

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND ALSO FINDS, AS A RESULT OF PUBLIC HEARINGS IN SOME OF THE METROPOLITAN COUNTIES DURING THE 1973 INTERIM, THAT IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES ARE NECESSARY TO HELP ALLEVIATE THE GROWING PROBLEM OF DECEPTIVE CONSUMER PRACTICES AND URGES THAT FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO REQUESTS FOR INCREASED BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR INCREASES IN STAFF AND OTHER MEASURES TENDING TO IMPROVE THE ENFORCEMENT CAPABILITIES OR INCREASE THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIVISION.

IT IS THE INTENTION OF THIS LEGISLATION TO SET CERTAIN MINIMUM STATE-WIDE STANDARDS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CONSUMERS ACROSS THE STATE AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY STRONGLY URGES THAT LOCAL SUBDIVISIONS, WHICH HAVE CREATED CONSUMER PROTECTION AGENCIES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, ENCOURAGE THE FUNCTION OF SUCH AGENCIES AT LEAST TO THE MINIMUM LEVEL AS SET FORTH IN THE STANDARDS OF THIS ACT.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS CONCERNED THAT THE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN MERCHANTS OFFERING GOODS, SERVICES AND CREDIT IS BEING UNDERMINED, ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY OF BUSINESS PEOPLE OPERATE WITH INTEGRITY AND SINCERE REGARD FOR THE CONSUMER.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONCLUDES, THEREFORE, THAT IT SHOULD TAKE STRONG STEPS, BOTH PROTECTIVE AND PREVENTIVE, TO INVESTIGATE UNLAWFUL CONSUMER PRACTICES, TO ASSIST THE PUBLIC IN OBTAINING RELIEF FROM SUCH PRACTICES AND TO PREVENT SUCH PRACTICES FROM OCCURRING IN MARYLAND. IT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS SUBHEADING TO ACCOMPLISH THESE ENDS AND THEREBY MAINTAIN THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE OF MARYLAND.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That Section 20 of Article 83 - Sales and Notices, of the Annotated Code of Maryland (1969 Replacement Volume and 1973 Supplement) be and it is hereby repealed and re-enacted, with amendments, to read as follows:

Article 83 - Sales and Notices

20. AS USED IN THIS SUBHEADING:

(a) The term "advertisement" means the publication, dissemination, or circulation of any matter, oral or written, including labeling, which tends to induce directly or indirectly, any person to enter into any obligation, sign any contract, or acquire any title or interest in any merchandise or service and includes every word device to disguise any form of business solicitation by using such terms as "renewal," "invoice," "bill," "statement," or "reminder," to create an impression of existing obligation when there is none, or