<u>SSB 5222</u> - S AMD **638** By Senator Nelson

- 1 Strike everything after the enacting clause and insert the 2 following:
- 3 "Sec. 1. RCW 19.16.100 and 2015 c 201 s 3 are each amended to 4 read as follows:
- 5 Unless a different meaning is plainly required by the context, 6 the following words and phrases as hereinafter used in this chapter 7 shall have the following meanings:
- 8 (1) "Account level documentation" means all records generated by
 9 the original creditor or received by the original creditor from the
 10 debtor related to a claim in collection including, but not limited
 11 to: The original contract and terms and conditions of the account,
 12 periodic statements of accounts due, and records of payments,
 13 letters, and other account notices.
- 14 (2) "Board" means the Washington state collection agency board.
- $((\frac{2}{2}))$ (3) "Claim" means any obligation for the payment of money or thing of value arising out of any agreement or contract, express or implied.
- 18 $((\frac{3}{3}))$ $(\frac{4}{3})$ "Client" or "customer" means any person authorizing or employing a collection agency to collect a claim.
- 20 (((4))) (5) "Collection agency" means and includes:
 - (a) Any person directly or indirectly engaged in soliciting claims for collection, or collecting or attempting to collect claims owed or due or asserted to be owed or due another person;
 - (b) Any person who directly or indirectly furnishes or attempts to furnish, sells, or offers to sell forms represented to be a collection system or scheme intended or calculated to be used to collect claims even though the forms direct the debtor to make payment to the creditor and even though the forms may be or are actually used by the creditor himself or herself in his or her own name;
- 31 (c) Any person who in attempting to collect or in collecting his 32 or her own claim uses a fictitious name or any name other than his or

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1 her own which would indicate to the debtor that a third person is 2 collecting or attempting to collect such claim;

- (d) Any person or entity that is engaged in the business of purchasing delinquent or charged off claims for collection purposes, whether it collects the claims itself or hires a third party for collection or an attorney for litigation in order to collect such claims;
- 8 (e) Any person or entity attempting to enforce a lien under 9 chapter 60.44 RCW, other than the person or entity originally 10 entitled to the lien.
- $((\frac{5}{}))$ <u>(6)</u> "Collection agency" does not mean and does not 12 include:
 - (a) Any individual engaged in soliciting claims for collection, or collecting or attempting to collect claims on behalf of a licensee under this chapter, if said individual is an employee of the licensee;
 - (b) Any individual collecting or attempting to collect claims for not more than one employer, if all the collection efforts are carried on in the name of the employer and if the individual is an employee of the employer;
 - (c) Any person whose collection activities are carried on in his, her, or its true name and are confined and are directly related to the operation of a business other than that of a collection agency, such as but not limited to: Trust companies; savings and loan associations; building and loan associations; abstract companies doing an escrow business; real estate brokers; property management companies collecting assessments, charges, or fines on behalf of condominium unit owners associations, associations of apartment owners, or homeowners' associations; public officers acting in their official capacities; persons acting under court order; lawyers; insurance companies; credit unions; loan or finance companies; mortgage banks; and banks;
 - (d) Any person who on behalf of another person prepares or mails monthly or periodic statements of accounts due if all payments are made to that other person and no other collection efforts are made by the person preparing the statements of account;
- 37 (e) An "out-of-state collection agency" as defined in this 38 chapter; or
- 39 (f) Any person while acting as a debt collector for another 40 person, both of whom are related by common ownership or affiliated by Code Rev/BP:amh 2 S-4796.1/16

- corporate control, if the person acting as a debt collector does so only for persons to whom it is so related or affiliated and if the principal business of the person is not the collection of debts.
 - $((\frac{(6)}{(6)}))$ <u>(7)</u> "Commercial claim" means any obligation for payment of money or thing of value arising out of any agreement or contract, express or implied, where the transaction which is the subject of the agreement or contract is not primarily for personal, family, or household purposes.
- 9 (((7))) (8) "Credit card payment" means any payment made by a 10 payment card that incurs a credit card interchange fee to the 11 collection agency, regardless of the type of payment card used.
- 12 (9) "Debtor" means any person owing or alleged to owe a claim.
- 13 $((\frac{8}{}))$ (10) "Director" means the director of licensing.
- 14 $((\frac{(9)}{)})$ <u>(11)</u> "Licensee" means any person licensed under this chapter.
 - ((\(\frac{(10)}{10}\))) (12) "Out-of-state collection agency" means a person whose activities within this state are limited to collecting debts from debtors located in this state by means of interstate communications, including telephone, mail, or facsimile transmission, from the person's location in another state on behalf of clients located outside of this state, but does not include any person who is excluded from the definition of the term "debt collector" under the federal fair debt collection practices act (15 U.S.C. Sec. 1692a(6)).
- 24 $((\frac{11}{1}))$ <u>(13)</u> "Person" includes individual, firm, partnership, 25 trust, joint venture, association, or corporation.
- 26 (((12))) (14) "Statement of account" means a report setting forth 27 only amounts billed, invoices, credits allowed, or aged balance due.
- 28 **Sec. 2.** RCW 19.16.250 and 2013 c 148 s 2 are each amended to 29 read as follows:
- No licensee or employee of a licensee shall:
- 31 (1) Directly or indirectly aid or abet any unlicensed person to 32 engage in business as a collection agency in this state or receive 33 compensation from such unlicensed person: PROVIDED, That nothing in 34 this chapter shall prevent a licensee from accepting, as forwardee, 35 claims for collection from a collection agency or attorney whose 36 place of business is outside the state.
- 37 (2) Collect or attempt to collect a claim by the use of any means 38 contrary to the postal laws and regulations of the United States 39 postal department.

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- (3) Publish or post or cause to be published or posted, any list of debtors commonly known as "bad debt lists" or threaten to do so. For purposes of this chapter, a "bad debt list" means any list of natural persons alleged to fail to honor their lawful debts. However, nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit a licensee from communicating to its customers or clients by means of a coded list, the existence of a check dishonored because of insufficient funds, not sufficient funds or closed account by the financial institution servicing the debtor's checking account: PROVIDED, That the debtor's identity is not readily apparent: PROVIDED FURTHER, That the licensee complies with the requirements of subsection (10)(e) of this section.
 - (4) Have in his or her possession or make use of any badge, use a uniform of any law enforcement agency or any simulation thereof, or make any statements which might be construed as indicating an official connection with any federal, state, county, or city law enforcement agency, or any other governmental agency, while engaged in collection agency business.
 - (5) Perform any act or acts, either directly or indirectly, constituting the unauthorized practice of law.
 - (6) Advertise for sale or threaten to advertise for sale any claim as a means of endeavoring to enforce payment thereof or agreeing to do so for the purpose of soliciting claims, except where the licensee has acquired claims as an assignee for the benefit of creditors or where the licensee is acting under court order.
 - (7) Use any name while engaged in the making of a demand for any claim other than the name set forth on his or her or its current license issued hereunder.
 - (8) Give or send to any debtor or cause to be given or sent to any debtor, any notice, letter, message, or form, other than through proper legal action, process, or proceedings, which represents or implies that a claim exists unless it shall indicate in clear and legible type:
- 33 (a) The name of the licensee and the city, street, and number at which he or she is licensed to do business;
- 35 (b) The name of the original creditor to whom the debtor owed the 36 claim if such name is known to the licensee or employee: PROVIDED, 37 That upon written request of the debtor, the licensee shall provide 38 this name to the debtor or cease efforts to collect on the debt until 39 this information is provided;

1 (c) If the notice, letter, message, or form is the first notice 2 to the debtor or if the licensee is attempting to collect a different 3 amount than indicated in his or her or its first notice to the 4 debtor, an itemization of the claim asserted must be made including:

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- (i) Amount owing on the original obligation at the time it was received by the licensee for collection or by assignment;
- (ii) Interest or service charge, collection costs, or late payment charges, if any, added to the original obligation by the original creditor, customer or assignor before it was received by the licensee for collection, if such information is known by the licensee or employee: PROVIDED, That upon written request of the debtor, the licensee shall make a reasonable effort to obtain information on such items and provide this information to the debtor;
- 14 (iii) Interest or service charge, if any, added by the licensee 15 or customer or assignor after the obligation was received by the 16 licensee for collection;
- 17 (iv) Collection costs, if any, that the licensee is attempting to 18 collect;
- 19 (v) Attorneys' fees, if any, that the licensee is attempting to 20 collect on his or her or its behalf or on the behalf of a customer or 21 assignor; and
 - (vi) Any other charge or fee that the licensee is attempting to collect on his or her or its own behalf or on the behalf of a customer or assignor;
- (d) If the notice, letter, message, or form concerns a judgment obtained against the debtor, no itemization of the amounts contained in the judgment is required, except postjudgment interest, if claimed, and the current account balance;
- (e) If the notice, letter, message, or form is the first notice to the debtor, an itemization of the claim asserted must be made including the following information:
 - (i) The original account number or redacted original account number assigned to the debt, if known to the licensee or employee: PROVIDED, That upon written request of the debtor, the licensee must make a reasonable effort to obtain this information or cease efforts to collect on the debt until this information is provided; ((and))
- (ii) The date of the last payment to the creditor on the subject debt by the debtor, if known to the licensee or employee: PROVIDED, That upon written request of the debtor, the licensee must make a

reasonable effort to obtain this information or cease efforts to collect on the debt until this information is provided:

- (iii) Certification that the itemization of the claim was made based on a personal review of account level documentation provided by the original creditor; and
- (iv) A copy of the account level documentation reviewed by the licensee pursuant to (e)(iii) of this subsection (8).
 - (9) Communicate in writing with a debtor concerning a claim through a proper legal action, process, or proceeding, where such communication is the first written communication with the debtor, without providing the information set forth in subsection (8)(c) of this section in the written communication.
 - (10) Communicate or threaten to communicate, the existence of a claim to a person other than one who might be reasonably expected to be liable on the claim in any manner other than through proper legal action, process, or proceedings except under the following conditions:
 - (a) A licensee or employee of a licensee may inform a credit reporting bureau of the existence of a claim. If the licensee or employee of a licensee reports a claim to a credit reporting bureau, the licensee shall, upon receipt of written notice from the debtor that any part of the claim is disputed, notify the credit reporting bureau of the dispute by written or electronic means and create a record of the fact of the notification and when the notification was provided;
 - (b) A licensee or employee in collecting or attempting to collect a claim may communicate the existence of a claim to a debtor's employer if the claim has been reduced to a judgment;
 - (c) A licensee or employee in collecting or attempting to collect a claim that has not been reduced to judgment, may communicate the existence of a claim to a debtor's employer if:
 - (i) The licensee or employee has notified or attempted to notify the debtor in writing at his or her last known address or place of employment concerning the claim and the debtor after a reasonable time has failed to pay the claim or has failed to agree to make payments on the claim in a manner acceptable to the licensee, and
- (ii) The debtor has not in writing to the licensee disputed any part of the claim: PROVIDED, That the licensee or employee may only communicate the existence of a claim which has not been reduced to

judgment to the debtor's employer once unless the debtor's employer has agreed to additional communications.

- (d) A licensee may for the purpose of locating the debtor or locating assets of the debtor communicate the existence of a claim to any person who might reasonably be expected to have knowledge of the whereabouts of a debtor or the location of assets of the debtor if the claim is reduced to judgment, or if not reduced to judgment, when:
- (i) The licensee or employee has notified or attempted to notify the debtor in writing at his or her last known address or last known place of employment concerning the claim and the debtor after a reasonable time has failed to pay the claim or has failed to agree to make payments on the claim in a manner acceptable to the licensee, and
- 15 (ii) The debtor has not in writing disputed any part of the 16 claim.
 - (e) A licensee may communicate the existence of a claim to its customers or clients if the claim is reduced to judgment, or if not reduced to judgment, when:
 - (i) The licensee has notified or attempted to notify the debtor in writing at his or her last known address or last known place of employment concerning the claim and the debtor after a reasonable time has failed to pay the claim or has failed to agree to make payments on the claim in a manner acceptable to the licensee, and
 - (ii) The debtor has not in writing disputed any part of the claim.
 - (11) Threaten the debtor with impairment of his or her credit rating if a claim is not paid: PROVIDED, That advising a debtor that the licensee has reported or intends to report a claim to a credit reporting agency is not considered a threat if the licensee actually has reported or intends to report the claim to a credit reporting agency.
 - (12) Communicate with the debtor after notification in writing from an attorney representing such debtor that all further communications relative to a claim should be addressed to the attorney: PROVIDED, That if a licensee requests in writing information from an attorney regarding such claim and the attorney does not respond within a reasonable time, the licensee may communicate directly with the debtor until he or she or it again

1 receives notification in writing that an attorney is representing the 2 debtor.

- or anyone else in such a manner as to harass, intimidate, threaten, or embarrass a debtor, including but not limited to communication at an unreasonable hour, with unreasonable frequency, by threats of force or violence, by threats of criminal prosecution, and by use of offensive language. A communication, or attempted communication, shall be presumed to have been made for the purposes of harassment if:
- (a) It is made with a debtor or spouse in any form, manner, or place, more than three times in a single week, unless the licensee is responding to a communication from the debtor or spouse;
 - (b) It is made with a debtor at his or her place of employment more than one time in a single week, unless the licensee is responding to a communication from the debtor;
 - (c) It is made with the debtor or spouse at his or her place of residence between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 7:30 a.m. A call to a telephone is presumed to be received in the local time zone to which the area code of the number called is assigned for landline numbers, unless the licensee reasonably believes the telephone is located in a different time zone. If the area code is not assigned to landlines in any specific geographic area, such as with toll-free telephone numbers, a call to a telephone is presumed to be received in the local time zone of the debtor's last known place of residence, unless the licensee reasonably believes the telephone is located in a different time zone.
 - (14) Communicate with the debtor through use of forms or instruments that simulate the form or appearance of judicial process, the form or appearance of government documents, or the simulation of a form or appearance of a telegraphic or emergency message.
 - (15) Communicate with the debtor and represent or imply that the existing obligation of the debtor may be or has been increased by the addition of attorney fees, investigation fees, service fees, or any other fees or charges when in fact such fees or charges may not legally be added to the existing obligation of such debtor.
- 37 (16) Threaten to take any action against the debtor which the 38 licensee cannot legally take at the time the threat is made.
- 39 (17) Send any telegram or make any telephone calls to a debtor or 40 concerning a debt or for the purpose of demanding payment of a claim Code Rev/BP:amh 8 S-4796.1/16

or seeking information about a debtor, for which the charges are payable by the addressee or by the person to whom the call is made:

3 PROVIDED, That:

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- (a) This subsection does not prohibit a licensee from attempting to communicate by way of a cellular telephone or other wireless device: PROVIDED, That a licensee cannot cause charges to be incurred to the recipient of the attempted communication more than three times in any calendar week when the licensee knows or reasonably should know that the number belongs to a cellular telephone or other wireless device, unless the licensee is responding to a communication from the debtor or the person to whom the call is made.
- (b) The licensee is not in violation of (a) of this subsection if the licensee at least monthly updates its records with information provided by a commercial provider of cellular telephone lists that the licensee in good faith believes provides reasonably current and comprehensive data identifying cellular telephone numbers, calls a number not appearing in the most recent list provided by the commercial provider, and does not otherwise know or reasonably should know that the number belongs to a cellular telephone.
- 20 (c) This subsection may not be construed to increase the number 21 of communications permitted pursuant to subsection (13)(a) of this 22 section.
 - (18)Call, or send a text message or other electronic communication to, a cellular telephone or other wireless device more than twice in any day when the licensee knows or reasonably should know that the number belongs to a cellular telephone or other wireless device, unless the licensee is responding to a communication from the debtor or the person to whom the call, text message, other electronic communication is made. The licensee is not in violation of this subsection if the licensee at least monthly updates its records with information provided by a commercial provider of cellular telephone lists that the licensee in good faith believes provides reasonably current and comprehensive data identifying cellular telephone numbers, calls a number not appearing in the most recent list provided by the commercial provider, and does not otherwise know or reasonably should know that the number belongs to a cellular telephone. Nothing in this subsection may be construed to number of communications permitted pursuant increase the subsection (13)(a) of this section.

1 (19) Intentionally block its telephone number from displaying on 2 a debtor's telephone.

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- (20) In any manner convey the impression that the licensee is vouched for, bonded to or by, or is an instrumentality of the state of Washington or any agency or department thereof.
- (21) Collect or attempt to collect in addition to the principal amount of a claim any sum other than:
- - (b) A transaction fee for processing a credit card payment in an amount that does not exceed fifty cents plus three percent of the payment amount, provided that a no-cost payment option is available to the debtor and the option is disclosed to the debtor at the same time and in the same manner as the debtor's credit card information is taken;
- 16 <u>(c) In the case of suit, attorneys' fees and taxable court</u>
 17 costs((. A licensee may collect or attempt to collect)); and
 - (d) In the case of a commercial claim, collection costs and fees, including contingent collection fees, as authorized by a written agreement or contract, between the licensee's client and the debtor((, in the collection of a commercial claim)). The amount charged to the debtor for collection services shall not exceed thirty-five percent of the commercial claim.
 - (22) Procure from a debtor or collect or attempt to collect on any written note, contract, stipulation, promise or acknowledgment under which a debtor may be required to pay any sum other than principal, allowable interest, except as noted in subsection (21) of this section, and, in the case of suit, attorney's fees and taxable court costs.
- 30 (23) Bring an action or initiate an arbitration proceeding on a 31 claim when the licensee knows, or reasonably should know, that such 32 suit or arbitration is barred by the applicable statute of 33 limitations.
- (24) Upon notification by a debtor that the debtor disputes all 34 debts arising from a series of dishonored checks, automated 35 clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or other 36 preprinted written instruments, initiate oral contact with a debtor 37 more than one time in an attempt to collect from the debtor debts 38 39 arising from the identified series of dishonored checks, automated 40 clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or other S-4796.1/16Code Rev/BP:amh 10

preprinted written instruments when: (a) Within the previous one hundred eighty days, in response to the licensee's attempt to collect the initial debt assigned to the licensee and arising from the identified series of dishonored checks, automated clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or other preprinted written instruments, the debtor in writing notified the licensee that the debtor's checkbook or other series of preprinted written instruments was stolen or fraudulently created; (b) the licensee has received from the debtor a certified copy of a police report referencing the fraudulent creation of the checkbook, clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or series of preprinted written instruments; (c) in the written notification to the licensee or in the police report, the debtor identified the financial institution where the account was maintained, the account number, the magnetic ink character recognition number, the full bank routing and transit number, and the check numbers of the stolen checks, automated clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or other preprinted written instruments, which check numbers included the number of the check that is the subject of the licensee's collection efforts; (d) the debtor provides, or within the previous one hundred eighty days provided, to the licensee a legible copy of a government-issued photo identification, which contains the debtor's signature and which was issued prior to the date of the theft or fraud identified in the police report; and (e) the debtor advised the licensee that the subject debt is disputed because the identified check, automated clearinghouse transaction on a demand deposit account, or other preprinted written instrument underlying the debt is a stolen or fraudulently created check or instrument.

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The licensee is not in violation of this subsection if the licensee initiates oral contact with the debtor more than one time in an attempt to collect debts arising from the identified series of dishonored checks, automated clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or other preprinted written instruments when: (i) The licensee acted in good faith and relied on their established practices and procedures for batching, recording, or packeting debtor accounts, and the licensee inadvertently initiates oral contact with the debtor in an attempt to collect debts in the identified series subsequent to the initial debt assigned to the licensee; (ii) the licensee is following up on collection of a debt assigned to the licensee, and the debtor has previously requested more information

1 from the licensee regarding the subject debt; (iii) the debtor has notified the licensee that the debtor disputes only some, but not all 2 the debts arising from the identified series of dishonored checks, 3 automated clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or 4 other preprinted written instruments, in which case the licensee 5 6 shall be allowed to initiate oral contact with the debtor one time for each debt arising from the series of identified checks, automated 7 clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or written 8 instruments and initiate additional oral contact for those debts that 9 the debtor acknowledges do not arise from stolen or fraudulently 10 created checks or written instruments; (iv) the oral contact is in 11 12 the context of a judicial, administrative, arbitration, mediation, or similar proceeding; or (v) the oral contact is made for the purpose 13 investigating, confirming, or authenticating the 14 information received from the debtor, to provide additional information to the 15 16 debtor, or to request additional information from the debtor needed 17 by the licensee to accurately record the debtor's information in the 18 licensee's records.

(25) Submit an affidavit or other request pursuant to chapter 6.32 RCW asking a superior or district court to transfer a bond posted by a debtor subject to a money judgment to the licensee, when the debtor has appeared as required.

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- (26) Collect, or attempt to collect, on any account purchased for collection by a licensee unless the licensee has completed a meaningful investigation into the chain of ownership of the account and has in its possession a copy of a written assignment or bill of sale which identifies the debtor by name and account number for each sale or assignment of the account beginning with the original creditor. A copy of each assignment must be included with any initial written communication to a debtor.
- 31 (27) File with any court an affidavit or declaration in support
 32 of a judgment on a claim which fails to inform the court if the
 33 original creditor, or any prior owner of the account, disclaimed the
 34 accuracy or integrity of the account balance, account information,
 35 account records, or other documentation of indebtedness transferred
 36 at the time of sale.
- 37 **Sec. 3.** RCW 19.16.270 and 2011 c 336 s 522 are each amended to 38 read as follows:

In any action brought by licensee to collect the claim of his, 1 her, or its customer, the assignment of the claim to licensee by his, 2 her, or its customer shall be conclusively presumed valid, if the 3 assignment is filed in court with the complaint, unless objection is 4 made thereto by the debtor in a written answer or in writing five 5 6 days or more prior to trial. The provisions of this section do not apply to delinquent or charged off claims purchased for collection 7 purposes, whether the purchaser collects the claims itself, or hires 8 a third party for collection or an attorney for litigation in order 9 to collect such claims." 10

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- On page 1, line 1 of the title, after "Relating to" strike the remainder of the title and insert "collection agency practices; and amending RCW 19.16.100, 19.16.250, and 19.16.270."
 - EFFECT: (1) Revises the collection agency act.
 - (2) Addresses prohibited practices of collection agencies with regard to certification that an itemization of a claim was made based on a personal review of account level documentation provided by the original creditor.

--- END ---