

Sixty-second  
Legislative Assembly  
of North Dakota

**SENATE BILL NO. 2236**

Introduced by

Senators Klein, G. Lee, O'Connell

Representatives Ruby, Kaldor, Vigesaa

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact section 51-07-00.1 and 51-07-02.4 of the North Dakota  
2 Century Code, relating to definitions and warranty or incentive audits for new motor vehicle  
3 dealers; to amend and reenact section 51-07-02.3 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating  
4 to prohibited acts for manufacturers, wholesalers, or distributors of new automobiles and  
5 automobile parts; to provide for application; and to declare an emergency.

6 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

7 **SECTION 1.** Section 51-07-00.1 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted  
8 as follows:

9 **51-07-00.1. Definitions.**

10 As used in sections 51-07-01, 51-07-02.1, 51-07-02.2, 51-07-02.3, 51-07-02.4, and  
11 51-07-03 unless context or subject matter otherwise requires:

- 12 1. "Contract" means any oral or written franchise agreement, sales agreement, dealer  
13 agreement, or security agreement, or other form of agreement or arrangement of like  
14 effect.
- 15 2. "Dealer" means a person that engages in the business of selling, at retail, new motor  
16 vehicles or trucks or new and used motor vehicles or trucks and possesses a current  
17 new motor vehicle dealer license as defined in section 39-22-16.
- 18 3. "Distributor" means any person who in whole or in part offers for sale, sells, or  
19 distributes any new motor vehicle to a new motor vehicle dealer, and any person that  
20 in whole or in part offers for sale, sells, or distributes any farm implement, machinery,  
21 or attachment or part for the same; or lawn and garden equipment, or part for the  
22 same; or semitrailer, or part for the same, to any person that retails all or any of these  
23 items.

- 1       4.   "Franchise" or "franchise agreement" means any contract or agreement between a  
2       dealer and a manufacturer or distributor that authorizes the dealer to engage in the  
3       business of selling or purchasing any particular make of new motor vehicles or motor  
4       vehicle parts manufactured or distributed by the manufacturer or distributor or that  
5       establishes rights or obligations, or both, relating to the dealer's new motor vehicle  
6       operation, including agreements relating to dealership facilities or site control.
- 7       5.   "Franchisor" means a person that manufactures, imports, or distributes new motor  
8       vehicles and which may enter a franchise agreement.
- 9       6.   "Good cause" means failure by a new motor vehicle dealer to substantially comply  
10      with essential and reasonable requirements imposed upon the new motor vehicle  
11      dealer by the franchise agreement if the requirements are not different from those  
12      requirements imposed on other similarly situated new motor vehicle dealers.
- 13      7.   "Good faith" means honesty in fact and the observance of commercially reasonable,  
14      nondiscriminatory standards of fair dealing.
- 15      8.   "Line-make" means new motor vehicles that are offered for sale, lease, or distribution  
16      under a common name, trademark, service mark, or brand name of the manufacturer,  
17      distributor, or factory branch.
- 18      9.   "Manufacturer" means any person that is engaged in the business of manufacturing or  
19      assembling new motor vehicles or any person controlled by the manufacturer.
- 20      10.   "Merchandise" means farm implements, machinery, attachments, and parts for the  
21      same; lawn and garden equipment and parts for the same; and automobiles, trucks,  
22      and semitrailers and parts for the same.
- 23      11.   "New motor vehicle" means a motor vehicle that has not been subject to a retail sale,  
24      the registration provisions of chapter 39-04, the title registration provisions of chapter  
25      39-05, or the motor vehicle excise tax provisions of chapter 57-40.3.
- 26      12.   "Owner" means a person, other than a lienholder, having the property in or title to a  
27      vehicle. The term includes a person entitled to the use and possession of a vehicle  
28      subject to a security interest in another person, but excludes a lessee under a lease  
29      not intended as security.

1     13. "Semitrailer" includes every vehicle of the trailer type so designed and used in  
2     conjunction with a truck that some part of its own weight and that of its own load rests  
3     upon or is carried by a truck, except that it does not include a mobile home.

4     14. "Successor" means the spouse, child, grandchild, parent, brother, or sister of the  
5     owner of a new motor vehicle dealer who, in the case of the owner's death, is entitled  
6     to inherit the ownership interest in the new motor vehicle dealership or who, in the  
7     case of an incapacitated owner of a new motor vehicle dealer, has been appointed by  
8     a court as the legal representative of the new motor vehicle dealer's property.

9     15. "Truck" includes every motor vehicle designed, used, or maintained primarily for  
10    transportation of property or designed and used primarily for drawing other vehicles  
11    and not so constructed as to carry a load other than a part of the weight of the vehicle  
12    and load so drawn.

13    16. "Used motor vehicle" means a motor vehicle that has been subject to a retail sale, the  
14    registration provisions of chapter 39-04, the title registration provisions of  
15    chapter 39-05, or the motor vehicle excise tax provisions of chapter 57-40.3.

16    **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Section 51-07-02.3 of the North Dakota Century Code is  
17    amended and reenacted as follows:

18    **51-07-02.3. Prohibited acts.**

19    A manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor of automobiles or trucks, or parts of the  
20    automobiles or trucks, that enters a contract with any person engaged in the business of selling  
21    or retailing automobiles, trucks, or parts for the automobiles or trucks, may not:

- 22       1. Coerce or attempt to coerce the retailer into accepting delivery of automobiles, trucks,  
23       parts, or accessories that the retailer has not ordered voluntarily.
- 24       2. Condition or attempt to condition the sale of automobiles or trucks on a requirement  
25       that the automobile or truck retailer purchase other goods or services, except that the  
26       manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor may require a retailer to purchase all parts  
27       reasonably necessary to maintain the quality of operation and telecommunications  
28       necessary to communicate with the manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor.
- 29       3. Implement or establish a system of motor vehicle allocation or distribution to one or  
30       more of its dealers that is unfair, inequitable, or unreasonably discriminatory. As used  
31       in this subsection, "unfair" includes requiring a dealer to accept new vehicles not

1           ordered by the dealer or the refusal or failure to offer to any dealer all models offered  
2           to any of its other same line-make dealers in this state. The failure to deliver any motor  
3           vehicle is not a violation of this section if failure is due to any cause over which the  
4           manufacturer does not have control.

5           4. Require a dealer to pay all or any part of the cost of an advertising campaign or  
6           contest or purchase any promotional material, showroom, or other display decoration  
7           or material at the expense of the dealer.

8           5. Coerce or attempt to coerce an automobile or truck retailer into not carrying dual lines  
9           or into maintaining separate facilities as long as the retailer's facilities otherwise satisfy  
10          the reasonable requirements of the manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor.

11          6. Require a retailer to either establish or maintain exclusive facilities, personnel, or  
12          display space or to abandon an existing franchise relationship with another  
13          manufacturer in order to continue, renew, reinstate, or enter a franchise agreement or  
14          to participate in any program discount, credit, rebate, or sales incentive.

15          7. Unreasonably prevent or refuse to approve the relocation of a dealership to another  
16          site within the dealer's relevant market area. The dealer shall provide the  
17          manufacturer or distributor with notice of the proposed address and a reasonable site  
18          plan of the proposed location. The manufacturer or distributor shall approve or deny  
19          the request in writing within sixty days after receipt of the request, and failure to deny  
20          the request within sixty days is deemed approval.

21          8. Require the retailer to unreasonably remodel, renovate, or recondition the retailer's  
22          facilities, change the location of the facilities, or make unreasonable alterations to the  
23          dealership premises.

24          4.9. Discriminate in the prices charged for automobiles or trucks of like grade and quality  
25          sold by automobile or truck manufacturers to similarly situated automobile or truck  
26          retailers. This prohibition does not prevent the use of differentials that solely make due  
27          allowance for differences in the cost of manufacture, sale, or delivery or for differing  
28          methods or quantities in which the automobiles or trucks are sold or delivered by the  
29          manufacturer, wholesaler, or distributor.

30          10. Refuse or fail to offer any incentive program, bonus payment, holdback margin, or any  
31          other mechanism that effectively lowers the net cost of a vehicle to any franchised

1           dealer in this state if the incentive, bonus, or holdback is available or made to one or  
2           more same line-make dealers in this state.

3     ~~5-11.~~   Attempt or threaten to terminate, cancel, or fail to renew, or substantially change the  
4           competitive circumstances of the dealership contracts for any reason other than the  
5           failure of the automobile or truck retailer to comply with the terms of the contract  
6           between the parties, if the attempt or threat is based on the results of a circumstance  
7           beyond the retailer's control, including a natural disaster in the dealership market area  
8           or a labor dispute.

9     ~~12.~~   Require a dealer in this state to enter any agreement to assent to a release,  
10           assignment, novation, waiver, or estoppel in which a dealer relinquishes any rights  
11           under this state's law, or which would relieve any person from liability imposed by this  
12           state's law unless done in connection with a settlement agreement to resolve a matter  
13           between a manufacturer and the dealer. The settlement agreement must be entered  
14           voluntarily for adequate and valuable consideration, and the renewal, reinstatement, or  
15           continuation of a franchise agreement does not constitute adequate and valuable  
16           consideration.

17    ~~13.~~   Require any dealer in this state to enter any agreement with the manufacturer or any  
18           other party which requires the law of another jurisdiction to apply to any dispute  
19           between the dealer and manufacturer, requires that the dealer bring an action against  
20           the manufacturer in a venue outside of this state, in any way purports to waive any  
21           dealer's right to have all of this state's statutory and common law apply, shortens or  
22           otherwise modifies or eliminates any dealer's right to resolve any dispute with a  
23           manufacturer in a state or federal court in this state, or requires the dealer to agree to  
24           arbitration or waive its rights to bring a cause of action against the manufacturer,  
25           unless done in connection with a settlement agreement to resolve a matter or pending  
26           dispute between a manufacturer and the dealer. This settlement agreement must be  
27           entered voluntarily for adequate and valuable consideration and renewal,  
28           reinstatement, or continuation of a franchise agreement is not adequate and valuable  
29           consideration.

30       **SECTION 3.** Section 51-07-02.4 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted  
31    as follows:

**51-07-02.4. Warranty and incentive claims.**

1. If a manufacturer attempts to conduct a warranty or incentive audit on claims paid more than one year earlier, or if a manufacturer seeks to charge back any warranty or incentive payment made more than one year earlier, and a retailer objects to the warranty or incentive audit on the claims or on the attempted chargeback of any warranty or incentive payment, the audit or chargeback may not take place until the manufacturer proves that the proposed warranty or incentive audit is on a claim made less than one year before the date of the notice of the proposed audit, or that the proposed chargeback of any warranty or incentive payment is for a payment made less than one year before the date the chargeback is first proposed.
2. A manufacturer may not charge back a dealer for a sales or warranty payment unless the manufacturer can satisfy its burden of proof that the dealer's claim was fraudulent or that the dealer did not substantially comply with the reasonable written procedures of the manufacturer.
3. The audit and chargeback provisions of this section apply to all other incentive and reimbursement programs that are subject to audit by the manufacturer. This section does not apply to fraudulent claims.

**SECTION 4. APPLICATION.** This Act applies to all dealership agreements in effect on the effective date of this Act which do not have an expiration date and which are continuing contracts and all other contracts entered, amended, or renewed on or after the effective date of this Act. A contract in effect on the effective date of this Act, which by its terms will terminate on a date after that date and which is not renewed, is governed by the law as it existed before the effective date of this Act.

**SECTION 5. EMERGENCY.** This Act is declared to be an emergency measure.