

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5238

To amend title 49, United States Code, to prohibit Amtrak from including mandatory arbitration clauses in contracts of carriage, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. CASEY, Mr. FETTERMAN, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MERKLEY, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Ms. WARREN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, and Mr. WYDEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To amend title 49, United States Code, to prohibit Amtrak from including mandatory arbitration clauses in contracts of carriage, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Ending Passenger Rail
5 Forced Arbitration Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. NO VALIDITY OR ENFORCEABILITY OF ARBITRA-**
 2 **TION AGREEMENTS FOR CONSUMER AND**
 3 **CIVIL RIGHTS DISPUTES.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 243 of title 49, United
 5 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
 6 lowing:

7 **“§ 24324. Prohibition on mandatory arbitration**

8 “(a) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this section are—

9 “(1) to prohibit predispute arbitration agree-
 10 ments that force arbitration of consumer and civil
 11 rights disputes between Amtrak and customers of
 12 Amtrak; and

13 “(2) to prohibit agreements and practices that
 14 interfere with the right of customers to participate
 15 in a joint, class, or collective action related to con-
 16 sumer and civil rights disputes between Amtrak and
 17 customers of Amtrak.

18 “(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

19 “(1) AMTRAK.—The term ‘Amtrak’ means the
 20 National Railroad Passenger Corporation.

21 “(2) CIVIL RIGHTS DISPUTE.—The term ‘civil
 22 rights dispute’ means a dispute—

23 “(A) arising from an alleged violation of—

24 “(i) the Constitution of the United
 25 States or the constitution of a State; or

1 “(ii) any Federal, State, or local law
2 that prohibits discrimination on the basis
3 of—

4 “(I) race, sex, age, gender iden-
5 tity, sexual orientation, disability, reli-
6 gion, or national origin; or

7 “(II) any legally protected status
8 in education, employment, credit,
9 housing, public accommodations and
10 facilities, voting, veterans and
11 servicemembers, health care, or a pro-
12 gram funded or conducted by the
13 Federal Government or a State gov-
14 ernment, including any law referred to
15 or described in section 62(e) of the
16 Internal Revenue Code of 1986, in-
17 cluding parts of such law not explic-
18 itly referenced in such section that re-
19 late to protecting individuals on any
20 such basis; and

21 “(B) in which at least 1 party alleging a
22 violation described in subparagraph (A) consists
23 of 1 or more customers (or their authorized
24 representative), including 1 or more individuals
25 seeking certification as a class under rule 23 of

1 the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure or a com-
 2 parable rule or provision of State law.

3 “(3) CONSUMER DISPUTE.—The term ‘con-
 4 sumer dispute’ means any dispute, including all
 5 claims related to personal injuries, between Amtrak
 6 and 1 or more customers who seek or acquire—

7 “(A) services and accommodations pro-
 8 vided by Amtrak; or

9 “(B) carriage on Amtrak trains and equip-
 10 ment.

11 “(4) CUSTOMER.—The term ‘customer’ means
 12 any individual, except for an employee of Amtrak
 13 and without regard to whether the individual is a
 14 minor or paid for the transportation, who seeks or
 15 acquires—

16 “(A) services and accommodations pro-
 17 vided by Amtrak; or

18 “(B) carriage on Amtrak trains and equip-
 19 ment.

20 “(5) PREDISPUTE ARBITRATION AGREEMENT.—
 21 The term ‘predispute arbitration agreement’ means
 22 an agreement to arbitrate a dispute that has not yet
 23 arisen at the time of the making of the agreement.

24 “(6) PREDISPUTE JOINT-ACTION WAIVER.—The
 25 term ‘predispute joint-action waiver’ means an

1 agreement, whether or not part of a predispute arbi-
 2 tration agreement, which would prohibit, or waive
 3 the right of, 1 of the parties to the agreement to
 4 participate in a joint, class, or collective action in a
 5 judicial, arbitral, administrative, or other forum,
 6 concerning a dispute that has not yet arisen at the
 7 time of the making of the agreement.

8 “(7) RAIL PASSENGER CARRIER.—The term
 9 ‘rail passenger carrier’ means a rail carrier pro-
 10 viding—

11 “(A) intercity rail passenger transportation
 12 (as such term is defined in section 24102); or

13 “(B) interstate or intrastate high-speed
 14 rail (as such term is defined in section 26105)
 15 transportation, excluding a tourist, historic, sce-
 16 nic, or excursion rail carrier.

17 “(c) IN GENERAL.—

18 “(1) IN GENERAL.—All predispute arbitration
 19 agreements and predispute joint-action waivers shall
 20 be invalid and unenforceable with respect to a con-
 21 sumer or civil rights dispute between Amtrak (in its
 22 capacity as a rail passenger carrier) and a customer
 23 of Amtrak.

24 “(2) APPLICABILITY.—

1 “(A) IN GENERAL.—A determination of
 2 whether this section applies to a particular dis-
 3 pute shall be made in accordance with Federal
 4 law.

5 “(B) AUTHORITY OF COURT.—The appli-
 6 cability of this section to an agreement to arbi-
 7 trate and the validity and enforceability of an
 8 agreement to which this section applies shall be
 9 determined by a court, rather than by an arbi-
 10 trator, regardless of whether—

11 “(i) the party resisting arbitration
 12 challenges the arbitration agreement spe-
 13 cifically or in conjunction with other terms
 14 of the contract containing such agreement;
 15 and

16 “(ii) the agreement purports to dele-
 17 gate such determinations to an arbitrator.

18 “(C) EXCLUSION.—Nothing in this section
 19 may be construed to apply to a predispute arbi-
 20 tration agreement or joint-action waiver invoked
 21 in connection with any dispute subject to the
 22 Railway Labor Act (45 U.S.C. 151 et seq.).”.

23 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by
 24 subsection (a)—

1 (1) shall take effect on the date of the enact-
2 ment of this Act; and

3 (2) shall apply with respect to any dispute or
4 claim that arises or accrues on or after such date.

5 (c) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The analysis for chap-
6 ter 243 of title 49, United States Code, is amended by
7 adding at the end the following:

“24324. Prohibition on mandatory arbitration.”.

