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# OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

Office of Research  
and Drafting

Legislative Budget  
Office

**H.B. 131**  
**133rd General Assembly**

## Bill Analysis

**Version:** As Introduced

**Primary Sponsor:** Rep. Roemer

Carla Napolitano, Attorney

### Summary

- Expands the definition of “debt adjusting” to include providing services to debtors in the reduction or elimination of the amount or repayment terms of their debts.
- Expressly excludes a debt collector under federal law from the Debt Adjusting Law.
- Requires a debt adjuster to disclose to a debtor any creditor who is believed will not negotiate settlements.
- Establishes that a person in compliance with federal law relating to debt adjusting is not subject to any conflicting requirement under Ohio’s Debt Adjusting Law.

### Detailed Analysis

#### General overview

The bill modifies the Debt Adjusting Law by expanding the definition of “debt adjusting” and by addressing the conflicts that exist between that Law and the federal laws on debt adjusting by establishing that a person in compliance with federal law relating to debt adjusting is not subject to any conflicting requirement under Ohio’s Debt Adjusting Law. The bill also makes technical changes by relocating the Debt Adjusting Law (R.C. Chapter 4710) to the same chapter as the law governing credit service organizations (R.C. Chapter 4712)<sup>1</sup> and assigns the express culpable mental state of “recklessly” to the prohibition against violating the Debt Adjusting Law.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 4712.50 to 4712.54 and 4712.99, with conforming changes in R.C. 9.45, 2925.01, and 4712.01 and the repeal of R.C. 4710.99.

<sup>2</sup> R.C. 4712.99(B).

## Definition of “debt adjusting”

Currently, the term means doing business in debt adjusting, budget counseling, debt management, or debt pooling service, or holding oneself out as providing services to debtors in the management of their debts, to do either of the following:

1. Effect the adjustment, compromise, or discharge of any indebtedness of the debtor;
2. Receive from the debtor and disburse to the debtor’s creditors any money or other thing of value.

Under the bill, “debt adjusting” also means providing services to debtors in the reduction or elimination of the amount or repayment terms of their debts. And with respect to (1), above, the bill adds that the purpose behind those services is to obtain an adjustment of an interest rate on a debt, a waiver or reduction of fees or charges, or a discharge of a debt by reducing the principal balance of the debt. The bill expressly excludes from the definition of “debt adjusting” any activities of a debt collector, as defined in the federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.<sup>3</sup>

## Conflict with federal law

The bill states that any person engaged in debt adjusting and operating in compliance with federal laws or regulations, such as the rules implementing the federal Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act,<sup>4</sup> is **not** subject to:

--The provision of the Debt Adjuster Law that limits the fees debt adjusters may charge debtors;<sup>5</sup> or

--Any requirement of that Law that conflicts with those federal laws or regulations.<sup>6</sup>

## Disclosure to debtor

The bill requires a person engaged in debt adjusting and operating in compliance with federal laws or regulations to disclose to the debtor in a debt management plan each creditor the person has reason to believe will not negotiate settlements directly with the person. A reckless violation of the disclosure requirement is a third degree misdemeanor for the first offense and a second degree misdemeanor for any subsequent offense.<sup>7</sup>

## Unauthorized practice of law

Lastly, the bill states that it is not to be construed as permitting the unauthorized practice of law by anyone engaging in debt adjusting.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R.C. 4712.50(B) and 15 United States Code 1692a, not in the bill.

<sup>4</sup> 16 Code of Federal Regulations part 310, not in the bill.

<sup>5</sup> R.C. 4712.51(B).

<sup>6</sup> R.C. 4712.54(A).

<sup>7</sup> R.C. 4712.54(B) and 4712.99(B).

<sup>8</sup> Section 4.

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## History

Action	Date
Introduced	03-12-19

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