

Chapter 585

(Senate Bill 651)

AN ACT concerning

**Real Estate – Real Estate Brokerage Services and Termination of Residential
Real Estate Contracts
(The Anthony Moorman Act)**

FOR the purpose of requiring a real estate broker or an escrow agent to distribute trust money to a purchaser within a certain period of time if the purchaser terminates a real estate transaction; requiring a holder of trust money who makes a certain distribution to notify the seller and purchaser of the distribution within a certain period of time, subject to a certain exception; establishing that a holder of trust money may not be held liable for a certain decision to distribute the trust money; authorizing a claimant aggrieved by a certain distribution of trust money to file a claim in the District Court; and generally relating to real estate brokerage services, escrow agents, and trust money.

BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
Article – Business Occupations and Professions
Section 17–101(a) and (l) and 17–501
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2018 Replacement Volume and 2022 Supplement)

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Article – Business Occupations and Professions
Section 17–505
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2018 Replacement Volume and 2022 Supplement)

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Article – Real Property
Section 10–802
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2015 Replacement Volume and 2022 Supplement)

BY adding to
Article – Real Property
Section 10–803
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2015 Replacement Volume and 2022 Supplement)

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

Article – Business Occupations and Professions

17–101.

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

(1) “Provide real estate brokerage services” means to engage in any of the following activities:

(1) for consideration, providing any of the following services for another person:

(i) selling, buying, exchanging, or leasing any real estate; or

(ii) collecting rent for the use of any real estate;

(2) for consideration, assisting another person to locate or obtain for purchase or lease any residential real estate;

(3) engaging regularly in a business of dealing in real estate or leases or options on real estate;

(4) engaging in a business the primary purpose of which is promoting the sale of real estate through a listing in a publication issued primarily for the promotion of real estate sales;

(5) engaging in a business that subdivides land that is located in any state and sells the divided lots; or

(6) for consideration, serving as a consultant regarding any activity set forth in items (1) through (5) of this subsection.

17–501.

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

(b) “Beneficial owner” means a person, other than the owner of the trust money, for whose benefit a real estate broker or, on behalf of a real estate broker, an associate real estate broker or a real estate salesperson is entrusted to hold trust money.

(c) “Trust money” means a deposit, payment, or other money that a person entrusts to a real estate broker or, on behalf of a real estate broker, to an associate real estate broker or a real estate salesperson to hold for:

(1) the benefit of the owner or beneficial owner of the trust money; and

(2) a purpose that relates to a real estate transaction involving real estate in the State.

17-505.

(a) A real estate broker shall maintain trust money in an account authorized under this Part I of this subtitle until:

(1) the real estate transaction for which the trust money was entrusted is consummated or terminated;

(2) the real estate broker receives proper written instructions from the owner and beneficial owner directing withdrawal or other disposition of the trust money;

(3) on an interpleader filed by the real estate broker, a court orders a different disposition; or

(4) the owner or beneficial owner of the trust money fails to complete the real estate transaction for which the trust money was entrusted and the real estate broker, in the real estate broker's sole discretion, decides to distribute the trust money in accordance with subsection (b) of this section.

(b) (1) Prior to distributing the trust money under subsection (a)(4) of this section, the real estate broker shall notify both the owner and the beneficial owner that the real estate broker intends to distribute the trust money to the person who, in the good faith opinion of the real estate broker, is entitled to receive the trust money in accordance with the terms of the real estate contract which established the trust.

(2) The notice required under this subsection shall:

(i) be in writing;

(ii) state whether the trust money will be paid to the owner or beneficial owner; and

(iii) disclose to the owner and the beneficial owner that:

1. either party may prevent distribution of the trust money under subsection (a)(4) of this section by submitting a protest within 30 days from the date the notice was delivered or mailed by the real estate broker; and

2. if neither party submits a protest within 30 days from the date the notice was delivered or mailed by the real estate broker, the trust money will be distributed in accordance with the real estate broker's notice.

(3) The notice required under this subsection shall be:

- (i) hand delivered to both the owner and beneficial owner; or
 - (ii) sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, and regular mail to both the owner and beneficial owner.
- (4) (i) An owner or beneficial owner may protest the distribution of the trust money.
- (ii) An owner or beneficial owner shall submit the protest to the real estate broker holding the trust money within 30 days from the date the notice required in paragraph (1) of this subsection was delivered or mailed by the real estate broker.
 - (iii) A protest shall be in writing and either:
 1. hand delivered; or
 2. sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, and regular mail.
- (5) (i) If a written protest is received by the real estate broker, the real estate broker shall distribute the trust money in accordance with subsection (a)(1), (2), or (3) of this section.
- (ii) If no written protest is received by the real estate broker holding the trust money, the real estate broker shall distribute the trust money in accordance with the terms of the notice as required in this section.

(C) IF A PURCHASER OF RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE, AS DEFINED IN § 10-802 OF THE REAL PROPERTY ARTICLE, TERMINATES A REAL ESTATE TRANSACTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 10-803 OF THE REAL PROPERTY ARTICLE, THE REAL ESTATE BROKER SHALL DISTRIBUTE THE TRUST MONEY TO THE PURCHASER IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS SECTION.

[(c)] (D) When the duty of the real estate broker to maintain trust money in an account terminates, the real estate broker promptly shall account for all trust money.

[(d)] (E) A real estate broker may invest trust money:

- (1) as the owner and beneficial owner of the trust money instruct in writing; or
- (2) as the real estate broker, owner, and beneficial owner of the trust money agree in writing.

[(e)] (F) A real estate broker may not be liable to an owner or beneficial owner of the trust money for:

(1) a good faith decision to distribute the trust money under subsection (a)(4) of this section; or

(2) a decision not to distribute the trust money under subsection (a)(4) of this section.

[(f)] (G) An agreement under which a real estate broker is entrusted with the trust money shall contain a statement that the real estate broker may distribute the trust money in accordance with subsection (b) of this section if the owner or beneficial owner of the trust money fails to complete the real estate transaction for which the trust money was entrusted.

Article – Real Property

10–802.

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

(2) “Escrow agent” means a person engaged in the business of residential real estate settlements who receives trust money.

(3) “Residential real estate” means:

(i) Real property improved by four or fewer single–family dwelling units that are designed principally and are intended for human habitation; and

(ii) Unimproved real property zoned for residential use by the local zoning authority of the county or municipality in which the real property is located.

(4) “Trust money” means a deposit made by a purchaser in connection with a residential real estate sales transaction that the purchaser delivers to an escrow agent to hold for the benefit of the purchaser and the seller.

(b) This section does not apply to:

(1) Banks, trust companies, savings and loan associations, savings banks, or credit unions;

(2) A homebuilder registered under Title 4.5 of the Business Regulation Article who is engaged in the initial sale of residential real estate; or

(3) A real estate salesperson, associate real estate broker, or real estate broker licensed under Title 17 of the Business Occupations and Professions Article.

(c) When an escrow agent agrees to hold trust money, the escrow agent shall enter into a written agreement with the purchaser and seller of the residential real estate that contains the following information:

- (1) The amount of the trust money delivered to the escrow agent;
- (2) The date the trust money was delivered to the escrow agent;
- (3) The responsibility of the escrow agent to notify the purchaser and seller of trust money returned due to dishonored funds;
- (4) The conditions under which the escrow agent may release the trust money; and
- (5) The process to address disputes over the release of the trust money.

(D) IF A PURCHASER TERMINATES A REAL ESTATE TRANSACTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 10-803 OF THIS SUBTITLE, THE ESCROW AGENT SHALL DISTRIBUTE THE TRUST MONEY TO THE PURCHASER IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS SECTION.

[(d)] **(E)** Nothing in this section may be construed to prohibit an escrow agent from transferring trust money to another escrow agent if the purchaser of the residential real estate for which the trust money is held chooses the escrow agent to whom the trust money is transferred.

10-803.

(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(2) (I) “CONTINGENCY” MEANS A CLAUSE INCLUDED IN A CONTRACT OF SALE FOR RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE THAT:

- 1. REQUIRES A SPECIFIC EVENT OR ACTION TO OCCUR FOR THE CONTRACT TO BE ENFORCEABLE; AND**
- 2. ENTITLES A PARTY EXERCISING THE CONTINGENCY TO TERMINATE THE CONTRACT AND RECEIVE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TRUST MONEY.**

(II) “CONTINGENCY” INCLUDES A CLAUSE RELATING TO:

- 1. APPRAISALS;**

2. **BACK-UP CONTRACTS;**
3. **BUILDING PERMITS, FEASIBILITY STUDIES, OR OTHER CONTINGENCIES RELATED TO CONDOMINIUM NOTICE;**
4. **CONSERVATION EASEMENTS;**
5. **COOPERATIVE HOUSING NOTICES;**
6. **DEEDS AND TITLES;**
7. **HOME OR ENVIRONMENTAL INSPECTIONS;**
8. **HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION NOTICES;**
9. **ON-SITE SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEM INSPECTIONS;**
10. **PROPERTY CONDITION DISCLOSURES AND DISCLAIMER ACT NOTICES;**
11. **SHORT SALES;**
12. **SALES OF RESIDENTIAL UNIMPROVED LAND;**
13. **TERMITE INSPECTIONS;**
14. **THIRD-PARTY APPROVAL NOT RELATED TO FINANCING; OR**
15. **WATER AND SEWER ASSESSMENTS NOTICES.**

(3) “HOLDER OF TRUST MONEY” MEANS:

(I) AN ESCROW AGENT AS DEFINED IN § 10-802 OF THIS SUBTITLE; OR

(II) A LICENSED REAL ESTATE BROKER AS DEFINED IN § 17-101 OF THE BUSINESS OCCUPATIONS AND PROFESSIONS ARTICLE.

(4) “RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 10-802 OF THIS SUBTITLE.

(5) “TRUST MONEY” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 10-802 OF THIS SUBTITLE.

(B) (1) (I) IF A PURCHASER TERMINATES A RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE CONTRACT UNDER THE TERMS OF A CONTINGENCY CLAUSE OF A CONTRACT OF SALE FOR RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE, THE PURCHASER MAY REQUEST THE RETURN OF THE TRUST MONEY BY PROVIDING THE HOLDER OF THE TRUST MONEY AND THE SELLER WRITTEN NOTICE OF THE REQUEST.

(II) WITHIN 10 DAYS AFTER RECEIVING A REQUEST MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBPARAGRAPH (I) OF THIS PARAGRAPH, THE SELLER SHALL PROVIDE THE HOLDER OF THE TRUST MONEY WITH A COPY OF A COMPLAINT FILED IN THE DISTRICT COURT OR A NOTARIZED, WRITTEN REQUEST FOR MEDIATION RELATING TO THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TRUST MONEY.

(III) WITHIN 30 DAYS AFTER RECEIVING A REQUEST MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBPARAGRAPH (I) OF THIS PARAGRAPH, THE HOLDER OF THE TRUST MONEY, IF THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED A COPY OF A COMPLAINT FILED, OR A REQUEST FOR MEDIATION MADE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBPARAGRAPH (II) OF THIS PARAGRAPH, SHALL:

- 1. DISTRIBUTE THE TRUST MONEY TO THE PURCHASER;**
- AND**
- 2. NOTIFY THE PURCHASER AND SELLER OF THE DISTRIBUTION.**

(IV) IF THE HOLDER OF TRUST MONEY RECEIVES A COPY OF A COMPLAINT FILED, OR A REQUEST FOR MEDIATION MADE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBPARAGRAPH (II) OF THIS PARAGRAPH, THEY SHALL HOLD THE TRUST MONEY UNTIL:

- 1. A COURT ORDER OR MEDIATION AGREEMENT AUTHORIZES THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE MONEY; OR**
- 2. THE HOLDER OF THE TRUST MONEY FILES AN INTERPLEADER ACTION IN THE DISTRICT COURT.**

(2) A HOLDER OF TRUST MONEY MAY NOT BE LIABLE FOR A DECISION TO DISTRIBUTE TRUST MONEY MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS SUBSECTION.

(C) A CLAIMANT WHO IS AGGRIEVED BY A DISTRIBUTION OF TRUST MONEY

UNDER THIS SECTION MAY FILE AN ACTION IN THE DISTRICT COURT SITTING IN THE DISTRICT IN WHICH THE RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE IS LOCATED.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2023.

Approved by the Governor, May 8, 2023.