

CHAPTER 298

AN ACT concerning certain consumer fraud practices relating to senior citizens and amending various parts of the statutory law.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. This act shall be known and may be cited as "The Senior Citizens Fraudulent Claims Act."

2. Section 1 of P.L.1960, c.39 (C.56:8-1) is amended to read as follows:

C.56:8-1 Definitions.

1. (a) The term "advertisement" shall include the attempt directly or indirectly by publication, dissemination, solicitation, indorsement or circulation or in any other way to induce directly or indirectly any person to enter or not enter into any obligation or acquire any title or interest in any merchandise or to increase the consumption thereof or to make any loan;

(b) The term "Attorney General" shall mean the Attorney General of the State of New Jersey or any person acting on his behalf;

(c) The term "merchandise" shall include any objects, wares, goods, commodities, services or anything offered, directly or indirectly to the public for sale;

(d) The term "person" as used in this act shall include any natural person or his legal representative, partnership, corporation, company, trust, business entity or association, and any agent, employee, salesman, partner, officer, director, member, stockholder, associate, trustee or cestuis que trustent thereof;

(e) The term "sale" shall include any sale, rental or distribution, offer for sale, rental or distribution or attempt directly or indirectly to sell, rent or distribute;

(f) The term "senior citizen" means a natural person 60 years of age or older.

3. Section 1 of P.L.1966, c.39 (C.56:8-13) is amended to read as follows:

C.56:8-13 Penalties.

1. Any person who violates any of the provisions of the act to which this act is a supplement shall, in addition to any other penalty provided by law, be liable to a penalty of not more than \$7,500 for the first offense and not more than \$15,000 for the second and each subsequent offense. The penalty shall be exclusive of and in addition to any moneys or property ordered to be paid or restored to any person in interest pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1966, c.39 (C.56:8-14) or section 3 of P.L.1971, c.247 (C.56:8-15).

4. Section 2 of P.L.1966, c.39 (C.56:8-14) is amended to read as follows:

C.56:8-14 Enforcement of penalty; process.

2. The Superior Court and every municipal court shall have jurisdiction of proceedings for the collection and enforcement of a penalty imposed because of the violation, within the territorial jurisdiction of the court, of any provision of the act to which this act is a supplement. Except as otherwise provided in this act the penalty shall be collected and enforced in a summary proceeding pursuant to "the penalty enforcement law" (N.J.S.2A:58-1 et seq.). Process shall be either in the nature of a summons or warrant and shall issue in the name of the State, upon the complaint of the Attorney General or any other person.

In any action brought pursuant to this section to enforce any order of the Attorney General or his designee the court may, without regard to jurisdictional limitations, restore to any person in interest any moneys or property, real or personal, which have been acquired by any means declared to be unlawful under this act, except that the court shall restore to any senior citizen twice the amount or value, as the case may be, of any moneys or property, real or personal, which have been acquired by any means declared to be unlawful under P.L.1960, c.39 (C.56:8-1 et seq.).

In the event that any person found to have violated any provision of this act fails to pay a civil penalty assessed by the court, the court may issue, upon application by the Attorney General, a warrant for the arrest of such person for the purpose of bringing him before the court to satisfy the civil penalty imposed.

A person who fails to restore any moneys or property, real or personal, found to have been acquired unlawfully from a senior citizen shall be subject to punishment for criminal contempt pursuant to N.J.S.2C:29-9, which is a crime of the fourth degree.

5. Section 3 of P.L.1971, c.247 (C.56:8-15) is amended to read as follows:

C.56:8-15 Additional penalties.

3. In addition to the assessment of civil penalties, the Attorney General or his designee may, after a hearing as provided in P.L.1967, c.97 (C.56:8-3.1) and upon a finding of an unlawful practice under this act and the act hereby amended and supplemented, order that any moneys or property, real or personal, which have been acquired by means of such unlawful practice be restored to any person in interest, except that if any moneys or property, real or personal, have been acquired by means of an unlawful practice perpetrated against a senior citizen, the amount of moneys or property, real or personal, ordered restored shall be twice the amount acquired.

6. Section 5 of P.L.1971, c.247 (C.56:8-17) is amended to read as follows:

C.56:8-17 Noncompliance; penalties.

5. Upon the failure of any person to comply within 10 days after service of any order of the Attorney General or his designee directing payment of penalties or restoration of moneys or property, the Attorney General may issue a certificate to the Clerk of the Superior Court that such person is indebted to the State for the payment of such penalty and the moneys or property ordered restored. A copy of such certificate shall be served upon the person against whom the order was entered. Thereupon the clerk shall immediately enter upon his record of docketed judgments the name of the person so indebted, and of the State, a designation of the statute under which the penalty is imposed, the amount of the penalty imposed and the amount of moneys ordered restored, a listing of property ordered restored, and the date of the certification. Such entry shall have the same force and effect as the entry of a docketed judgment in the Superior Court. Such entry, however, shall be without prejudice to the right of appeal to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court from the final order of the Attorney General or his designee.

A person who fails to restore moneys or property found to have been acquired unlawfully from a senior citizen shall be subject to punishment for criminal contempt pursuant to N.J.S.2C:29-9, which is a crime of the fourth degree.

7. This act shall take effect on the 180th day after enactment.

Approved December 23, 1999.