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State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

EIGHTY-EIGHTH SESSION

H. F. No. 774

02/21/2013 Authored by Atkins, Hoppe, Lesch, Davids and Fritz

The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Transportation Policy

03/06/2013 Adoption of Report: Pass as Amended and re-referred to the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection Finance and Policy

1.1 A bill for an act
1.2 relating to transportation; motor vehicles; amending regulation of motor vehicle
1.3 manufacturers and distributors; amending Minnesota Statutes 2012, sections
1.4 80E.13; 168.27, by adding a subdivision.

1.5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.6 Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2012, section 80E.13, is amended to read:

1.7 80E.13 UNFAIR PRACTICES BY MANUFACTURERS, DISTRIBUTORS,
1.8 FACTORY BRANCHES.

1.9 It is unlawful and an unfair practice for a manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch
1.10 to engage in any of the following practices:

1.11 (a) delay, refuse, or fail to deliver new motor vehicles or new motor vehicle parts or
1.12 accessories in reasonable time and in reasonable quantity relative to the new motor vehicle
1.13 dealer's facilities and sales potential in the dealer's relevant market area, after having
1.14 accepted an order from a new motor vehicle dealer having a franchise for the retail sale of
1.15 any new motor vehicle sold or distributed by the manufacturer or distributor, if the new
1.16 motor vehicle or new motor vehicle parts or accessories are publicly advertised as being
1.17 available for delivery or actually being delivered. This clause is not violated, however, if
1.18 the failure is caused by acts or causes beyond the control of the manufacturer;

1.19 (b) refuse to disclose to any new motor vehicle dealer handling the same line make,
1.20 the manner and mode of distribution of that line make within the relevant market area;

1.21 (c) obtain money, goods, service, or any other benefit from any other person with
1.22 whom the dealer does business, on account of, or in relation to, the transaction between
1.23 the dealer and the other person, other than for compensation for services rendered, unless
1.24 the benefit is promptly accounted for, and transmitted to, the new motor vehicle dealer;

2.1 (d) increase prices of new motor vehicles which the new motor vehicle dealer had
2.2 ordered for private retail consumers prior to the dealer's receiving the written official price
2.3 increase notification. A sales contract signed by a private retail consumer shall constitute
2.4 evidence of each order if the vehicle is in fact delivered to that customer. In the event of
2.5 manufacturer price reductions, the amount of any reduction received by a dealer shall be
2.6 passed on to the private retail consumer by the dealer if the retail price was negotiated on
2.7 the basis of the previous higher price to the dealer;

2.8 (e) offer any refunds or other types of inducements to any new motor vehicle dealer
2.9 for the purchase of new motor vehicles of a certain line make without making the same
2.10 offer to all other new motor vehicle dealers in the same line make within geographic areas
2.11 reasonably determined by the manufacturer;

2.12 (f) release to any outside party, except under subpoena or in an administrative or
2.13 judicial proceeding involving the manufacturer or dealer, any business, financial, or
2.14 personal information which may be provided by the dealer to the manufacturer, without
2.15 the express written consent of the dealer or unless pertinent to judicial or governmental
2.16 administrative proceedings or to arbitration proceedings of any kind;

2.17 (g) deny any new motor vehicle dealer the right of free association with any other
2.18 new motor vehicle dealer for any lawful purpose;

2.19 (h) unfairly discriminate among its new motor vehicle dealers with respect to
2.20 warranty reimbursement or authority granted its new vehicle dealers to make warranty
2.21 adjustments with retail customers;

2.22 (i) ~~compete with a new motor vehicle dealer in the same line make operating under~~
2.23 ~~an agreement or franchise from the same manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch~~ own
2.24 or operate, either directly or indirectly through any subsidiary, parent company, or firm, a
2.25 motor vehicle dealership or permanent facility for display of new vehicles located within the
2.26 state of the same line make as any of the vehicles manufactured, assembled, or distributed
2.27 by that manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch. A manufacturer, distributor, or factory
2.28 branch is considered to be competing in violation of this clause when it has an ownership
2.29 interest, other than a passive interest held for investment purposes, in a dealership of its
2.30 line make located within the state. A manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch shall not,
2.31 however, be deemed to be competing violating this clause when operating a dealership,
2.32 either temporarily or for a reasonable period, which is for sale to any qualified independent
2.33 person at a fair and reasonable price, or when involved in a bona fide relationship in which
2.34 an independent person has made a significant investment subject to loss in the dealership
2.35 and can reasonably expect to acquire full ownership and full management and operational
2.36 control of the dealership within a reasonable time on reasonable terms and conditions. A

3.1 new motor vehicle dealer licensed under section 168.27 is presumed to be injured and has
3.2 standing to bring an action under section 80E.17 for a violation of this clause;

3.3 (j) prevent a new motor vehicle dealer from transferring or assigning a new motor
3.4 vehicle dealership to a qualified transferee. There shall be no transfer, assignment of the
3.5 franchise, or major change in the executive management of the dealership, except as is
3.6 otherwise provided in sections 80E.01 to 80E.17, without consent of the manufacturer,
3.7 which shall not be withheld without good cause. In determining whether good cause exists
3.8 for withholding consent to a transfer or assignment, the manufacturer, distributor, factory
3.9 branch, or importer has the burden of proving that the transferee is a person who is not
3.10 of good moral character or does not meet the franchisor's existing and reasonable capital
3.11 standards and, considering the volume of sales and service of the new motor vehicle
3.12 dealer, reasonable business experience standards in the market area. Denial of the request
3.13 must be in writing and delivered to the new motor vehicle dealer within 60 days after the
3.14 manufacturer receives the completed application customarily used by the manufacturer,
3.15 distributor, factory branch, or importer for dealer appointments. If a denial is not sent
3.16 within this period, the manufacturer shall be deemed to have given its consent to the
3.17 proposed transfer or change. In the event of a proposed sale or transfer of a franchise, the
3.18 manufacturer, distributor, factory branch, or importer shall be permitted to exercise a right
3.19 of first refusal to acquire the franchisee's assets or ownership if:

3.20 (1) the franchise agreement permits the manufacturer, distributor, factory branch, or
3.21 importer to exercise a right of first refusal to acquire the franchisee's assets or ownership
3.22 in the event of a proposed sale or transfer;

3.23 (2) the proposed transfer of the dealership or its assets is of more than 50 percent of
3.24 the ownership or assets;

3.25 (3) the manufacturer, distributor, factory branch, or importer notifies the dealer in
3.26 writing within 60 days of its receipt of the complete written proposal for the proposed sale
3.27 or transfer on forms generally utilized by the manufacturer, distributor, factory branch,
3.28 or importer for such purposes and containing the information required therein and all
3.29 documents and agreements relating to the proposed sale or transfer;

3.30 (4) the exercise of the right of first refusal will result in the dealer and dealer's
3.31 owners receiving the same or greater consideration with equivalent terms of sale as is
3.32 provided in the documents and agreements submitted to the manufacturer, distributor,
3.33 factory branch, or importer under clause (3);

3.34 (5) the proposed change of 50 percent or more of the ownership or of the dealership
3.35 assets does not involve the transfer or sale of assets or the transfer or issuance of stock
3.36 by the dealer or one or more dealer owners to a family member, including a spouse,

4.1 child, stepchild, grandchild, spouse of a child or grandchild, brother, sister, or parent of
4.2 the dealer owner; to a manager who has been employed in the dealership for at least four
4.3 years and is otherwise qualified as a dealer operator; or to a partnership or corporation
4.4 owned and controlled by one or more of such persons; and

4.5 (6) the manufacturer, distributor, factory branch, or importer agrees to pay the
4.6 reasonable expenses, including reasonable attorney fees, which do not exceed the usual
4.7 customary and reasonable fees charged for similar work done for other clients incurred
4.8 by the proposed new owner and transferee before the manufacturer, distributor, factory
4.9 branch, or importer exercises its right of first refusal, in negotiating and implementing the
4.10 contract for the proposed change of ownership or transfer of dealership assets. However,
4.11 payment of such expenses and attorney fees shall not be required if the dealer has not
4.12 submitted or caused to be submitted an accounting of those expenses within 20 days after
4.13 the dealer's receipt of the manufacturer, distributor, factory branch, or importer's written
4.14 request for such an accounting. The manufacturer, distributor, factory branch, or importer
4.15 may request such an accounting before exercising its right of first refusal. The obligation
4.16 created under this clause is enforceable by the transferee;

4.17 (k) threaten to modify or replace or modify or replace a franchise with a succeeding
4.18 franchise that would adversely alter the rights or obligations of a new motor vehicle dealer
4.19 under an existing franchise or that substantially impairs the sales or service obligations or
4.20 investments of the motor vehicle dealer;

4.21 (l) unreasonably deny the right to acquire factory program vehicles to any dealer
4.22 holding a valid franchise from the manufacturer to sell the same line make of vehicles,
4.23 provided that the manufacturer may impose reasonable restrictions and limitations on the
4.24 purchase or resale of program vehicles to be applied equitably to all of its franchised
4.25 dealers. For the purposes of this paragraph, "factory program vehicle" has the meaning
4.26 given the term in section 80E.06, subdivision 2;

4.27 (m) fail or refuse to offer to its same line make franchised dealers all models
4.28 manufactured for that line make, other than alternative fuel vehicles as defined in section
4.29 216C.01, subdivision 1b. Failure to offer a model is not a violation of this section if
4.30 the failure is not arbitrary and is due to a lack of manufacturing capacity, a strike, labor
4.31 difficulty, or other cause over which the manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch has
4.32 no control;

4.33 (n) require a dealer to pay an extra fee, or remodel, renovate, or recondition the
4.34 dealer's existing facilities, or purchase unreasonable advertising displays, training, tools,
4.35 or other materials, or to require the dealer to establish exclusive facilities or dedicated
4.36 personnel as a prerequisite to receiving a model or a series of vehicles;

5.1 (o) require a dealer to adhere to performance standards that are not applied uniformly
5.2 to other similarly situated dealers.

5.3 A performance standard, sales objective, or program for measuring dealership performance
5.4 that may have a material effect on a dealer, including the dealer's right to payment under
5.5 any incentive or reimbursement program, and the application of the standard or program
5.6 by a manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch must be fair, reasonable, equitable, and
5.7 based on accurate information.

5.8 A manufacturer, distributor, or factory branch has the burden of proving that the
5.9 performance standard, sales objective, or program for measuring dealership performance
5.10 is fair and reasonable under this subdivision; or

5.11 (p) unreasonably reduce a dealer's area of sales effectiveness without giving at
5.12 least 90 days' notice of the proposed reduction. The change may not take effect if the
5.13 dealer commences a civil action to determine whether there is good cause for the change
5.14 within the 90 days' notice period. The burden of proof in such an action shall be on the
5.15 manufacturer or distributor.

5.16 Sec. 2. Minnesota Statutes 2012, section 168.27, is amended by adding a subdivision
5.17 to read:

5.18 Subd. 8a. **Manufacturers and distributors.** (a) A motor vehicle manufacturer or
5.19 distributor is not required to be licensed under this section to sell new motor vehicles
5.20 solely to a licensed new motor vehicle dealer. A manufacturer or distributor of passenger
5.21 automobiles or trucks may not obtain a new motor vehicle dealer license.

5.22 (b) For purposes of this subdivision, "manufacturer or distributor of passenger
5.23 automobiles or trucks" includes affiliates under common management and control, but
5.24 does not include a manufacturer or distributor of:

5.25 (1) new and unused motor vehicle bodies to be installed on incomplete motor vehicles;
5.26 (2) medium-speed electric vehicles, as defined in section 169.011, subdivision 39; or
5.27 (3) neighborhood electric vehicles, as defined in section 169.011, subdivision 47.