

Chapter 618

(House Bill 128)

AN ACT concerning

**Debt Settlement Services – Student Education Loan Debt Relief – Disclosures
and Prohibitions**

FOR the purpose of ~~applying certain provisions of law regarding debt settlement services to student education loan debt relief~~; requiring a person registered to provide debt settlement services to make certain disclosures to consumers relating to student education loan debt; requiring that an advertisement for debt settlement services for student education loan debt relief include a certain disclosure; prohibiting debt settlement services providers from taking certain actions with respect to student education loan debt relief; and generally relating to student education loan debt and debt settlement services.

~~BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
Article – Financial Institutions
Section 2–104.1(a)
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)~~

~~BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Article – Financial Institutions
Section 12–1001, 12–1012, and 12–1013
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)~~

~~BY adding to
Article – Financial Institutions
Section 12–1012.1
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)~~

BY renumbering
Article – Financial Institutions
Section 12–1001(l)
to be Section 12–1001(m)
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
Article – Financial Institutions
Section 2–104.1(a)(1) and (3) and 12–1001(a)
Annotated Code of Maryland

(2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

BY adding to

Article – Financial Institutions

Section 12–1001(l) and 12–1012.1

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

Article – Financial Institutions

Section 12–1012 and 12–1013

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2020 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)

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

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
That Section(s) 12–1001(l) of Article – Financial Institutions of the Annotated Code of
Maryland be renumbered to be Section(s) 12–1001(m).

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the Laws of Maryland read
as follows:

Article – Financial Institutions

~~2–104.1.~~

~~(a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated:~~

~~(2) “Servicing” means:~~

~~(i) Receiving scheduled periodic payments from a student loan
borrower according to the terms of a student education loan;~~

~~(ii) Applying the payments according to the student education loan
terms; and~~

~~(iii) Performing other administrative services.~~

~~(3) “Student education loan” means any loan, notwithstanding any election
of law or designation of status in any contract, used for financing postsecondary education
or other postsecondary school-related expenses.~~

~~(4) “Student loan borrower” means:~~

~~(i) A resident of the State who has received or agreed to pay a student education loan; or~~

~~(ii) A resident who shares repayment responsibility with a resident described under item (i) of this paragraph.~~

~~(5) "Student Loan Ombudsman" means an individual, whether a paid employee or a volunteer, whom the Commissioner designates to serve as a liaison between student loan borrowers and student loan servicers.~~

~~(6) (i) "Student loan servicer" means a person, regardless of location, responsible for servicing a student education loan to a student loan borrower.~~

~~(ii) "Student loan servicer" includes a trust entity performing or receiving the benefit of student education loan servicing.~~

~~12-1001.~~

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

~~(b) (1) "Consumer" means an individual who:~~

~~[(1)] (I) Resides in the State; and~~

~~[(2)] (II) Is seeking debt settlement services or has entered into a debt settlement services agreement in connection with debts that are consumer debts, as defined in § 13-101 of the Commercial Law Article.~~

~~(2) "CONSUMER" INCLUDES A STUDENT LOAN BORROWER AS DEFINED IN § 2-104.1 OF THIS ARTICLE.~~

~~(c) "Debt management services" has the meaning stated in § 12-901 of this title.~~

~~(d) (1) "Debt settlement services" means any service or program represented, directly or by implication, to renegotiate, settle, reduce, or in any way alter the terms of payment or other terms of a debt between a consumer and one or more unsecured creditors or debt collectors, including a reduction in the balance, interest rate, or fees owed by a consumer to an unsecured creditor or debt collector.~~

~~(2) "DEBT SETTLEMENT SERVICES" INCLUDES STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN DEBT RELIEF.~~

~~[(2)] (3) "Debt settlement services" does not include [debt]:~~

~~(I) DEBT management services;~~

~~(H) SERVICES OF A STUDENT LOAN SERVICER; OR~~~~(HH) SERVICES OF AN ORIGINATOR, A GUARANTOR, OR A SERVICER OF FEDERAL EDUCATION LOANS OR PRIVATE EDUCATION LOANS.~~

~~(e) "Debt settlement services agreement" means a written contract, plan, or agreement between a debt settlement services provider and a consumer for the performance of debt settlement services.~~

~~(f) "Debt settlement services fee" means a fee charged to a consumer by a debt settlement services provider for providing debt settlement services for a consumer.~~

~~(g) (1) "Debt settlement services provider" means a person that provides or offers to provide debt settlement services for a consumer regardless of whether the person provides the debt settlement services on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis.~~

~~(2) "DEBT SETTLEMENT SERVICES PROVIDER" INCLUDES A PERSON THAT:~~

~~(I) ENGAGES IN OR HOLDS ITSELF OUT AS ENGAGING IN THE BUSINESS OF STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN DEBT RELIEF IN EXCHANGE FOR A FEE OR COMPENSATION ASSESSED AGAINST OR CHARGED TO A CONSUMER; OR~~

~~(II) SOLICITS FOR OR ACTS ON BEHALF OF A PERSON ENGAGING IN ACTIVITIES DESCRIBED UNDER ITEM (I) OF THIS PARAGRAPH.~~

~~(3) "DEBT SETTLEMENT SERVICES PROVIDER" DOES NOT INCLUDE AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS DEFINED IN THE FEDERAL HIGHER EDUCATION ACT OF 1965.~~

~~(h) "Dedicated account" means an account described in § 12-1010(d) of this subtitle.~~

~~(i) "Offer, provide, or attempt to provide debt settlement services" means providing debt settlement services:~~

~~(1) To consumers through any means, including telephone telemarketing, Internet solicitation, and face-to-face meetings; and~~

~~(2) On an intrastate or interstate basis.~~

~~(j) "Principal amount of the debt" means the amount of a debt at the time the debt is included in a debt settlement services agreement.~~

~~(k) "Registrant" means a person registered under this subtitle to provide debt settlement services.~~

~~(L) "STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN" HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 2-104.1(A) OF THIS ARTICLE.~~

~~(M) "STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN DEBT RELIEF" MEANS OFFERING TO PROVIDE ADVICE OR SERVICE, OR ACTING AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN OR ON BEHALF OF A CONSUMER AND THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ANY ORIGINATOR OR GUARANTOR OF FEDERAL EDUCATION LOANS, OR A STUDENT LOAN SERVICER, IN EXCHANGE FOR A FEE OR COMPENSATION ASSESSED AGAINST OR CHARGED TO A CONSUMER, IN ORDER TO:~~

~~(1) NEGOTIATE, ARRANGE, OR OBTAIN:~~

~~(I) A SETTLEMENT, ADJUSTMENT, DISCHARGE, OR SATISFACTION OF A CONSUMER'S STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN IN AN AMOUNT LESS THAN THE FULL AMOUNT OF THE PRINCIPAL AMOUNT OF THE DEBT OR THE CURRENT OUTSTANDING BALANCE OF THE DEBT; OR~~

~~(II) A REDUCTION OR ALTERATION IN:~~

~~1. THE AMOUNT OF MONTHLY PAYMENT OF FEES; OR~~

~~2. THE AMOUNT OF INTEREST OWED;~~

~~(2) ENROLL A CONSUMER IN A REPAYMENT PLAN, FORBEARANCE, OR DEFERMENT OF A STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN;~~

~~(3) APPLY FOR CONSOLIDATION OF OR CONSOLIDATE A CONSUMER'S STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN; OR~~

~~(4) OFFER TO PROVIDE ANY OTHER SERVICE RELATING TO ALTERING THE TERMS OF A CONSUMER'S STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN, INCLUDING A REDUCTION IN THE AMOUNT OF:~~

~~(I) INTEREST OWED BY THE CONSUMER;~~

~~(II) THE PRINCIPAL BALANCE OF THE STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN; OR~~

~~(III) A MONTHLY PAYMENT OR FEE.~~

~~(N) “STUDENT LOAN SERVICER” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 2-104.1(A) OF THIS ARTICLE.~~

~~(D) (O) “Unique identifier” means a number or another identifier assigned by NMLS.~~

2-104.1.

(a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

(3) “Student education loan” means any loan, notwithstanding any election of law or designation of status in any contract, used for financing postsecondary education or other postsecondary school-related expenses.

12-1001.

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

(L) “STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 2-104.1(A) OF THIS ARTICLE.

12-1012.

(a) A debt settlement services agreement shall:

(1) Be signed and dated by the registrant and the consumer; and

(2) Include, in at least 12 point type:

(i) The name, address, and telephone number of the consumer;

(ii) The name, address, and telephone number of the registrant;

(iii) A description of the debt settlement services to be provided to the consumer;

(iv) 1. Any debt settlement services fees to be charged to the consumer; and

2. A statement that the registrant may not:

A. Charge the consumer a fee for consultation or for obtaining a consumer’s credit report; or

B. Require a voluntary contribution from the consumer for any service provided by the registrant;

(v) The identity of each individual creditor or debt collector whose debts are included in the debt settlement services agreement and the principal amount of the debt owed to each individual creditor or debt collector;

(vi) The principal amount of the total debt included in the debt settlement services agreement;

(vii) A good faith estimate of the amount of time necessary to achieve the represented results;

(viii) To the extent that the debt settlement services may include a debt settlement offer to any of the consumer's creditors or debt collectors, a good faith estimate of:

1. The time by which the registrant will make a bona fide debt settlement offer to each of them; and

2. The amount of money or percentage of each debt that the consumer must accumulate before the registrant will make a bona fide debt settlement offer to each of them;

(ix) A statement that:

1. The consumer may withdraw from the debt settlement services agreement at any time; and

2. If a consumer withdraws from the debt settlement services agreement, the registrant:

A. May not charge a penalty; and

B. May collect debt settlement services fees earned by the registrant;

(X) FOR A DEBT SETTLEMENT SERVICES AGREEMENT FOR STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN DEBT RELIEF, A STATEMENT IN SUBSTANTIALLY THE FOLLOWING FORM:

“(NAME OF COMPANY) IS A PRIVATE COMPANY, AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OR ANY OTHER ACADEMIC ENTITY OR GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. (NAME OF COMPANY) IS NOT A LENDER, GUARANTOR, OR SERVICER OF FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS. YOU CAN APPLY FOR CONSOLIDATION AND OTHER REPAYMENT PLANS WITHOUT PAID ASSISTANCE THROUGH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THE DEPARTMENT’S WEBSITE OR THROUGH YOUR

FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN SERVICER. YOU CAN FIND OUT WHO YOUR SERVICER IS THROUGH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.”;

[(x)] (XI) If the registrant requests or requires the consumer to deposit funds in a dedicated account, a statement that:

1. The consumer owns the funds held in the account, including any accrued interest; and

2. If the consumer requests to withdraw from the debt settlement services agreement, within 7 days after the request, all funds in the account, including accrued interest, less any debt settlement services fees earned by the registrant in compliance with § 12-1010 of this subtitle, must be paid to the consumer; and

[(xi)] (XII) A statement that the consumer may be required to pay taxes on the amount by which the consumer’s debt is reduced.

(b) ~~(1)~~ The disclosures required under subsection (a)(2)(vii) through **[(xi)] (XII)** of this section shall be provided to the consumer in a clear and conspicuous manner in the debt settlement services agreement.

~~**(2) A REGISTRANT REQUIRED TO MAKE A DISCLOSURE UNDER SUBSECTION (A)(2)(X) OF THIS SECTION SHALL MAKE SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME STATEMENT ORALLY TO THE CONSUMER BEFORE THE AGREEMENT IS SIGNED.**~~

12-1012.1.

A DEBT SETTLEMENT SERVICES PROVIDER ENGAGED IN STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN DEBT RELIEF MAY NOT:

(1) ADVISE, EXPRESSLY OR BY IMPLICATION, THAT A CONSUMER STOP MAKING PAYMENTS OR STOP COMMUNICATING WITH THE CONSUMER’S STUDENT LOAN SERVICER; OR

(2) ACCESS OR OBTAIN A CONSUMER’S STUDENT AID INFORMATION IN VIOLATION OF FEDERAL LAW.

12-1013.

(A) An advertisement for debt settlement services shall include clearly and conspicuously a disclosure that, to the extent that any aspect of the debt settlement services relies on or results in the consumer’s failure to make timely payments to the consumer’s creditors or debt collectors, the use of the debt settlement services:

(1) Will likely adversely affect the consumer’s creditworthiness;

(2) May result in the consumer being subject to collections or being sued by creditors or debt collectors; and

(3) May increase the amount of money the consumer owes due to the accrual of fees and interest by creditors or debt collectors.

(B) AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR DEBT SETTLEMENT SERVICES FOR STUDENT EDUCATION LOAN DEBT RELIEF SHALL INCLUDE CLEARLY AND CONSPICUOUSLY A DISCLOSURE IN SUBSTANTIALLY THE FOLLOWING FORM:

“(NAME OF COMPANY) IS A PRIVATE COMPANY, AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OR ANY OTHER ACADEMIC ENTITY OR GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. (NAME OF COMPANY) IS NOT A LENDER, GUARANTOR, OR SERVICER OF FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS. YOU CAN APPLY FOR CONSOLIDATION AND OTHER REPAYMENT PLANS WITHOUT PAID ASSISTANCE THROUGH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THE DEPARTMENT’S WEBSITE OR THROUGH YOUR FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN SERVICER. YOU CAN FIND OUT WHO YOUR SERVICER IS THROUGH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.”.

SECTION ~~2~~ 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2022.

Enacted under Article II, § 17(c) of the Maryland Constitution, May 29, 2022.