CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT containing an explanation in 12 point type that:

11 (i) The owner should be aware that builders of new homes in the  
12 State of Maryland are [not] required to be [licensed by the State and are not licensed  
13 in most local jurisdictions] REGISTERED WITH THE CONSUMER PROTECTION  
14 DIVISION OF THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL;

15 (ii) Without a new home warranty or other express warranties, the  
16 owner may be afforded only certain limited implied warranties as are provided by  
17 law; and

18 (iii) 1. Describes any hazardous or regulated materials, including  
19 asbestos, lead-based paint, radon, methane, underground storage tanks, licensed  
20 landfills, unlicensed landfills, licensed rubble fills, unlicensed rubble fills, or other  
21 environmental hazards, present on the site of the new home of which the builder has  
22 actual knowledge; or

23 2. States that the builder is making no representations or  
24 warranties as to whether there is any hazardous or regulated material on the site of  
25 the new home;

26 (2) The owner shall acknowledge in writing that the owner understands  
27 that the builder does not participate in a new home warranty security plan and that  
28 the owner has read and understood the disclosure pursuant to paragraph (1) of this  
29 subsection; and

30 (3) Any purchase or construction contract entered into which does not  
31 contain the acknowledgment required by paragraph (2) of this subsection is voidable  
32 by the owner.

33 (b) (1) An owner who has made the acknowledgment described in subsection  
34 (a)(2) of this section may rescind the contract within 5 working days from the date of  
35 the contract by providing the builder with written notice of the owner's rescission of  
36 the contract; and

1 (2) Upon rescission, the owner shall be entitled to a refund of any money  
2 paid to the builder for the new home.

3 10-604.

4 (a) (1) Except for coverage excluded under paragraph (2) of this subsection,  
5 a new home warranty provided under a new home warranty security plan shall  
6 warrant at a minimum that:

7 (i) For 1 year, beginning on the warranty date, the new home is  
8 free from any defects in materials and workmanship;

9 (ii) For 2 years, beginning on the warranty date, the new home is  
10 free from any defect in the electrical, plumbing, heating, cooling, and ventilating  
11 systems, except that in the case of appliances, fixtures and items of equipment, the  
12 warranty may not exceed the length and scope of the warranty offered by the  
13 manufacturer; and

14 (iii) For 5 years, beginning on the warranty date, the new home is  
15 free from any structural defect.

16 (2) A new home warranty provided under a new home warranty security  
17 plan may exclude the following:

18 (i) Damage to real property that is not part of the home covered by  
19 the warranty or that is not included in the purchase price of the home;

20 (ii) Bodily injury or damage to personal property;

21 (iii) Any defect in materials supplied or work performed by anyone  
22 other than the builder or the builder's employees, agents, or subcontractors;

23 (iv) Any damage that the owner has not taken timely action to  
24 minimize or for which the owner has failed to provide timely notice to the builder;

25 (v) Normal wear and tear or normal deterioration;

26 (vi) Insect damage, except where the builder has failed to use  
27 proper materials or construction methods designed to prevent insect infestation;

28 (vii) Any loss or damage that arises while the home is being used  
29 primarily for nonresidential purposes;

30 (viii) Any damage to the extent it is caused or made worse by  
31 negligence, improper maintenance or improper operations by anyone other than the  
32 builder or its employees, agents, or subcontractors;

33 (ix) Any damage to the extent it is caused or made worse by changes  
34 of the grading of the ground by anyone other than the builder, its employees, agents,  
35 or subcontractors; and

- 1 (x) Any loss or damage caused by acts of God.
- 2 (b) A builder who has disclosed that the builder participates in a new home  
3 warranty security plan shall:
- 4 (1) Furnish to the owner at the time of the purchase or construction  
5 contract:
- 6 (i) The name and phone number of the builder's new home  
7 warranty security plan;
- 8 (ii) Details of the warranty coverage provided under the plan; and
- 9 (iii) In a form to be determined by the [Secretary] DIVISION,  
10 evidence that:
- 11 1. The builder currently is a participant in good standing  
12 with a plan that satisfies the requirements of § 10-606(a) of this subtitle; and
- 13 2. The new home is eligible for registration or has been  
14 registered in the builder's new home warranty security plan;
- 15 (2) [(i)] Disclose to the owner [any] AT THE TIME OF THE PURCHASE  
16 OR CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT:
- 17 (I) ANY actual knowledge that the builder has of any hazardous or  
18 regulated materials, including asbestos, lead-based paint, radon, methane,  
19 underground storage tanks, licensed landfills, unlicensed landfills, licensed rubble  
20 fills, unlicensed rubble fills, or other environmental hazards, present on the site of  
21 the new home; or
- 22 (ii) [Disclose to the owner that] THAT the builder is making no  
23 representations or warranties as to whether there is any hazardous or regulated  
24 material on the site of the new home; and
- 25 (3) Either:
- 26 (i) Provide the new home with a new home warranty if the builder  
27 belongs to a new home warranty security plan that:
- 28 1. Requires the builder to register every new home that the  
29 builder builds; or
- 30 2. Does not require the builder to register every new home  
31 but the builder has decided to sell the new home with a new home warranty; or
- 32 (ii) If the builder belongs to a new home warranty security plan  
33 that does not require the builder to register every new home and the builder has not  
34 decided whether or not to sell the new home with a new home warranty, give the  
35 owner the option of:

1                                   1.       Purchasing the new home with the new home warranty  
2 provided by the builder's new home warranty security plan; or

3                                   2.       Waiving the right to warranty coverage by making the  
4 affirmative waiver described in § 10-607 of this subtitle.

5       (c)       (1)       If the purchase or construction contract provides that the new home  
6 shall be covered by a new home warranty under a new home warranty security plan  
7 it shall constitute a material breach of the contract if either:

8                                   (i)       The builder was not a participant in good standing on the date  
9 of the contract with a new home warranty security plan that satisfies the  
10 requirements of § 10-606(a) of this subtitle; or

11                                  (ii)       The new home has not been registered in the plan on or before  
12 the warranty date.

13                                  (2)       If there has been a material breach of the contract, the owner shall be  
14 entitled to whatever remedies are provided by law including, but not limited to:

15                                   (i)       Rescission of the contract; and

16                                   (ii)       Except in the case of a construction contract for a new home  
17 built on the owner's property, a refund of any money paid to the builder for the new  
18 home.

19       (d)       (1)       The builder shall notify the new home warranty security plan of each  
20 new home being constructed by the builder on the earlier of the date of the purchase  
21 or construction contract or the start of construction of the new home.

22                                  (2)       Upon receipt of notification by the builder as required in paragraph  
23 (1) of this subsection, the new home shall be eligible for registration in the builder's  
24 new home warranty security plan.

25       (e)       (1)       Upon registration of the new home in the new home warranty  
26 security plan, warranty coverage which has not been waived by the owner shall be  
27 provided beginning on the warranty date for the new home constructed by the builder,  
28 provided that the builder was in good standing with the new home warranty security  
29 plan at the time of the contract.

30                                  (2)       On the warranty date, the builder shall provide the owner with  
31 evidence, in a form approved by the [Secretary] DIVISION that the new home is  
32 covered by a new home warranty that meets the requirements of this subtitle.

33                                  (3)       Within 60 days from the warranty date, the builder's new home  
34 warranty security plan shall provide the owner with validated new home warranty  
35 documents.

36       (f)       A new home warranty shall benefit any successor in title to the owner who  
37 occupies the home for residential purposes during the warranty period.

1 10-606.

2 (a) A new home warranty security plan shall:

3 (1) Provide for the payment of claims against a builder for defects  
4 warranted under this subtitle;

5 (2) Be operated by a corporation, partnership, or other legal entity  
6 authorized to do business in Maryland;

7 (3) Demonstrate to the [Secretary] DIVISION that the plan will maintain  
8 financial security to cover the total number of claims that the plan reasonably  
9 anticipates will be filed against participating builders;

10 (4) File with the [Secretary] DIVISION a surety bond or an irrevocable  
11 letter of credit from a federally insured financial institution in an amount set by the  
12 [Secretary] DIVISION, but not less than \$100,000, for the benefit of owners injured by  
13 the failure of the new home warranty security plan to pay claims as required under  
14 this subtitle;

15 (5) Provide within the new home warranty documents the performance  
16 standards that describe the builder's obligations for defects warranted under this  
17 subtitle;

18 (6) Provide for the mediation of disputes between an owner and a builder  
19 before a claim will be paid by the builder's new home warranty security plan; and

20 (7) Meet any other requirements determined by the [Secretary]  
21 DIVISION and be approved by the [Secretary] DIVISION.

22 (b) (1) The [Secretary] DIVISION may revoke or suspend approval for a new  
23 home warranty security plan if the [Secretary] DIVISION determines that the plan:

24 (i) Is unable to meet its obligations under a new home warranty; or

25 (ii) Is administered in a manner that denies owners the warranty  
26 coverage required under this subtitle.

27 (2) Except for new homes that were registered in the new home warranty  
28 security plan prior to the revocation or suspension and for which a purchase or  
29 construction contract has been executed, during the time period that approval for a  
30 new home warranty security plan is revoked or suspended by the [Secretary]  
31 DIVISION, the new home warranty security plan may not provide warranty coverage  
32 for any new homes built in Maryland.

33 (c) (1) Unless the [Secretary] DIVISION determines that a shorter notice  
34 period is needed to protect the interests of the builders and owners, the [Secretary]  
35 DIVISION shall give a new home warranty security plan at least 90 days notice that  
36 the [Secretary's] DIVISION'S approval of the plan is being revoked or suspended; and

1 (2) A new home warranty security plan shall give to its participating  
2 builders at least 60 days' notice of the plan's revocation or suspension, or such shorter  
3 time as specified by the [Secretary] DIVISION if the plan receives less than 90 days'  
4 notice.

5 10-607.

6 (a) If in accordance with § 10-604(b)(3) of this subtitle an owner does not wish  
7 to require that the new home be covered by a new home warranty, the owner shall  
8 make an affirmative waiver of the coverage at the time of the purchase or  
9 construction contract.

10 (b) Before an owner makes a waiver under this section, the owner must be  
11 informed in writing by the builder of the cost, nature, and extent of warranty  
12 coverage that would be provided under the builder's new home warranty security  
13 plan if not waived by the owner.

14 (c) An owner who has made an affirmative waiver under this section may  
15 rescind the waiver and request a new home warranty in accordance with the  
16 provisions of this subtitle within 3 working days from the date of the contract by  
17 providing the builder with written notice of the owner's rescission of the waiver.

18 (d) The waiver under this section shall be made on a form determined by the  
19 [Secretary] DIVISION and shall contain a section in which an owner who has made a  
20 waiver may rescind the waiver pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

21 (e) The form shall clearly and concisely explain in 12 point boldface type on a  
22 separate piece of paper:

23 (1) The cost, nature, and extent of warranty coverage that would be  
24 provided under the builder's new home warranty security plan if not waived by the  
25 owner;

26 (2) That the failure of the owner to make a waiver requires the builder to  
27 provide a new home warranty;

28 (3) That a builder may not refuse to build a new home for the owner  
29 because the owner refuses to waive warranty coverage;

30 (4) That the owner should be aware that builders of new homes in the  
31 State of Maryland are [not] required to be [licensed by the State and most local  
32 jurisdictions] REGISTERED WITH THE CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION OF THE  
33 OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL;

34 (5) Without a new home warranty or other express warranties, the  
35 owner may be afforded only certain limited implied warranties as are provided by  
36 law; and

37 (6) That an owner who has made an affirmative waiver of the warranty  
38 coverage still may rescind the waiver and request a new home warranty in accordance

1 with the provisions of Title 10, Subtitle 6 of the Real Property Article, within 3  
2 working days from the date of the contract by providing the builder with written  
3 notice of the owner's rescission of the waiver.

4 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take  
5 effect July 1, 2002.