

3618

2011-2012 Regular Sessions

I N   S E N A T E

February 28, 2011

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Introduced by Sen. ADAMS -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Consumer Protection

AN ACT to amend the general business law, in relation to enacting the "internet dating safety act of 2011" and requiring internet dating services to provide notice whether the service conducts criminal background screenings

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

1     Section 1. Short title. This act shall be known and may be cited as  
2     the "internet dating safety act of 2011".  
3     S 2. Legislative findings and declarations. The legislature finds and  
4     declares:  
5     a. residents of this state need to be informed of the potential risks  
6     of participating in internet dating services. There is a public safety  
7     need to disclose whether criminal history background screenings have  
8     been performed and to increase public awareness of the possible risks  
9     associated with internet dating activities; and  
10    b. the offer of internet dating services to residents of this state,  
11    and the acceptance of membership fees from residents of this state means  
12    that an internet dating service is conducting business in this state and  
13    is subject to regulation by this state and the jurisdiction of the  
14    state's courts.  
15    S 3. Section 394-cc of the general business law, as added by chapter  
16    425 of the laws of 2010, is amended to read as follows:  
17    S 394-cc. Internet dating safety. 1. As used in this section, the  
18    following terms shall have the following meanings:  
19    (a) "CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREENING" MEANS A NAME SEARCH FOR A PERSON'S  
20    CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS INITIATED BY AN ON-LINE DATING SERVICE PROVIDER AND  
21    CONDUCTED BY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MEANS:

EXPLANATION--Matter in ITALICS (underscored) is new; matter in brackets  
[ ] is old law to be omitted.

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1 (I) BY SEARCHING AVAILABLE AND REGULARLY UPDATED GOVERNMENT PUBLIC  
2 RECORD DATABASES FOR CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS SO LONG AS SUCH DATABASES, IN  
3 THE AGGREGATE, PROVIDE SUBSTANTIAL NATIONAL COVERAGE; OR

4 (II) BY SEARCHING A DATABASE MAINTAINED BY A PRIVATE VENDOR THAT IS  
5 REGULARLY UPDATED AND IS MAINTAINED IN THE UNITED STATES WITH SUBSTAN-  
6 TIAL NATIONAL COVERAGE OF CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORDS AND SEXUAL OFFENDER  
7 REGISTRIES.

8 (B) "internet dating service" means a person or entity directly or  
9 indirectly in the business, for profit, of offering, promoting or  
10 providing access to dating, relationship, compatibility, matrimonial or  
11 social referral services principally on or through the internet.

12 [(b)] (C) "internet service provider" means any person, business or  
13 organization qualified to do business in this state that provides indi-  
14 viduals, corporations, or other entities with the ability to connect to  
15 the internet through equipment that is located in this state.

16 [(c)] (D) "member" means a customer, client or participant who submits  
17 to an internet dating service information required to access the service  
18 for the purpose of engaging in dating, relationship, compatibility,  
19 matrimonial or social referral.

20 [(d)] (E) "New York member" means a member who provides an in-state  
21 billing address or zip code when registering with the service.

22 (F) "CRIMINAL CONVICTION" MEANS A CONVICTION FOR ANY CRIME INCLUDING,  
23 BUT NOT LIMITED TO, ANY SEX OFFENSE THAT WOULD QUALIFY THE OFFENDER FOR  
24 REGISTRATION PURSUANT TO ARTICLE SIX-C OF THE CORRECTION LAW OR UNDER  
25 ANOTHER JURISDICTION'S EQUIVALENT STATUTE.

26 2. An internet dating service offering services to New York members  
27 shall provide safety awareness notification that includes, at minimum, a  
28 list and description of safety measures reasonably designed to increase  
29 awareness of safer dating practices in a clear and conspicuous manner.  
30 Such notification shall include, but not be limited to, the following  
31 statements or substantially similar statements:

32 (a) "There is no substitute for acting with caution when communicating  
33 with any stranger who wants to meet you."

34 (b) "Never include your last name, e-mail address, home address, phone  
35 number, place of work, or any other identifying information in your  
36 internet profile or initial e-mail messages. Stop communicating with  
37 anyone who pressures you for personal or financial information or  
38 attempts in any way to trick you into revealing it."

39 (c) "If you choose to have a face-to-face meeting with another member,  
40 always tell someone in your family or a friend where you are going and  
41 when you will return. Never agree to be picked up at your home. Always  
42 provide your own transportation to and from your date and meet in a  
43 public place with many people around."

44 (D) "ANYONE WHO IS ABLE TO COMMIT IDENTITY THEFT CAN ALSO FALSIFY A  
45 DATING PROFILE."

46 Such notification shall be given at the time a New York member regis-  
47 ters with the service and by way of a link on the main website, or the  
48 first entry point, of the service.

49 3. (a) [The attorney general may bring an action against an internet  
50 dating service that violates the provisions of this section:

51 (i) to enjoin further violation of the provisions of this section; and

52 (ii) to recover up to two hundred fifty dollars for each New York  
53 member registered with the internet dating service during the time peri-  
54 od that the internet dating service was in violation of this section.

55 (b) In an action under subparagraph (ii) of paragraph (a) of this  
56 subdivision, a court may increase the damages up to three times the

1 damages allowed by such paragraph where the defendant has been found to  
2 have engaged in a pattern and practice of violating the provisions of  
3 this section.

4 (c) No internet dating service shall be deemed to have violated the  
5 provisions of this section if such internet dating service shows, by a  
6 preponderance of the evidence, that the violation was not intentional  
7 and resulted from a bona fide error made notwithstanding the maintenance  
8 of procedures reasonably adopted to avoid such error.

9 (d) IF AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE DOES NOT CONDUCT CRIMINAL BACK-  
10 GROUND SCREENINGS ON ITS MEMBERS, THE SERVICE SHALL DISCLOSE, CLEARLY  
11 AND CONSPICUOUSLY, TO ALL NEW YORK MEMBERS THAT THE INTERNET DATING  
12 SERVICE DOES NOT CONDUCT CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREENINGS. THE DISCLOSURE  
13 SHALL BE PROVIDED WHEN AN ELECTRONIC MAIL MESSAGE IS SENT OR RECEIVED BY  
14 A NEW YORK MEMBER, ON THE PROFILE DESCRIBING A MEMBER TO A NEW YORK  
15 MEMBER, AND ON THE WEBSITE PAGES OF THE INTERNET DATING SERVICE USED  
16 WHEN A NEW YORK MEMBER SIGNS UP. A DISCLOSURE UNDER THIS PARAGRAPH SHALL  
17 BE IN BOLD, CAPITAL LETTERS IN AT LEAST TWELVE-POINT TYPE.

18 (B) IF AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE CONDUCTS CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREEN-  
19 INGS ON ALL OF ITS COMMUNICATING MEMBERS, THEN THE SERVICE SHALL  
20 DISCLOSE, CLEARLY AND CONSPICUOUSLY, TO ALL NEW YORK MEMBERS THAT THE  
21 INTERNET DATING SERVICE CONDUCTS A CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREENING ON EACH  
22 MEMBER PRIOR TO PERMITTING A NEW YORK MEMBER TO COMMUNICATE WITH ANOTHER  
23 MEMBER. THE DISCLOSURE SHALL BE PROVIDED ON THE WEBSITE PAGES USED WHEN  
24 A NEW YORK MEMBER SIGNS UP. A DISCLOSURE UNDER THIS PARAGRAPH SHALL BE  
25 IN BOLD, CAPITAL LETTERS IN AT LEAST TWELVE-POINT TYPE.

26 (C) IF AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE CONDUCTS CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREEN-  
27 INGS, THEN THE SERVICE SHALL DISCLOSE WHETHER IT HAS A POLICY ALLOWING A  
28 MEMBER WHO HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING A CRIMINAL CONVICTION TO HAVE  
29 ACCESS TO ITS SERVICE TO COMMUNICATE WITH ANY NEW YORK MEMBER; SHALL  
30 STATE THAT CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREENINGS ARE NOT FOOLPROOF; THAT THEY  
31 MAY GIVE MEMBERS A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY; THAT THEY ARE NOT A PERFECT  
32 SAFETY SOLUTION; THAT CRIMINALS MAY CIRCUMVENT EVEN THE MOST SOPHISTI-  
33 CATED SEARCH TECHNOLOGY; THAT NOT ALL CRIMINAL RECORDS ARE PUBLIC IN ALL  
34 STATES AND NOT ALL DATABASES ARE UP TO DATE; THAT ONLY PUBLICLY AVAIL-  
35 ABLE CONVICTIONS ARE INCLUDED IN THE SCREENING; AND THAT SCREENINGS DO  
36 NOT COVER OTHER TYPES OF CONVICTIONS OR ARRESTS OR ANY CONVICTIONS FROM  
37 FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

38 4. (A) IT SHALL BE AN UNLAWFUL PRACTICE AND A VIOLATION OF ARTICLE  
39 TWENTY-TWO-A OF THIS CHAPTER FOR AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE TO FAIL TO  
40 PROVIDE NOTICE OR FALSELY INDICATE THAT IT HAS PERFORMED CRIMINAL BACK-  
41 GROUND SCREENINGS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS SECTION. IN EVERY CASE WHERE  
42 THE COURT SHALL DETERMINE THAT A VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION HAS OCCURRED,  
43 IT MAY IMPOSE A CIVIL PENALTY OF UP TO ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS  
44 FOR EACH VIOLATION.

45 (B) Nothing in this section shall be construed to restrict any right  
46 which any person may have under any other statute or common law.

47 [4.] 5. An internet service provider does not violate this section  
48 solely as a result of serving as an intermediary for the transmission of  
49 electronic messages between members of an internet dating service.

50 S 4. This act shall take effect on the one hundred twentieth day after  
51 it shall have become a law; provided, however, that effective immediate-  
52 ly, the addition, amendment and/or repeal of any rule or regulation  
53 necessary for the implementation of this act on its effective date is  
54 authorized and directed to be made and completed on or before such  
55 effective date.