
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 6415

State of Washington 57th Legislature

2002 Regular Session

By Senate Committee on Labor, Commerce & Financial Institutions (originally sponsored by Senators Prentice, Winsley, Keiser, Kline, Spanel, Gardner and Rasmussen; by request of Attorney General and Governor Locke)

READ FIRST TIME 02/08/2002.

1 AN ACT Relating to price gouging during significant disruption,
2 emergency, or disaster; adding new sections to chapter 19.86 RCW; and
3 creating a new section.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 19.86 RCW
6 to read as follows:

7 The legislature finds that consumers are vulnerable to price
8 gouging or clearly excessive pricing during times of abnormal market
9 conditions caused by significant disruptions, emergencies, or
10 disasters. The legislature declares that excessive and unjustified
11 increases in retail prices charged during abnormal market conditions as
12 defined in section 2 of this act should be prohibited and made subject
13 to civil remedies.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 19.86 RCW
15 to read as follows:

16 The definitions in this section apply throughout sections 1 through
17 4 of this act unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

1 (1) "Abnormal market conditions" means those instances of
2 significant disruption to the marketplace caused by terrorist acts,
3 civil disorder, war, or military action; extreme weather conditions; or
4 convulsion of nature, including earthquake, tornado, tsunami, volcanic
5 activity, fire, flood, or storm; and any emergency or disaster as set
6 forth in chapters 43.06 and 38.52 RCW.

7 (2) "Person" has the same meaning as provided under RCW 19.86.010.

8 (3) "Essential consumer good or service" means a retail good or
9 service that is used, bought, or rendered primarily for personal,
10 family, or household purposes, and is necessary for consumption or use
11 during a period of abnormal market condition, including food items;
12 emergency supplies; medical supplies; building materials; fuel;
13 transportation services; storage services; and temporary housing.

14 (4) "Food item" means any article that is used or intended for use
15 for food or drink by a person or animal.

16 (5) "Emergency supplies" includes but is not limited to water,
17 flashlights, fire extinguishers, radios, batteries, candles, blankets,
18 soaps, diapers, temporary shelters, tape, toiletries, and portable
19 fossil-fueled electric generators.

20 (6) "Medical supplies" includes but is not limited to prescription
21 and nonprescription medications, bandages, gauze, isopropyl alcohol,
22 and antibacterial products.

23 (7) "Building materials" includes lumber, construction tools,
24 nails, windows, and other products used to protect, repair, build, or
25 rebuild property.

26 (8) "Fuel" includes oil or propane used for home heating, or any
27 fuel used to power any motor vehicle, portable electric generator, or
28 power tool.

29 (9) "Transportation services" includes any service that is
30 performed by any person who contracts to move or transport persons or
31 personal or business property, or rents equipment for such purposes.

32 (10) "Storage services" includes any service that is performed by
33 any person who contracts to store personal or business property or
34 rents equipment for such purposes.

35 (11) "Temporary housing" includes any rental housing or office
36 space leased on a temporary or short-term basis to a person who has
37 been displaced from his or her dwelling, housing, or office space
38 because of a significant disruption, emergency, or disaster.

1 (12) "Emergency cleanup, repair, or reconstruction services" means
2 services provided and equipment used to clear or remove debris or other
3 material that poses a public safety or health hazard and to repair
4 residential or commercial property of any type to a safe and habitable
5 condition.

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 19.86 RCW
7 to read as follows:

8 (1) In addition to the powers in chapters 43.06 and 38.52 RCW for
9 the governor to make disaster or emergency proclamations, for purposes
10 of triggering the provisions in sections 1 through 4 of this act, the
11 governor is also hereby empowered to make and to rescind a proclamation
12 of an abnormal market condition as defined in section 2 of this act.

13 (2) Upon the proclamation by the governor under chapters 43.06 and
14 38.52 RCW or sections 1 through 4 of this act of an abnormal market
15 condition, and for a period of thirty days following the proclamation,
16 or a lesser time period if the proclamation is rescinded, it is
17 unlawful for any person to sell or offer to sell at retail any
18 essential consumer good or service within the area designated in the
19 proclamation at a clearly excessive increase in price above the price
20 charged by that person for such goods or services immediately prior to
21 the proclamation as specified in section 4 of this act.

22 (3) Upon the proclamation by the governor under chapters 43.06 and
23 38.52 RCW or sections 1 through 4 of this act of an abnormal market
24 condition, and for a period of ninety days following the proclamation,
25 or a lesser time period if the proclamation is rescinded, it is
26 unlawful for any person to sell or offer to sell at retail any
27 emergency cleanup, repair, or reconstruction service within the area
28 designated in the proclamation at a clearly excessive increase in price
29 above the price charged by that person for such goods or services
30 immediately prior to the proclamation as defined in section 4 of this
31 act.

32 (4) An increase in price is not unlawful if the higher price
33 charged reflected reasonable expenses in addition to the prior price of
34 the goods or services but such reasonable expenses are limited to those
35 which are necessarily incurred in procuring or delivering such goods
36 and services during the period of time set forth in subsections (2) and
37 (3) of this section. A price increase in excess of fifteen percent not
38 tied to the reasonable expenses necessarily incurred in procuring or

1 delivering an essential consumer good or service during the period of
2 time set forth in subsections (2) and (3) of this section is prima
3 facie evidence of a clearly excessive price increase.

4 (5) Any person who sold or had offered to sell an essential
5 consumer good or service, or emergency cleanup, repair, or
6 reconstruction service at a temporarily discounted or reduced price
7 immediately prior to the proclamation as set forth in this section may
8 use the price at which the person normally or usually sold the good or
9 service for purposes of determining whether a price increase violates
10 sections 1 through 4 of this act.

11 (6) The governor may extend the time periods set forth in
12 subsections (2) and (3) of this section for additional thirty-day
13 periods by issuing a renewed proclamation, upon a finding that the
14 abnormal market condition continues and that any such extension is
15 deemed necessary to protect the health, safety, or welfare of the
16 citizens of the state.

17 (7) The governor may rescind an emergency proclamation made in
18 accordance with subsection (1) of this section upon a finding that no
19 abnormal market conditions exist.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 19.86 RCW
21 to read as follows:

22 (1) The legislature finds that the practices covered by sections 1
23 through 4 of this act are matters vitally affecting the public
24 interest. A violation of sections 1 through 4 of this act is not
25 reasonable in relation to the development and preservation of business
26 and is an unfair or deceptive practice in trade or commerce and an
27 unfair method of competition.

28 (2) The provisions of sections 1 through 4 of this act do not apply
29 to persons whose activities or transactions as to prices for goods or
30 services are subject to regulation by the Washington utilities and
31 transportation commission or the federal energy regulatory commission.

32 (3) Persons who merely provide advertising and related services for
33 persons engaged in making offers to sell goods or perform services
34 shall not be deemed to be making any offer to sell any goods or perform
35 any services for purposes of sections 1 through 4 of this act.

36 (4) In any action against a person under the provisions of sections
37 1 through 4 of this act, the defendant shall be deemed not to have

1 violated sections 1 through 4 of this act if the defendant proves all
2 of the following:

3 (a) The violation of the price limitation was unintentional;

4 (b) The defendant voluntarily rolled back prices to a level
5 permitted under sections 1 through 4 of this act upon discovering that
6 this section was or may have been violated; and

7 (c) The defendant has instituted a restitution program for all
8 consumers who may have paid excessive prices.

9 (5) Subsequent remedial measures are not admissible as evidence of
10 a violation of sections 1 through 4 of this act.

11 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** This act shall be known as the "Preventing
12 Price Gouging During Emergencies and Disasters Act."

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