

HB 2198 -- Motor Vehicle Franchise Practices Act

Sponsor: Parson

This bill changes the laws regarding the Motor Vehicle Franchise Practices Act. In its main provisions, the bill:

(1) Specifies that the public policy of the state is to provide for fair and impartial regulation of individuals engaged in the manufacturing, distribution, importation, or selling of motor vehicles and to protect the public interest in the purchase and trade of motor vehicles;

(2) Requires all franchise licenses and license renewals after August 28, 2010, to be bound by the provisions of the act and prohibits any franchise agreement made, entered, modified, or renewed after that date from avoiding or circumventing the requirements of the act;

(3) Requires the provisions of the act to apply to each franchise that a franchisor, manufacturer, importer, or distributor has with a franchisee and all agreements between a franchisee and a common entity or any person controlled by a franchisor;

(4) Increases the distance requirements of a relevant market area when locating or relocating dealerships. Franchisors must give written notice to a franchisee of the opening of any new dealership in the relevant market area selling vehicles of the same line-make. Franchisees may bring an action before the Administrative Hearing Commission within 30 days of the notice to determine if there is good cause to allow the competition. The bill revises the circumstances that the commission will take into consideration when determining good cause;

(5) Requires a reopened or replaced franchise to be offered to the former owner if a dealership reopens within two miles of its former location;

(6) Requires a franchisor to be licensed and to annually renew his or her license with the Department of Revenue;

(7) Regulates the offering of franchises by successor manufacturers and specifies certain criteria that must be met before a new franchise may be offered or sold if a manufacturer previously canceled or otherwise ended a franchise agreement;

(8) Allows for the filing of a complaint instead of an application for a hearing before the commission regarding a violation of the act. When a proceeding is pending before the

commission, a demand for mediation must be filed which will stay further action by the commission. If mediation is unsuccessful, the commission must issue its order terminating the stay;

(9) Specifies that the actions listed in Section 407.825, RSMo, whether committed directly or indirectly through an agent, employee, affiliate, common entity, representative, or franchisor-controlled entity will be considered an unlawful practice;

(10) Revises existing unlawful practices and establishes additional unlawful practice violations including:

(a) Engaging in certain specified restraint of trade actions such as conditioning the offer of a franchise on a site control agreement or agreement for exclusive use;

(b) Terminating a franchise agreement without specified notice regarding unsatisfactory sales or service performance;

(c) Conditioning the retention of a franchise agreement on certain specified control requirements over the franchisee's business;

(d) Causing warranties to fail to be performed;

(e) Interfering with or withholding contracted services;

(f) Requiring installment financing with a particular financial institution;

(g) Requiring changes in a franchisee's location without good cause;

(h) Allowing an unauthorized person to perform warranty service;

(i) Discriminating in the models of the same line-make offered to franchisees;

(j) Failing to make available the offering of bonuses or rebates;

(k) Conditioning a franchise agreement on facility improvements unless reasonably required by the technology of a motor vehicle;

(l) Entering into site control agreements unless voluntarily accepted by the franchisee;

(m) Failing to offer rebates, dealer incentives, interest rate reductions, finance terms for the same line-make, and various

cash incentives and promotional items;

(n) Discriminating between franchisees in any program providing assistance including sales and marketing help;

(o) Failing to provide notice of a choice of law provision specified in the act;

(p) Interfering with the delivery of motor vehicle parts;

(q) Using data concerning franchisees to discriminate against them in various specified ways;

(r) Refusing to sell or deliver motor vehicles;

(s) Requiring the use of customer information obtained from the franchisee and requiring franchisees to make a customer purchase additional products from the franchisor;

(t) Establishing unfair performance standards for franchisees;

(u) Implementing any plan for delivery of parts that is inequitable; and

(v) Violating any other provision of the act that adversely impacts a franchisee;

(11) Establishes deadlines and other rules for submitting claims concerning products purchased by the franchisee under Section 407.828;

(12) Requires franchisors to indemnify and hold harmless a franchisee for damage to a vehicle occurring prior to delivery that was not disclosed in writing to the franchisee prior to the delivery of the vehicle;

(13) Requires franchisors to give 90 days' notice of any modification that substantially and adversely affects the franchisee's rights, obligations, investments, or return on investments; and

(14) Specifies the right to appeal judgments of the commission in court and allows actual damages, court costs, and punitive damages to be recovered for a violation of the provisions of the act. Mediation is non-binding, and Missouri law will govern all disputes brought pursuant to the act.