
SENATE BILL 6434

State of Washington

55th Legislature

1998 Regular Session

By Senators Finkbeiner, Brown, Winsley, Jacobsen, Haugen, Rasmussen and Kohl; by request of Attorney General

Read first time 01/19/98. Referred to Committee on Energy & Utilities.

1 AN ACT Relating to electronic mail; adding a new chapter to Title
2 19 RCW; and prescribing penalties.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that the volume of
5 unsolicited electronic mail has grown exponentially in the past year as
6 individuals and organizations have discovered that they are able to
7 send electronic advertisements to hundreds of thousands or millions of
8 internet users at virtually no cost.

9 Unsolicited commercial electronic mail messages constitute the
10 majority of unsolicited electronic mail. Unsolicited commercial
11 electronic mail messages often impose an out-of-pocket monetary cost on
12 recipients who cannot refuse such messages and incur incremental fees
13 for time spent accessing and reviewing each message.

14 To the recipient, unsolicited commercial electronic mail messages
15 are often indistinguishable from other electronic mail messages. The
16 unsolicited messages thus diminish the utility of electronic mail
17 service because users must wade through unwanted advertisements to
18 obtain those messages they wish to receive.

1 Unsolicited commercial electronic mail messages cannot be
2 effectively blocked and, thus, invade the privacy of recipients. This
3 invasion of privacy is exacerbated for recipients whose electronic mail
4 service issues an alert for each message received, resulting in
5 repeated disruption of computer use.

6 Advertisers may reach electronic mail users by less intrusive
7 means, means which do not impose the cost of unwanted advertisements on
8 recipients and do not interfere with recipients' ability to use
9 electronic mail service. Advertisers may also continue to use
10 electronic mail as a low-cost method of reaching a wide audience, if
11 their mailings are solicited.

12 Unsolicited electronic mail sent in bulk often imposes significant
13 monetary costs on the interactive computer services, businesses, and
14 educational and nonprofit institutes because they must divert a
15 significant portion of their limited computing resources to processing
16 and storing those messages and to responding to ensuing complaints by
17 recipients. Unsolicited electronic mail is increasingly diminishing
18 the quality of service provided to customers of interactive computer
19 services and is harming the interactive computer services themselves.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
21 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

22 (1) "Electronic mail address" means a destination, commonly
23 expressed as a string of characters, to which electronic mail may be
24 sent or delivered.

25 (2) "Initiate the transmission" refers to the action by the
26 original sender of an electronic mail message, not to the action by any
27 intervening interactive computer service that may handle or retransmit
28 the message, unless the intervening interactive computer service
29 retransmits the message with an intent to engage in activities
30 prohibited by this section.

31 (3) "Interactive computer service" means any information service,
32 system, or access software provider that provides or enables computer
33 access by multiple users to a computer server, including specifically
34 a service or system that provides access to the internet and such
35 systems operated or services offered by libraries or educational
36 institutions.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** (1) No person, corporation, partnership, or
2 association may initiate the transmission of an unsolicited electronic
3 mail message from a commuter located in Washington or to a Washington
4 resident's electronic mail address, to promote goods or services for
5 purchase or lease by the recipient.

6 (2) Except as provided in subsection (3) of this section, this
7 section does not apply to: (a) An electronic mail message intended to
8 be delivered exclusively to existing customers who have previously
9 purchased or leased goods or services from the sender; (b) an
10 electronic mail message sent for the purpose of collecting an existing
11 obligation; or (c) an electronic mail message sent with the consent of
12 all intended recipients. However, if an existing customer provides to
13 a business written or electronic notice that the customer does not wish
14 to receive further electronic mail messages from that business, the
15 business shall not send the customer any further unsolicited electronic
16 mail messages.

17 (3) A person may not initiate an unsolicited electronic mail
18 message under the provisions of subsection (2) of this section if the
19 person knows or reasonably should know that any of the recipients is a
20 governmental entity, unless that entity has consented to the receipt of
21 the electronic mail message.

22 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) If a person, corporation, partnership,
23 or association initiates the transmission of an unsolicited commercial
24 electronic mail message from a computer located in Washington or to a
25 Washington resident's electronic mail address to promote goods or
26 services for purchase or lease by the recipient, that person or entity
27 shall cause the following information to appear in each electronic mail
28 message transmitted:

29 (a) The term "advertisement"; and

30 (b) The legal name, mailing address, true electronic mail address,
31 physical address, and telephone number, including area code, of the
32 person, corporation, partnership, or association initiating
33 transmission of the message and the date and time the message was sent.

34 (2) The information specified in subsection (1)(a) of this section
35 must appear as the first word on the subject line of the electronic
36 mail message, without any prior text or symbol.

37 (3) The information specified in subsection (1)(b) of this section
38 must appear prominently in the body of the message.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** The unsolicited transmission of electronic
2 mail messages promoting goods or services for purchase or lease by the
3 recipient in violation of this section is a matter affecting the public
4 interest for the purpose of applying the consumer protection act,
5 chapter 19.86 RCW. The transmission of unsolicited electronic mail
6 messages in violation of this section is not reasonable in relation to
7 the development and preservation of business. A violation of this
8 section is an unfair or deceptive act in trade or commerce for the
9 purpose of applying the consumer protection act, chapter 19.86 RCW.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** (1) Damages to the recipient of an
11 unsolicited electronic mail message sent in violation of this section
12 are five hundred dollars, or actual damages, whichever is greater.

13 (2) Damages to an interactive computer service resulting from a
14 violation of this section are one thousand dollars, or actual damages,
15 whichever is greater.

16 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** (1) An interactive computer service may,
17 upon its own initiative, block the receipt or transmission through its
18 service of any electronic mail which it reasonably believes is, or will
19 be, sent in violation of this chapter.

20 (2) No interactive computer service may be held liable for any
21 action voluntarily taken in good faith to block the receipt or
22 transmission through its service of any electronic mail which it
23 reasonably believes is, or will be, sent in violation of this section.

24 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** Sections 1 through 7 of this act constitute
25 a new chapter in Title 19 RCW.

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