

7192

2009-2010 Regular Sessions

I N A S S E M B L Y

March 25, 2009

Introduced by M. of A. ROBINSON -- read once and referred to the Committee on Consumer Affairs and Protection

AN ACT to amend the general business law, in relation to enacting the "internet dating safety act" 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".

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. The general business law is amended by adding a new section 394-  
16 cc 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 (C) "INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER" MEANS ANY PERSON, BUSINESS OR ORGAN-  
13 IZATION QUALIFIED TO DO BUSINESS IN THIS STATE THAT PROVIDES INDIVID-  
14 UALS, CORPORATIONS, OR OTHER ENTITIES WITH THE ABILITY TO CONNECT TO THE  
15 INTERNET THROUGH EQUIPMENT THAT IS LOCATED IN THIS STATE.

16 (D) "MEMBER" MEANS A CUSTOMER, CLIENT OR PARTICIPANT WHO SUBMITS TO AN  
17 INTERNET DATING SERVICE INFORMATION REQUIRED TO ACCESS THE SERVICE FOR  
18 THE PURPOSE OF ENGAGING IN DATING, RELATIONSHIP, COMPATIBILITY, MATRIMO-  
19 NIAL OR SOCIAL REFERRAL.

20 (E) "NEW YORK MEMBER" MEANS A MEMBER WHO PROVIDES AN IN STATE BILLING  
21 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:

28 (A) PROVIDE SAFETY AWARENESS NOTIFICATION THAT INCLUDES, AT MINIMUM, A  
29 LIST AND DESCRIPTION OF SAFETY MEASURES REASONABLY DESIGNED TO INCREASE  
30 AWARENESS OF SAFER DATING PRACTICES AS DETERMINED BY THE SERVICE. EXAM-  
31 PLES OF SUCH NOTIFICATIONS INCLUDE:

32 (I) "ANYONE WHO IS ABLE TO COMMIT IDENTITY THEFT CAN ALSO FALSIFY A  
33 DATING PROFILE."

34 (II) "THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR ACTING WITH CAUTION WHEN COMMUNICAT-  
35 ING WITH ANY STRANGER WHO WANTS TO MEET YOU."

36 (III) "NEVER INCLUDE YOUR LAST NAME, E-MAIL ADDRESS, HOME ADDRESS,  
37 PHONE NUMBER, PLACE OF WORK, OR ANY OTHER IDENTIFYING INFORMATION IN  
38 YOUR INTERNET PROFILE OR INITIAL E-MAIL MESSAGES. STOP COMMUNICATING  
39 WITH ANYONE WHO PRESSURES YOU FOR PERSONAL OR FINANCIAL INFORMATION OR  
40 ATTEMPTS IN ANY WAY TO TRICK YOU INTO REVEALING IT."

41 (IV) "IF YOU CHOOSE TO HAVE A FACE-TO-FACE MEETING WITH ANOTHER  
42 MEMBER, ALWAYS TELL SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY OR A FRIEND WHERE YOU ARE  
43 GOING AND WHEN YOU WILL RETURN. NEVER AGREE TO BE PICKED UP AT YOUR  
44 HOME. ALWAYS PROVIDE YOUR OWN TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM YOUR DATE AND  
45 MEET IN A PUBLIC PLACE WITH MANY PEOPLE AROUND."

46 (B) IF AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE DOES NOT CONDUCT CRIMINAL BACKGROUND  
47 SCREENINGS ON ITS MEMBERS, THE SERVICE SHALL DISCLOSE, CLEARLY AND  
48 CONSPICUOUSLY, TO ALL NEW YORK MEMBERS THAT THE INTERNET DATING SERVICE  
49 DOES NOT CONDUCT CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREENINGS. THE DISCLOSURE SHALL BE  
50 PROVIDED WHEN AN ELECTRONIC MAIL MESSAGE IS SENT OR RECEIVED BY A NEW  
51 YORK MEMBER, ON THE PROFILE DESCRIBING A MEMBER TO A NEW YORK MEMBER,  
52 AND ON THE WEBSITE PAGES OF THE INTERNET DATING SERVICE USED WHEN A NEW  
53 YORK MEMBER SIGNS UP. A DISCLOSURE UNDER THIS PARAGRAPH SHALL BE IN  
54 BOLD, CAPITAL LETTERS IN AT LEAST TWELVE-POINT TYPE.

55 (C) IF AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE CONDUCTS CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREEN-  
56 INGS ON ALL OF ITS COMMUNICATING MEMBERS, THEN THE SERVICE SHALL

1 DISCLOSE, CLEARLY AND CONSPICUOUSLY, TO ALL NEW YORK MEMBERS THAT THE  
2 INTERNET DATING SERVICE CONDUCTS A CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREENING ON EACH  
3 MEMBER PRIOR TO PERMITTING A NEW YORK MEMBER TO COMMUNICATE WITH ANOTHER  
4 MEMBER. THE DISCLOSURE SHALL BE PROVIDED ON THE WEBSITE PAGES USED WHEN  
5 A NEW YORK MEMBER SIGNS UP. A DISCLOSURE UNDER THIS PARAGRAPH SHALL BE  
6 IN BOLD, CAPITAL LETTERS IN AT LEAST TWELVE-POINT TYPE.

7 (D) IF AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE CONDUCTS CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREEN-  
8 INGS, THEN THE SERVICE SHALL DISCLOSE WHETHER IT HAS A POLICY ALLOWING A  
9 MEMBER WHO HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING A CRIMINAL CONVICTION TO HAVE  
10 ACCESS TO ITS SERVICE TO COMMUNICATE WITH ANY NEW YORK MEMBER; SHALL  
11 STATE THAT CRIMINAL BACKGROUND SCREENINGS ARE NOT FOOLPROOF; THAT THEY  
12 MAY GIVE MEMBERS A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY; THAT THEY ARE NOT A PERFECT  
13 SAFETY SOLUTION; THAT CRIMINALS MAY CIRCUMVENT EVEN THE MOST SOPHISTI-  
14 CATED SEARCH TECHNOLOGY; THAT NOT ALL CRIMINAL RECORDS ARE PUBLIC IN ALL  
15 STATES AND NOT ALL DATABASES ARE UP TO DATE; THAT ONLY PUBLICLY AVAIL-  
16 ABLE CONVICTIONS ARE INCLUDED IN THE SCREENING; AND THAT SCREENINGS DO  
17 NOT COVER OTHER TYPES OF CONVICTIONS OR ARRESTS OR ANY CONVICTIONS FROM  
18 FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

19 3. (A) IT SHALL BE AN UNLAWFUL PRACTICE AND A VIOLATION OF ARTICLE  
20 TWENTY-TWO-A OF THIS CHAPTER FOR AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE TO FAIL TO  
21 PROVIDE NOTICE OR FALSELY INDICATE THAT IT HAS PERFORMED CRIMINAL BACK-  
22 GROUND SCREENINGS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS SECTION. IN EVERY CASE WHERE  
23 THE COURT SHALL DETERMINE THAT A VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION HAS OCCURRED,  
24 IT MAY IMPOSE A CIVIL PENALTY OF UP TO ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS  
25 FOR EACH VIOLATION.

26 (B) NOTHING IN THIS SECTION SHALL BE CONSTRUED TO RESTRICT ANY RIGHT  
27 WHICH ANY PERSON MAY HAVE UNDER ANY OTHER STATUTE OR COMMON LAW.

28 4. AN INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER DOES NOT VIOLATE THIS SECTION SOLELY  
29 AS A RESULT OF SERVING AS AN INTERMEDIARY FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF ELEC-  
30 TRONIC MESSAGES BETWEEN MEMBERS OF AN INTERNET DATING SERVICE.

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