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**HOUSE BILL 1666**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Representative Reeves

AN ACT Relating to making changes to certain fee and debt collection practices; amending RCW 19.16.100 and 19.16.500; reenacting and amending RCW 19.16.250; adding a new section to chapter 19.200 RCW; and providing an effective date.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 19.16.100 and 2020 c 30 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

Unless a different meaning is plainly required by the context, the following words and phrases as hereinafter used in this chapter shall have the following meanings:

(1) "Board" means the Washington state collection agency board.

(2) "Claim" means ((~~any~~)):

(a) Any obligation for the payment of money or thing of value arising out of any agreement or contract, express or implied; and

(b) Outstanding public debts owed to government entities and courts.

(3) "Client" or "customer" means any person authorizing or employing a collection agency to collect a claim.

(4) "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;

(c) Any person who in attempting to collect or in collecting his or her own claim uses a fictitious name or any name other than his or her own which would indicate to the debtor that a third person is collecting or attempting to collect such claim;

(d) A debt buyer as defined in this section;

(e) Any person or entity attempting to enforce a lien under chapter 60.44 RCW, other than the person or entity originally entitled to the lien.

(5) "Collection agency" does not mean and does not 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;

(e) An "out-of-state collection agency" as defined in this chapter; or

(f) Any person while acting as a debt collector for another person, both of whom are related by common ownership or affiliated by 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.

(6) "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.

(7) "Debt buyer" means 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) "Debtor" means any person owing or alleged to owe a claim.

(9) "Director" means the director of licensing.

(10) "Licensee" means any person licensed under this chapter.

(11) "Medical debt" means any obligation for the payment of money arising out of any agreement or contract, express or implied, for the provision of health care services as defined in RCW 48.44.010. In the context of "medical debt," "charity care" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 70.170.020.

(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)).

(13) "Person" includes individual, firm, partnership, trust, joint venture, association, or corporation.

(14) "Statement of account" means a report setting forth only amounts billed, invoices, credits allowed, or aged balance due.

**Sec.**  RCW 19.16.250 and 2019 c 227 s 4 and 2019 c 201 s 2 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

No licensee or employee of a licensee shall:

(1) Directly or indirectly aid or abet any unlicensed person to engage in business as a collection agency in this state or receive compensation from such unlicensed person: PROVIDED, That nothing in this chapter shall prevent a licensee from accepting, as forwardee, claims for collection from a collection agency or attorney whose place of business is outside the state.

(2) Collect or attempt to collect a claim by the use of any means contrary to the postal laws and regulations of the United States postal department.

(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:

(a) The name of the licensee and the city, street, and number at which he or she is licensed to do business;

(b) The name of the original creditor to whom the debtor owed the claim if such name is known to the licensee or employee: PROVIDED, That upon ((~~written~~)) request of the debtor, the licensee shall provide this name to the debtor or cease efforts to collect on the debt until this information is provided;

(c) ((~~If~~)) An itemization of the claim asserted if the notice, letter, message, or form is the first notice to the debtor ((~~or~~)); if the licensee is attempting to collect a different amount than indicated in ((~~his or her or its~~)) the first notice to the debtor((~~, an itemization of the claim asserted must be made including~~)) or upon request of the debtor. The licensee shall include in the itemization the:

(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;

(iii) Interest or service charge, if any, added by the licensee or customer or assignor after the obligation was received by the licensee for collection;

(iv) Collection costs, if any, that the licensee is attempting to collect;

(v) Attorneys' fees, if any, that the licensee is attempting to collect on his or her or its behalf or on the behalf of a customer or assignor; and

(vi) ((~~Any other~~)) Other charges or fees 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 or other postjudgment collection costs, 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.

(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) Except as provided in subsection (28)(c) of this section, 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

(ii) The debtor has not in writing disputed any part of the 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 receives notification in writing that an attorney is representing the debtor.

(13) Communicate with a 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 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.

(16) Threaten to take any action against the debtor which the licensee cannot legally take at the time the threat is made.

(17) Send any telegram or make any telephone calls to a debtor or concerning a debt or for the purpose of demanding payment of a claim 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: PROVIDED, That:

(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.

(c) This subsection may not be construed to increase the number of communications permitted pursuant to subsection (13)(a) of this 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, or 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 increase the number of communications permitted pursuant to subsection (13)(a) of this section.

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

(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 allowable interest, collection costs or handling fees expressly authorized by statute, and, in the case of suit, attorney's fees and taxable court costs. A licensee may collect or attempt to collect 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~~)) 35 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.

(23) Bring an action or initiate an arbitration proceeding on a claim when the licensee knows, or reasonably should know, that such suit or arbitration is barred by the applicable statute of limitations.

(24) Upon notification by a debtor that the debtor disputes all debts arising from a series of dishonored checks, automated clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or other preprinted written instruments, initiate oral contact with a debtor more than one time in an attempt to collect from the debtor debts arising from the identified series of dishonored checks, automated clearinghouse transactions on a demand deposit account, or other preprinted written instruments when: (a) Within the previous ((~~one hundred eighty~~)) 180 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 theft or fraudulent creation of the checkbook, automated 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~~)) 180 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.

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

(25) Bring an action or initiate an arbitration proceeding on a claim for any amounts related to a transfer of sale of a vehicle when:

(a) The licensee has been informed or reasonably should know that the department of licensing transfer of sale form was filed in accordance with RCW 46.12.650 (1) through (3);

(b) The licensee has been informed or reasonably should know that the transfer of the vehicle either (i) was not made pursuant to a legal transfer or (ii) was not voluntarily accepted by the person designated as the purchaser/transferee; and

(c) Prior to the commencement of the action or arbitration, the licensee has received from the putative transferee a copy of a police report referencing that the transfer of sale of the vehicle either (i) was not made pursuant to a legal transfer or (ii) was not voluntarily accepted by the person designated as the purchaser/transferee.

(26) 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.

(27) Serve a debtor with a summons and complaint unless the summons and complaint have been filed with the court and bear the case number assigned by the court.

(28) If the claim involves medical debt:

(a) Fail to include, with the first written notice to the debtor, a statement that informs the debtor of the debtor's right to request the original account number or redacted original account number assigned to the debt, the date of the last payment, and an itemized statement as provided in (b) of this subsection (28);

(b)(i) Fail to provide to the debtor, upon written or oral request by the debtor for more information than is contained in a general balance due letter, an itemized statement free of charge. Unless and until the licensee provides the itemized statement, the licensee must cease all collection efforts. The itemized statement must include:

(A) The name and address of the medical creditor;

(B) The date, dates, or date range of service;

(C) The health care services provided to the patient as indicated by the health care provider in a statement provided to the licensee;

(D) The amount of principal for any medical debt or debts incurred;

(E) Any adjustment to the bill, such as negotiated insurance rates or other discounts;

(F) The amount of any payments received, whether from the patient or any other party;

(G) Any interest or fees; and

(H) Whether the patient was found eligible for charity care or other reductions and, if so, the amount due after all charity care and other reductions have been applied to the itemized statement;

(ii) In the event the debtor has entered into a voluntary payment agreement, the debtor shall give notice if he or she wants the payment plan discontinued. If no notice is given, the payment arrangement may continue.

(iii) Properly executed postjudgment writs, including writs of garnishment and execution, are not required to be ceased and second or subsequent requests for information already provided do not require the cessation of collection efforts;

(c) Report adverse information to consumer credit reporting agencies or credit bureaus until at least ((~~one hundred eighty~~)) 180 days after the original obligation was received by the licensee for collection or by assignment.

(29) If the claim involves hospital debt:

(a) Fail to include, with the first written notice to the debtor, a notice that the debtor may be eligible for charity care from the hospital, together with the contact information for the hospital;

(b) Collect or attempt to collect a claim related to hospital debt during the pendency of an application for charity care sponsorship or an appeal from a final determination of charity care sponsorship status. However, this prohibition is only applicable if the licensee has received notice of the pendency of the application or appeal.

(30) Use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any claim.

(31) Use unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect any claim.

**Sec.**  RCW 19.16.500 and 2011 c 57 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) Agencies, departments, taxing districts, political subdivisions of the state, counties, and cities may retain, by written contract, collection agencies licensed under this chapter for the purpose of collecting public debts owed by any person, including any restitution that is being collected on behalf of a crime victim.

(b) Any governmental entity as described in (a) of this subsection using a collection agency may add a ((~~reasonable~~)) nine percent fee, payable by the debtor, to the outstanding debt for the collection agency fee incurred or to be incurred. ((~~The amount to be paid for collection services shall be left to the agreement of the governmental entity and its collection agency or agencies, but a contingent fee of up to fifty percent of the first one hundred thousand dollars of the unpaid debt per account and up to thirty-five percent of the unpaid debt over one hundred thousand dollars per account is reasonable, and a minimum fee of the full amount of the debt up to one hundred dollars per account is reasonable. Any fee agreement entered into by a governmental entity is presumptively reasonable.~~))

(2) No debt may be assigned to a collection agency unless (a) there has been an attempt to advise the debtor (i) of the existence of the debt and (ii) that the debt may be assigned to a collection agency for collection if the debt is not paid, and (b) at least ((~~thirty~~)) 30 days have elapsed from the time notice was attempted.

(3) Collection agencies assigned debts under this section shall have only those remedies and powers which would be available to them as assignees of private creditors.

(4) For purposes of this section, the term debt shall include fines and other debts, including the fee allowed under subsection (1)(b) of this section.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 19.200 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Businesses whose fees or charges are regulated in Washington state are allowed to charge a transaction fee for processing a credit card payment provided that:

(a) A no-cost payment option is always available to the debtor; and

(b) The no-cost payment option is disclosed to the debtor at the same time and in the same manner as the debtor's credit card information is taken.

(2) The transaction fee amount shall not exceed the actual amount incurred or three percent of the payment amount, whichever is less.

(3) For purposes of this section, "credit card payment" means any payment made by a payment card that incurs an interchange fee, regardless of the type of payment card used.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act takes effect January 1, 2024.

**--- END ---**