

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 59.1-444.2 and 59.1-444.3 of the Code of Virginia, relating to security freezes on credit reports; elimination of fees.

[H 509]

Approved

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia: 1. That §§ 59.1-444.2 and 59.1-444.3 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 59.1-444.2. Security freezes.

A. As used in this section, "security freeze" means a notice placed in a consumer's credit report, at the request of the consumer and subject to certain exceptions, that prohibits the consumer reporting agency from releasing the consumer's credit report or score relating to the extension of credit.

B. A consumer may request that a security freeze be placed on his or her credit report by sending a request in writing by certified mail, or such other secure method authorized by a consumer reporting agency, to a consumer reporting agency at an address designated by the consumer reporting agency to receive such requests. This subsection does not prevent a consumer reporting agency from advising a third party that a security freeze is in effect with respect to the consumer's credit report.

C. A consumer reporting agency shall place a security freeze on a consumer's credit report no later than three business days after receiving from the consumer:

- 1. A written request described in subsection B; and
2. Proper identification; and
3. Payment of a fee not to exceed \$5, if applicable.

A consumer reporting agency shall place a security freeze on a consumer's credit report no later than one business day after receiving such a request, if such request is made electronically at an address designated by the consumer reporting agency to receive such requests.

D. The consumer reporting agency shall send a written confirmation of the placement of the security freeze to the consumer within 10 business days. Upon placing the security freeze on the consumer's credit report, the consumer reporting agency shall provide the consumer with a unique personal identification number or password, or similar device to be used by the consumer when providing authorization for the release of his credit report for a specific period of time or for a specific party.

E. If the consumer wishes to allow his credit report to be accessed for a specific period of time or for a specific party while a freeze is in place, he shall contact the consumer reporting agency using a point of contact designated by the consumer reporting agency, request that the freeze be temporarily lifted, and provide the following:

- 1. Proper identification;
2. The unique personal identification number or password provided by the consumer reporting agency pursuant to subsection D; and
3. The proper information regarding the time period or the specific party for which the report shall be available to users of the credit report.

F. A consumer reporting agency:

- 1. Shall comply with a request made under subsection E:
a. Within three business days after receiving the request if the request is made at a postal address designated by the agency to receive such requests; or
b. Within 15 minutes after the consumer's request is received by the consumer reporting agency through the electronic contact method chosen by the consumer reporting agency in accordance with this section;
2. Is not required to temporarily lift a security freeze within the time provided in subdivision 1 b if:
a. The consumer fails to meet the requirements of subsection E; or
b. The consumer reporting agency's ability to temporarily lift the security freeze within 15 minutes is prevented by:
(1) An act of God, including fire, earthquakes, hurricanes, storms, or similar natural disaster or phenomena;
(2) Unauthorized or illegal acts by a third party, including terrorism, sabotage, riot, vandalism, labor strikes or disputes disrupting operations, or similar occurrence;
(3) Operational interruption, including electrical failure, unanticipated delay in equipment or replacement part delivery, computer hardware or software failures inhibiting response time, or similar

57 disruption;

58 (4) Governmental action, including emergency orders or regulations, judicial or law-enforcement  
59 action, or similar directives;

60 (5) Regularly scheduled maintenance, during other than normal business hours, of, or updates to, the  
61 consumer reporting agency's systems; or

62 (6) Commercially reasonable maintenance of, or repair to, the consumer reporting agency's systems  
63 that is unexpected or unscheduled; and

64 3. May develop procedures involving the use of telephone, fax, the Internet, or other electronic media  
65 to receive and process a request from a consumer to temporarily lift a freeze on a credit report pursuant  
66 to subsection E in an expedited manner.

67 G. A consumer reporting agency shall remove or temporarily lift a freeze placed on a consumer's  
68 credit report only in the following cases:

69 1. Upon a consumer request, pursuant to subsection E or subsection J; or

70 2. If the consumer's credit report was frozen due to a material misrepresentation of fact by the  
71 consumer. If a consumer reporting agency intends to remove a freeze upon a consumer's credit report  
72 pursuant to this subdivision, the consumer reporting agency shall notify the consumer in writing prior to  
73 removing the freeze on the consumer's credit report.

74 H. If a third party requests access to a consumer credit report on which a security freeze is in effect,  
75 and this request is in connection with an application for credit or any other use, and the consumer does  
76 not allow his or her credit report to be accessed for that period of time, the third party may treat the  
77 application as incomplete.

78 I. If a consumer requests a security freeze, the consumer reporting agency shall disclose the process  
79 of placing and temporarily lifting a freeze, and the process for allowing access to information from the  
80 consumer's credit report for a period of time while the freeze is in place.

81 J. A security freeze shall remain in place until the consumer requests, using a point of contact  
82 designated by the consumer reporting agency, that the security freeze be removed. A consumer reporting  
83 agency shall remove a security freeze within three business days of receiving a request for removal from  
84 the consumer, who provides:

85 1. Proper identification; and

86 2. The unique personal identification number or password or similar device provided by the  
87 consumer reporting agency pursuant to subsection D.

88 K. A consumer reporting agency shall require proper identification of the person making a request to  
89 place or remove a security freeze.

90 L. The provisions of this section do not apply to the use of a consumer credit report by any of the  
91 following:

92 1. A person or entity, or a subsidiary, affiliate, or agent of that person or entity, or an assignee of a  
93 financial obligation owing by the consumer to that person or entity, or a prospective assignee of a  
94 financial obligation owing by the consumer to that person or entity in conjunction with the proposed  
95 purchase of the financial obligation, with which the consumer has or had prior to assignment an account  
96 or contract, including a demand deposit account, or to whom the consumer issued a negotiable  
97 instrument, for the purposes of reviewing the account or collecting the financial obligation owing for the  
98 account, contract, or negotiable instrument. For purposes of this paragraph, "reviewing the account"  
99 includes activities related to account maintenance, monitoring, credit line increases, and account  
100 upgrades and enhancements;

101 2. A subsidiary, affiliate, agent, assignee, or prospective assignee of a person to whom access has  
102 been granted for purposes of facilitating the extension of credit or other permissible use;

103 3. Any state or local agency, law-enforcement agency, trial court, or private collection agency acting  
104 pursuant to a court order, warrant, or subpoena;

105 4. A child support agency acting pursuant to Title IV-D of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. § 654  
106 et seq.);

107 5. The Commonwealth or its agents or assigns acting to investigate fraud or acting to investigate or  
108 collect delinquent taxes or unpaid court orders or to fulfill any of its other statutory responsibilities  
109 provided such responsibilities are consistent with a permissible purpose under 15 U.S.C. § 1681b;

110 6. The use of credit information for the purposes of prescreening or postscreening as provided for by  
111 the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act;

112 7. Any person or entity administering a credit file monitoring subscription or similar service to which  
113 the consumer has subscribed;

114 8. Any person or entity for the purpose of providing a consumer with a copy of his credit report or  
115 score upon the consumer's request;

116 9. Any person or entity for use in setting or adjusting a rate, adjusting a claim, or underwriting for  
117 insurance purposes; or

118 10. Any employer in connection with any application for employment with the employer.  
 119 M. This section does not prevent a consumer reporting agency from charging a fee of no more than  
 120 \$5 to a consumer to place each freeze, except that a A consumer reporting agency may *shall* not charge  
 121 a fee to a victim of identity theft who has submitted a valid police report to the consumer reporting  
 122 agency for any service performed under this section.

123 N. If a security freeze is in place, a consumer reporting agency shall not change any of the following  
 124 official information in a consumer credit report without sending a written confirmation of the change to  
 125 the consumer within 30 days of the change being posted to the consumer's file: name, date of birth,  
 126 social security number, and address. Written confirmation is not required for technical modifications of a  
 127 consumer's official information, including name and street abbreviations, complete spellings, or  
 128 transposition of numbers or letters. In the case of an address change, the written confirmation shall be  
 129 sent to both the new address and to the former address.

130 O. The following entities are not required to place a security freeze on a credit report:

131 1. A consumer reporting agency that acts only as a reseller of credit information by assembling and  
 132 merging information contained in the database of another consumer reporting agency or multiple  
 133 consumer credit reporting agencies, and does not maintain a permanent database of credit information  
 134 from which new consumer credit reports are produced. However, a consumer reporting agency acting as  
 135 a reseller shall honor any security freeze placed on a consumer credit report by another consumer  
 136 reporting agency;

137 2. A check services or fraud prevention services company, which issues reports on incidents of fraud  
 138 or authorizations for the purpose of approving or processing negotiable instruments, electronic funds  
 139 transfers, or similar methods of payments;

140 3. A deposit account information service company, which issues reports regarding account closures  
 141 due to fraud, substantial overdrafts, ATM abuse, or similar negative information regarding a consumer,  
 142 to inquiring banks or other financial institutions for use only in reviewing a consumer request for a  
 143 deposit account at the inquiring bank or financial institution; and

144 4. A consumer reporting agency's database or file that consists of information concerning, and used  
 145 for, one or more of the following: criminal record information, fraud prevention or detection, personal  
 146 loss history information, and employment, tenant, or background screening.

147 P. At any time a consumer is required to receive a summary of rights required under 15 U.S.C.  
 148 § 1681g(d), the following notice shall be included:

149 "Virginia Consumers Have the Right to Obtain a Security Freeze.

150 You have a right to place a "security freeze" on your credit report, which will prohibit a consumer  
 151 reporting agency from releasing information in your credit report without your express authorization. A  
 152 security freeze must be requested in writing by certified mail. The security freeze is designed to prevent  
 153 credit, loans, and services from being approved in your name without your consent. However, you  
 154 should be aware that using a security freeze to take control over who gets access to the personal and  
 155 financial information in your credit report may delay, interfere with, or prohibit the timely approval of  
 156 any subsequent request or application you make regarding a new loan, credit, mortgage, government  
 157 services or payments, rental housing, employment, investment, license, cellular phone, utilities, digital  
 158 signature, Internet credit card transaction, or other services, including an extension of credit at point of  
 159 sale. When you place a security freeze on your credit report, you will be provided a personal  
 160 identification number or password to use if you choose to remove the freeze on your credit report or  
 161 authorize the release of your credit report for a period of time or for a specific party after the freeze is  
 162 in place. To provide that authorization you must contact the consumer reporting agency and provide all  
 163 of the following:

- 164 1. The personal identification number or password;
- 165 2. Proper identification to verify your identity; and
- 166 3. The proper information regarding the period of time or the specific party for which the report  
 167 shall be available.

168 A consumer reporting agency must authorize the release of your credit report no later than three  
 169 business days after receiving the above information. A consumer credit reporting agency must authorize  
 170 the release of your credit report no later than 15 minutes after receiving the request.

171 A security freeze does not apply to a person or entity, or its affiliates, or collection agencies acting  
 172 on behalf of the person or entity, with which you have an existing account, that requests information in  
 173 your credit report for the purposes of reviewing or collecting the account. Reviewing the account  
 174 includes activities related to account maintenance, monitoring, credit line increases, and account  
 175 upgrades and enhancements.

176 You have a right to bring civil action against anyone, including a consumer reporting agency, who  
 177 improperly obtains access to a file, knowingly or willfully misuses file data, or fails to correct inaccurate  
 178 file data.

179 Unless you are a victim of identity theft with a police report to verify the crimes, a A consumer  
 180 reporting agency has *does not have* the right to charge you up to \$5 a fee to place a freeze on your  
 181 credit report."

182 Q. Any person who willfully fails to comply with any requirement imposed under this section or  
 183 § 59.1-444.3 with respect to any consumer is liable to that consumer in an amount equal to the sum of:

184 1. Any actual damages sustained by the consumer as a result of the failure or damages of not less  
 185 than \$100 and not more than \$1,000;

186 2. Such amount of punitive damages as the court may allow; and

187 3. In the case of any successful action to enforce any liability under this section, the costs of the  
 188 action together with reasonable attorney fees as determined by the court.

189 R. Any person who obtains a consumer report, requests a security freeze, requests the temporary lift  
 190 of a freeze, or *requests* the removal of a security freeze from a consumer reporting agency under false  
 191 pretenses or in an attempt to violate federal or state law shall be liable to the consumer reporting agency  
 192 for actual damages sustained by the consumer reporting agency or \$1,000, whichever is greater.

193 S. Any person who is negligent in failing to comply with any requirement imposed under this section  
 194 with respect to any consumer is liable to that consumer in an amount equal to the sum of:

195 1. Any actual damages sustained by the consumer as a result of the failure; and

196 2. In the case of any successful action to enforce any liability under this section, the costs of the  
 197 action together with reasonable attorney fees as determined by the court.

198 T. Upon a finding by the court that an unsuccessful pleading, motion, or other paper filed in  
 199 connection with an action under this section was filed in bad faith or for purposes of harassment, the  
 200 court shall award to the prevailing party attorney fees reasonable in relation to the work expended in  
 201 responding to the pleading, motion, or other paper.

202 U. Notwithstanding any other provision of law:

203 1. The exclusive authority to bring an action for any violation of subdivision F 1 b shall be with the  
 204 Attorney General. In any action brought under this subsection, the Attorney General may cause an action  
 205 to be brought in the name of the Commonwealth to enjoin the violation and to recover damages for  
 206 aggrieved consumers consistent with the limits stated in subsections Q and S for such violations.

207 2. In any action brought under this subsection, if the court finds a willful violation, the court may, in  
 208 its discretion, also award a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000 per violation, to be deposited in the  
 209 Literary Fund of the Commonwealth.

210 3. In any action brought under this subsection, the Attorney General may recover any costs, the  
 211 reasonable expenses incurred in investigating and preparing the case, and attorney fees.

212 **§ 59.1-444.3. Security freezes for protected consumers.**

213 A. As used in this section, unless the context requires a different meaning:

214 "Protected consumer" means a consumer who is either:

215 1. Under the age of 16 years at the time a request for the placement of a security freeze is made; or

216 2. An incapacitated person for whom a guardian or conservator has been appointed in accordance  
 217 with Chapter 20 (§ 64.2-2000 et seq.) of Title 64.2.

218 "Record" means a compilation of information regarding a specific identified protected consumer,  
 219 which compilation is created by a consumer reporting agency solely for the purpose of complying with  
 220 the requirement for a record's establishment set forth in subsection D.

221 "Representative" means a person who provides to a consumer reporting agency sufficient proof of  
 222 authority to act on behalf of a protected consumer.

223 "Security freeze" means:

224 1. If a consumer reporting agency does not have a file pertaining to a protected consumer, a  
 225 restriction that (i) is placed on the protected consumer's record in accordance with this section and (ii)  
 226 prohibits the consumer reporting agency from releasing the protected consumer's record except as  
 227 provided in this section; or

228 2. If a consumer reporting agency has a file pertaining to the protected consumer, a restriction that  
 229 (i) is placed on the protected consumer's credit report in accordance with this section and (ii) prohibits  
 230 the consumer reporting agency from releasing the protected consumer's credit report or any information  
 231 derived from the protected consumer's credit report except as provided in this section.

232 "Sufficient proof of authority" means documentation that shows a representative has authority to act  
 233 on behalf of a protected consumer. "Sufficient proof of authority" includes (i) an order issued by a court  
 234 of law, (ii) a lawfully executed and valid power of attorney, (iii) a birth certification; or (iv) a written,  
 235 notarized statement signed by a representative that expressly describes the authority of the representative  
 236 to act on behalf of the protected consumer.

237 "Sufficient proof of identification" means information or documentation that identifies a protected  
 238 consumer or a representative of a protected consumer. "Sufficient proof of identification" includes (i) a  
 239 social security number or a copy of a social security card issued by the U.S. Social Security

240 Administration; (ii) a certified or official copy of a birth certificate issued by the entity authorized to  
 241 issue the birth certificate; (iii) a copy of a driver's license, an identification card issued by the  
 242 Department of Motor Vehicles, or any other government-issued identification; or (iv) a copy of a bill,  
 243 including a bill for telephone, sewer, septic tank, water, electric, oil, or natural gas services, that shows  
 244 a name and home address.

245 B. This section does not apply to the use of a protected consumer's credit report or record by:

246 1. A person administering a credit file monitoring subscription service to which the protected  
 247 consumer has subscribed or the representative of the protected consumer has subscribed on behalf of the  
 248 protected consumer;

249 2. A person providing the protected consumer or the protected consumer's representative with a copy  
 250 of the protected consumer's credit report on request of the protected consumer or the protected  
 251 consumer's representative; or

252 3. An entity listed in subsection O of § 59.1-444.2.

253 C. A consumer reporting agency shall place a security freeze for a protected consumer if:

254 1. The consumer reporting agency receives a request from the protected consumer's representative for  
 255 the placement of the security freeze under this section; and

256 2. The protected consumer's representative:

257 a. Submits the request to the consumer reporting agency at the address or other point of contact and  
 258 in the manner specified by the consumer reporting agency;

259 b. Provides to the consumer reporting agency sufficient proof of identification of the protected  
 260 consumer and the representative; *and*

261 c. Provides to the consumer reporting agency sufficient proof of authority to act on behalf of the  
 262 protected consumer; *and*

263 ~~d. Pays to the consumer reporting agency a fee as provided in subsection J.~~

264 D. If a consumer reporting agency does not have a file pertaining to a protected consumer when the  
 265 consumer reporting agency receives a request under subsection C from the protected consumer's  
 266 representative for the placement of a security freeze, the consumer reporting agency shall create a record  
 267 for the protected consumer. A record may not be created or used to consider the protected consumer's  
 268 creditworthiness, credit standing, credit capacity, character, general reputation, personal characteristics, or  
 269 mode of living for the purpose of serving as a factor in establishing the consumer's eligibility for (i)  
 270 credit or insurance to be used primarily for personal, family, or household purposes or (ii) employment.

271 E. Within 30 days after receiving a request that meets the requirements of subsection C, a consumer  
 272 reporting agency shall place a security freeze for the protected consumer.

273 F. Unless a security freeze for a protected consumer is removed in accordance with subsection H or  
 274 K, a consumer reporting agency may not release the protected consumer's credit report, any information  
 275 derived from the protected consumer's credit report, or any record created for the protected consumer.

276 G. A security freeze for a protected consumer placed under subsection E shall remain in effect until:

277 1. The protected consumer or the protected consumer's representative requests the consumer reporting  
 278 agency to remove the security freeze in accordance with subsection H; or

279 2. The security freeze is removed in accordance with subsection K.

280 H. If a protected consumer or a protected consumer's representative wishes to remove a security  
 281 freeze for the protected consumer, the protected consumer or the protected consumer's representative  
 282 shall:

283 1. Submit a request for the removal of the security freeze to the consumer reporting agency at the  
 284 address or other point of contact and in the manner specified by the consumer reporting agency; *and*

285 2. Provide to the consumer reporting agency:

286 a. In the case of a request by the protected consumer:

287 (1) Proof that the sufficient proof of authority for the protected consumer's representative to act on  
 288 behalf of the protected consumer is no longer valid; and

289 (2) Sufficient proof of identification of the protected consumer; or

290 b. In the case of a request by the representative of a protected consumer:

291 (1) Sufficient proof of identification of the protected consumer and the representative; and

292 (2) Sufficient proof of authority to act on behalf of the protected consumer; *and*

293 ~~3. Pay to the consumer reporting agency a fee as provided in subsection J.~~

294 I. Within 30 days after receiving a request that meets the requirements of subsection H, the consumer  
 295 reporting agency shall remove the security freeze for the protected consumer.

296 J. A consumer reporting agency ~~may~~ *shall* not charge a fee for any service performed under this  
 297 section; ~~except for a reasonable fee, not exceeding \$5, for each placement or removal of a security~~  
 298 ~~freeze for a protected consumer. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a consumer reporting agency shall not~~  
 299 ~~charge any fee for the placement or removal of a security freeze for a protected consumer if:~~

300 1. The protected consumer's representative has obtained, and provides to the consumer reporting

301 agency, a report of alleged identity fraud against the protected consumer under § 18.2-186.3:1 or an  
302 Identity Theft Passport issued for the protected consumer under § 18.2-186.5; or

303 2. A request for the placement or removal of a security freeze is for a protected consumer who is  
304 under the age of 16 years at the time of the request, and the consumer reporting agency has a credit  
305 report pertaining to the protected consumer.

306 K. A consumer reporting agency may remove a security freeze for a protected consumer or delete a  
307 record of a protected consumer if the security freeze was placed or the record was created based on a  
308 material misrepresentation of fact by the protected consumer or the protected consumer's representative.

309 L. Any person who obtains a consumer report, requests a security freeze, requests the temporary lift  
310 of a freeze, or requests the removal of a security freeze from a consumer reporting agency under false  
311 pretenses or in an attempt to violate federal or state law shall be liable to the consumer reporting agency  
312 for damages sustained by the consumer reporting agency as provided in subsection R of § 59.1-444.2.

313 M. Notwithstanding any other provision of law:

314 1. The exclusive authority to bring an action for any violation of subsection E shall be with the  
315 Attorney General. In any action brought under this subsection, the Attorney General may cause an action  
316 to be brought in the name of the Commonwealth to enjoin the violation and to recover damages for  
317 aggrieved protected consumers.

318 2. In any action brought under this subsection, if the court finds a willful violation, the court may, in  
319 its discretion, also award a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000 per violation, to be deposited in the  
320 Literary Fund.

321 3. In any action brought under this subsection, the Attorney General may recover any costs, the  
322 reasonable expenses incurred in investigating and preparing the case, and attorney fees.