

AN ACT

relating to debt management services and the regulation of debt management services providers.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Section 394.202, Finance Code, is amended by adding Subdivisions (3-a), (9-a), and (11-a) and amending Subdivisions (6) and (10) to read as follows:

(3-a) "Concession" means assent to repayment of a debt on terms more favorable to a consumer than the terms of the agreement under which the consumer became indebted to the creditor.

(6) "Debt management service" means a service in which a provider obtains or seeks to obtain a concession from one or more creditors on behalf of a consumer [+

~~[(A) the receiving of money from a consumer for the purpose of distributing that money to or among one or more of the creditors of the consumer in full or partial payment of the consumer's obligations,~~

~~[(B) arranging or assisting a consumer to arrange for the distribution of one or more payments to or among one or more creditors of the consumer in full or partial payment of the consumer's obligations, or~~

~~[(C) exercising control, directly or indirectly, or arranging for the exercise of control over funds of a consumer for the purpose of distributing payments to or among one or more~~

1 ~~creditors of the consumer in full or partial payment of the~~
2 ~~consumer's obligations].~~

3 (9-a) "Principal amount of the debt" means the amount
4 of a debt owed by a consumer at the time the consumer enters into a
5 debt management service agreement.

6 (10) "Provider" means a person that acts as an
7 intermediary between a consumer and one or more creditors and that
8 provides or offers to provide [~~to a consumer in this state~~] a debt
9 management service to a consumer in this state.

10 (11-a) "Settlement fee" means a charge that is imposed
11 on or paid by a consumer in connection with a debt management
12 service agreement after a creditor agrees to accept in full
13 satisfaction of a debt an amount that is less than the principal
14 amount of the debt.

15 SECTION 2. Subsection (k), Section 394.204, Finance Code,
16 is amended to read as follows:

17 (k) In addition to the power to refuse an initial
18 application as specified in this section, the commissioner may
19 suspend or revoke a provider's registration after notice and
20 hearing if the commissioner finds that any of the following
21 conditions are met:

22 (1) a fact or condition exists that if it had existed
23 when the provider applied for registration would have been grounds
24 for denying registration;

25 (2) a fact or condition exists that the commissioner
26 was not aware of when the provider applied for registration and
27 would have been grounds for denying registration;

1 (3) the provider violates this subchapter or rule or
2 order of the commissioner under this subchapter;

3 (4) the provider is insolvent;

4 (5) the provider refuses to permit the commissioner to
5 make an examination authorized by this subchapter;

6 (6) the provider fails to respond within a reasonable
7 time and in an appropriate manner to communications from the
8 commissioner;

9 (7) the provider has received money from or on behalf
10 of a consumer for disbursement to a creditor under a debt management
11 plan that provides for regular periodic payments to creditors in
12 full repayment of the principal amount of the debts and the provider
13 has failed to disburse money to the creditor [~~creditors~~] on behalf
14 of the consumer [~~consumers~~] within a reasonable time, normally 30
15 days;

16 (8) the commissioner determines that the provider's
17 trust account is not materially in balance with and reconciled to
18 the consumer's account; or

19 (9) the provider fails to warrant the belief that the
20 business will be operated lawfully and fairly and within the
21 provisions and purposes of this subchapter.

22 SECTION 3. Subsection (b), Section 394.206, Finance Code,
23 is amended to read as follows:

24 (b) The bond or insurance must:

25 (1) run concurrently with the period of registration;

26 (2) be available to pay damages and penalties to
27 consumers directly harmed by a violation of this subchapter;

1 (3) be in favor of this state for the use of this state
2 and the use of a person who has a cause of action under this
3 subchapter against the provider;

4 (4) if a bond:

5 (A) be in an amount equal to the average daily
6 balance of the provider's trust account serving Texas consumers
7 over the six-month period preceding the issuance of the bond, or in
8 the case of an initial application, in an amount determined by the
9 commissioner, but not less than \$25,000 or more than \$100,000, if
10 the provider receives and holds money paid by or on behalf of a
11 consumer for disbursement to the consumer's creditors; or

12 (B) be in the amount of \$50,000, if the provider
13 does not receive and hold money paid by or on behalf of a consumer
14 for disbursement to the consumer's creditors;

15 (5) if an insurance policy:

16 (A) provide coverage for professional liability,
17 employee dishonesty, depositor's forgery, and computer fraud in an
18 amount not less than \$100,000;

19 (B) be issued by a company rated at least "A-" or
20 its equivalent by a nationally recognized rating organization; and

21 (C) provide for 30 days advance written notice of
22 termination of the policy to be provided to the commissioner;

23 (6) be issued by a bonding, surety, or insurance
24 company that is authorized to do business in the state; and

25 (7) be conditioned on the provider and its agents
26 complying with all state and federal laws, including regulations,
27 governing the business of debt management services.

1 SECTION 4. Subsections (a), (d), and (f), Section 394.208,
2 Finance Code, are amended to read as follows:

3 (a) A provider may not enroll a consumer in a debt
4 management plan unless, through the services of a counselor
5 certified by an independent accreditation organization, the
6 provider ~~has~~:

7 (1) has provided the consumer individualized
8 counseling and educational information that at a minimum addresses
9 the topics of managing household finances, managing credit and
10 debt, and budgeting;

11 (2) has prepared an individualized financial analysis
12 and an initial debt management plan for the consumer's debts with
13 specific recommendations regarding actions the consumer should
14 take;

15 (3) has determined that the consumer has a reasonable
16 ability to make payments under the proposed debt management plan
17 based on the information provided by the consumer;

18 (4) if the proposed debt management plan does not
19 provide for a reduction of principal as a concession:

20 (A) has a reasonable expectation, provided that
21 the consumer has provided accurate information to the provider,
22 that each creditor of the consumer listed as a participating
23 creditor in the plan will accept payment of the consumer's debts as
24 provided in the initial plan; and

25 (B) has ~~(5)~~ prepared, for all creditors
26 identified by the consumer or identified through additional
27 investigation by the provider, a list, which must be provided to the

1 consumer in a form the consumer may keep, of the creditors that the
2 provider reasonably expects to participate in the plan; and

3 (5) has [~~(6)~~] provided a written document to the
4 consumer in a form the consumer may keep that clearly and
5 conspicuously contains the following statements:

6 (A) that debt management services are not
7 suitable for all consumers and that consumers may request
8 information about other ways, including bankruptcy, to deal with
9 indebtedness;

10 (B) that if the provider is a nonprofit or
11 tax-exempt organization the provider cannot require donations or
12 contributions; and

13 (C) if applicable, that some of the provider's
14 funding comes from contributions from creditors who participate in
15 debt management plans, except that a provider may substitute for
16 "some" the actual percentage of creditor contributions it received
17 during the most recent reporting period.

18 (d) A provider may provide the information required by
19 Subsections (a)(2), (4)(B), and (5) [~~, and (6)~~] through its Internet
20 website if the provider:

21 (1) has complied with the federal Electronic
22 Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (15 U.S.C. Section
23 7001 et seq.);

24 (2) informs the consumer that, on electronic,
25 telephonic, or written request the provider will make available to
26 the consumer a paper copy or copies; and

27 (3) discloses on its Internet website:

1 (A) the provider's name and each name under which
2 it does business;

3 (B) the provider's principal business address
4 and telephone number; and

5 (C) the names of the provider's principal
6 officers.

7 (f) A provider who receives and disburses money to creditors
8 on behalf of consumers for debt management services shall provide
9 each consumer to [~~for~~] whom those services were provided [~~it~~
10 ~~provides debt management services~~] a written report accounting for:

11 (1) the amount of money received from the consumer
12 since the last report;

13 (2) the amount and date of each disbursement made on
14 the consumer's behalf to each creditor listed in the agreement
15 since the last report;

16 (3) any amount deducted from amounts received from the
17 consumer; and

18 (4) any amount held in reserve.

19 SECTION 5. Subsection (b), Section 394.209, Finance Code,
20 is amended to read as follows:

21 (b) Each debt management services agreement must:

22 (1) be dated and signed by the consumer;

23 (2) include the name and address of the consumer and
24 the name, address, and telephone number of the provider;

25 (3) describe the services to be provided;

26 (4) state all fees, individually itemized, to be paid
27 by the consumer;

1 (5) if the proposed debt management plan does not
2 provide for a reduction of principal as a concession, list in the
3 agreement or accompanying document, to the extent the information
4 is available to the provider at the time the agreement is executed,
5 each participating creditor of the consumer to which payments will
6 be made and, based on information provided by the consumer, the
7 amount owed to each creditor and the schedule of payments the
8 consumer will be required to make to the creditor, including the
9 amount and date on which each payment will be due;

10 (6) state the existence of a surety bond or insurance
11 for consumer claims;

12 (7) state that establishment of a debt management plan
13 may impact the consumer's credit rating and credit score either
14 favorably or unfavorably, depending on creditor policies and the
15 consumer's payment history before and during participation in the
16 debt management plan; and

17 (8) state that either party may cancel the agreement
18 without penalty at any time on 10 days' notice and that a consumer
19 who cancels an agreement is entitled to a refund of all money that
20 the consumer has paid to the provider that has not been disbursed.

21 SECTION 6. Subchapter C, Chapter 394, Finance Code, is
22 amended by adding Section 394.2095 to read as follows:

23 Sec. 394.2095. CANCELLATION OF AGREEMENT BY EITHER PROVIDER
24 OR CONSUMER. If a provider or a consumer cancels a debt management
25 service agreement, the provider shall immediately return to the
26 consumer:

27 (1) any money of the consumer held in trust by the

1 provider for the consumer's benefit; and

2 (2) 65 percent of any portion of the account set-up fee
3 received under Section 394.210(g)(1) that has not been credited
4 against settlement fees.

5 SECTION 7. Section 394.210, Finance Code, is amended by
6 amending Subsections (c) through (f) and adding Subsections (g)
7 through (n) to read as follows:

8 (c) A provider may not impose fees or other charges on a
9 consumer or receive payment for debt management services until the
10 consumer has entered into a debt management service agreement with
11 the provider that complies with Section 394.209.

12 (d) If a consumer enters into a debt management service
13 agreement with a provider, the provider may not impose a fee or
14 other charge for debt counseling, education services, or similar
15 services except as otherwise authorized by this section. The
16 commissioner may authorize a provider to charge a fee based on the
17 nature and extent of the counseling, education services, or other
18 similar services furnished by the provider.

19 (e) Subsections (f)-(j) apply subject to an adjustment made
20 under Section 394.2101.

21 (f) If a consumer is enrolled in a debt management plan that
22 provides for a reduction of finance charges or fees for late
23 payment, default, or delinquency as a concession from creditors,
24 the provider may charge:

25 (1) a fee not to exceed \$100 for debt consultation or
26 education services, including obtaining a credit report, setting up
27 an account, and other similar services; and

1 (2) a monthly service fee, not to exceed the lesser of:

2 (A) \$10 multiplied by the number of accounts
3 remaining in the plan on the day of the month the fee is assessed; or

4 (B) \$50.

5 (g) If a consumer is enrolled in a debt management plan that
6 provides for settlement of debts for amounts that are less than the
7 principal amounts of the debts as a concession from creditors, the
8 provider may charge:

9 (1) a fee for debt consultation or education services,
10 including obtaining a credit report, setting up an account, and
11 other similar services, in an amount not to exceed the lesser of
12 \$400 or four percent of the total amount of the outstanding debt
13 included in the plan at the time the plan is established; and

14 (2) a monthly service fee, not to exceed the lesser of:

15 (A) \$10 multiplied by the number of accounts
16 remaining in the plan on the day of the month the fee is assessed; or

17 (B) \$50; and

18 (3) one of the following:

19 (A) with respect to a debt management service
20 agreement in which a flat fee is charged based on the total amount
21 of debt that is included in a debt management plan, the total
22 aggregate amount of fees charged to a consumer under this
23 subchapter, including fees charged under Subdivisions (1) and (2),
24 may not exceed 17 percent of the total principal amount of debt
25 included in the debt management plan; or

26 (B) with respect to a debt management service
27 agreement in which fees are computed as a percentage of the amount

1 saved by a consumer as a result of a concession, in addition to fees
2 charged under Subdivisions (1) and (2), a settlement fee may not
3 exceed 30 percent of the excess of the outstanding amount of each
4 debt over the amount actually paid to the creditor, as computed at
5 the time of settlement.

6 (h) Settlement fees authorized under Subsection (g)(3)(B)
7 may be charged only as debts are settled, and the total aggregate
8 amount of fees charged to a consumer under this subchapter,
9 including fees charged under Subsections (g)(1) and (2), may not
10 exceed 20 percent of the principal amount of debt included in the
11 debt management plan.

12 (i) The flat fee authorized under this subchapter shall be
13 assessed in equal monthly payments for a period that is at least as
14 long as the term of the debt management plan, as estimated when the
15 debt management plan is established, unless:

16 (1) the fee payment period is voluntarily accelerated
17 by the consumer in an addendum to the agreement or other separate
18 agreement; and

19 (2) offers of settlement by creditors have been
20 obtained on at least half of the outstanding debt included in the
21 debt management plan.

22 (j) If a consumer is enrolled in a debt management plan that
23 provides for the settlement of debts for amounts that are less than
24 the principal amount of the debts as a concession from creditors, if
25 fees for debt management services will not be charged or collected
26 until the time a settlement agreement is reached with a creditor,
27 and if at least one payment has been made toward the settlement

1 agreement by or on behalf of the consumer, the fee limitations in
2 Subsection (g) do not apply and the provider may charge reasonable
3 settlement fees. The fee with respect to each debt included in the
4 plan must:

5 (1) bear the same proportional relationship to the
6 total fee for settling all debts included in the debt management
7 plan as the principal amount of the particular debt bears to the
8 total principal amount of the debt included in the plan; or

9 (2) be a percentage of the amount saved as a result of
10 the settlement, determined as the difference between the principal
11 amount of a debt and the amount actually paid to satisfy the debt.
12 The percentage charged cannot change from one debt to another.

13 (k) A provider may impose fees or other charges or receive
14 fees or payment under only one of Subsection (f), (g), or (j).

15 (l) If a consumer does not enter into a debt management
16 service agreement with a provider, the provider may receive payment
17 for debt counseling or education services provided to the consumer
18 in an amount not to exceed \$100 or a greater amount, on approval of
19 the commissioner. The commissioner may approve a fee in an amount
20 greater than \$100 if the nature and extent of the educational and
21 counseling services warrant the greater amount.

22 (m) If, before the expiration of the 90th day after the date
23 debt counseling or education services are completed or canceled, a
24 consumer enters into a debt management service agreement with a
25 provider, the provider shall refund to the consumer any payments
26 received under Subsection (l).

27 (n) Subject to an adjustment made under Section 394.2101, if

1 any payment made by a consumer to a provider under this subchapter
2 is dishonored, the provider may impose a reasonable charge on the
3 consumer not to exceed the lesser of \$25 or an amount permitted by a
4 law other than this chapter [~~Any fee charged by a provider must be~~
5 ~~fair and reasonable given the value of the products and services~~
6 ~~provided to the consumer, including consideration of the amount~~
7 ~~subject to debt management and the number of anticipated~~
8 ~~payments. A fee or a portion of a fee that is specifically related~~
9 ~~to a debt management plan may not be charged until the provider has~~
10 ~~complied with Sections 394.208(a) and (b) and 394.209.~~

11 [~~(d) A provider may charge a monthly maintenance fee if the~~
12 ~~fee is fair and reasonable.~~

13 [~~(e) A fee charged for a service other than a debt~~
14 ~~management service must be fair and reasonable.~~

15 [~~(f) The finance commission may establish maximum fair and~~
16 ~~reasonable fees under this section].~~

17 SECTION 8. Subchapter C, Chapter 394, Finance Code, is
18 amended by adding Section 394.2101 to read as follows:

19 Sec. 394.2101. ADJUSTMENT OF AMOUNTS OF FEES OR OTHER
20 CHARGES. (a) The commissioner shall compute and publish the
21 dollar amounts of fees or other charges in amounts different from
22 the amounts of fees or other charges specified in Section 394.210 to
23 reflect inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index for All
24 Urban Consumers published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the
25 United States Department of Labor or, if that index is not
26 available, another index adopted by finance commission rule. The
27 commissioner shall adopt a base year and adjust the dollar amounts,

1 effective on July 1 of each year, if the change in the index from the
2 base year, as of December 31 of the preceding year, is at least 10
3 percent. The dollar amounts must be rounded to the nearest \$100,
4 except that the amounts of the fees and other charges specified in
5 Section 394.210 must be rounded to the nearest dollar.

6 (b) The commissioner shall notify registered providers of
7 any change in dollar amounts made under Subsection (a) and make that
8 information available to the public.

9 SECTION 9. Subsection (a), Section 394.211, Finance Code,
10 is amended to read as follows:

11 (a) A provider must use a trust account for the management
12 of all money paid by or on behalf of a consumer and received by the
13 provider for disbursement to the consumer's creditor. A provider
14 may not commingle the money in a trust account established for the
15 benefit of consumers with any operating funds of the provider. A
16 provider shall exercise due care to appropriately manage the funds
17 in the trust account.

18 SECTION 10. Section 394.213, Finance Code, is amended to
19 read as follows:

20 Sec. 394.213. DUTIES OF PROPER MANAGEMENT. A provider has a
21 duty to a consumer who receives debt management services from the
22 provider to ensure that client money held by the provider is managed
23 properly at all times.

24 SECTION 11. This Act takes effect September 1, 2011.

President of the Senate

Speaker of the House

I hereby certify that S.B. No. 141 passed the Senate on March 15, 2011, by the following vote: Yeas 31, Nays 0; and that the Senate concurred in House amendments on May 23, 2011, by the following vote: Yeas 30, Nays 0.

Secretary of the Senate

I hereby certify that S.B. No. 141 passed the House, with amendments, on May 13, 2011, by the following vote: Yeas 114, Nays 18, two present not voting.

Chief Clerk of the House

Approved:

Date

Governor