**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING ARTICLE 21 TO CHAPTER 1, TITLE 25 SO AS TO ENACT THE “SOUTH CAROLINA SERVICEMEMBERS CIVIL RELIEF ACT”; TO DEFINE THE ACT’S RELEVANT TERMS; TO ENUMERATE CERTAIN RIGHTS, BENEFITS, AND OBLIGATIONS OF SERVICEMEMBERS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS; TO AUTHORIZE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO BRING A CIVIL ACTION FOR INTENTIONAL VIOLATIONS OF THE ACT; TO ESTABLISH REMEDIES AND PENALTIES; AND TO REQUIRE THE ADJUTANT GENERAL TO POST CERTAIN INFORMATION REGARDING THE ACT ON THE SOUTH CAROLINA NATIONAL GUARD WEBSITE.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Chapter 1, Title 25 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Article 21

South Carolina Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

Section 25‑1‑4010. This article may be cited as the ‘South Carolina Servicemembers Civil Relief Act’.

Section 25‑1‑4020. This article is intended to expand and supplement the rights, benefits, and protections of the federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. Section 3901, et seq. Nothing in this article may be construed as a restriction or limitation on the rights, benefits, and protections granted to a servicemember pursuant to federal law. A violation of the federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. Section 3901, et seq., constitutes a violation of this article.

Section 25‑1‑4030. For purposes of this article:

(1) ‘Dependent’, with respect to a servicemember, has the meaning set forth in 50 U.S.C. Section 3911(4).

(2) ‘Military service’ means any of the following:

(a) the meaning set forth in 50 U.S.C. Section 3911(2);

(b) in the case of a servicemember who is a member or reserve member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard, full‑time duty in the active military service of the United States, including:

(i) full‑time training duty;

(ii) annual training duty; and

(iii) attendance while at a school designated as a service school by federal law or by the secretary of the military department concerned;

(c) in the case of a member of the South Carolina National Guard, service under a call to active:

(i) service authorized by the President of the United States or the Secretary of Defense for a period of more than thirty days in response to a national emergency declared by the President of the United States; or

(ii) duty authorized pursuant to Article 15 for a period of more than thirty consecutive days;

(d) in the case of a member of the National Guard of another state, service under an order of the governor of that state, which is similar to South Carolina state active duty, for a period of more than thirty consecutive days;

(e) in the case of a servicemember who is a commissioned officer of the Public Health Service or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, active service; or

(f) any period during which a servicemember is absent from duty on account of sickness, wounds, leave, or other lawful cause.

(3) ‘Period of military service’ means the period beginning on the date on which a servicemember enters military service and ending on the date on which the servicemember is released from military service or dies while in military service.

(4) ‘Servicemember’ means an individual engaged in military service or a member of the uniformed services, as that term is defined 50 U.S.C Section 3911(1).

Section 25‑1‑4040. The rights, benefits, and protections of the federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. Section 3901, et seq., apply to a servicemember engaged in military service. However, in the case of a servicemember engaged in military service pursuant to Section 25‑1‑4030(2)(c)(ii) or (d), a person is not subject to the remedies or penalties of this article unless the servicemember gives to the person a written or electronic copy of the order to military service. A violation of the federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, as expanded by this section, is a violation of this article.

Section 25‑1‑4050. A dependent of a servicemember engaged in military service has the same rights and protections provided to a servicemember pursuant to Section 25‑1‑4060 and Subchapter II of Chapter 50, Title 50 of the U.S.C.

Section 25‑1‑4060. (A) In addition to the rights and protections regarding consumer transactions, contracts, and service providers provided to a servicemember pursuant to Subchapter III of Chapter 50, Title 50 of the U.S.C., a servicemember may terminate a contract described in subsection (B) of this section at any time after the date the servicemember receives military orders to relocate for a period of service of at least ninety days to a location that does not support the contract.

(B) This section applies to a contract to provide the following:

(1) telecommunication services;

(2) Internet services;

(3) television services, including but not limited to cable television, direct satellite, and other similarly comparable television services;

(4) athletic club or gym memberships; or

(5) satellite radio services.

(C) A servicemember shall give to the service provider written or electronic notice of the termination and a written or electronic copy of the order to relocate. If a servicemember terminates a contract, the service provider shall provide the servicemember with a written or electronic notice of the servicemember’s rights posted on the South Carolina National Guard’s Internet website pursuant to Section 25‑1‑4080. A termination of services pursuant to this section is effective on the day written or electronic notice is provided pursuant to this subsection.

(D) The service provider may not impose an early termination penalty, charge, or fee for a contract terminated pursuant to this section.

(E) Not later than sixty days after the termination date of the contact, the service provider shall refund to the servicemember any fee paid for a service that extends beyond the termination date of the contract.

(F) The servicemember shall pay the tax or other contractual obligation or liability that is due and unpaid at the time of termination of the contract.

(G) If the servicemember resubscribes to the service provided under the contract within ninety days of returning from military service, the service provider may not impose a charge or fee, other than the usual and customary charges and fees for the installation or acquisition of customer equipment imposed on other subscribers.

Section 25‑1‑4070. (A) The South Carolina Attorney General may bring a civil action against a person who intentionally violates a provision of this article.

(B) The court may order one or more of the following remedies:

(1) injunction; or

(2) payment of restitution to a servicemember in the amount of money unlawfully received from, or required to be refunded to, the servicemember, unless the servicemember has successfully recovered the amount in a separate action under the federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. Section 3901, et seq.

(C) The court may assess a civil penalty not to exceed five thousand dollars per violation. Fifty percent of the proceeds of civil penalties imposed pursuant to this section must be remitted to the general fund of the State, and the remaining fifty percent may be retained by the Office of the Attorney General and carried forward to succeeding fiscal years to support enforcement or public education efforts directly related to the purpose of this article.

Section 25‑1‑4080. The Adjutant General shall post on the South Carolina National Guard website a list of the rights a servicemember or a servicemember’s dependent has pursuant to both the South Carolina Servicemembers Civil Relief Act and the federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. Section 3901, et seq.”

SECTION 2. The provisions of this act are severable. If any section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, item, subitem, sentence, clause, phrase, or word of this act is for any reason held to be unconstitutional or invalid, such holding shall not affect the constitutionality or validity of the remaining portions of the act, the General Assembly hereby declaring that it would have passed each and every section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, item, subitem, sentence, clause, phrase, and word thereof, irrespective of the fact that any one or more other sections, subsections, paragraphs, subparagraphs, items, subitems, sentences, clauses, phrases, or words hereof may be declared to be unconstitutional, invalid, or otherwise ineffective.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor and applies to contracts entered into on or after that date.

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