Public Law 93-533

December 22, 1974
[S. 3164]

AN ACT

To further the national housing goal of encouraging homeownership by regulating certain lending practices and closing and settlement procedures in federally related mortgage transactions to the end that unnecessary costs and difficulties of purchasing housing are minimized, and for other purposes.

Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act of 1974.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SHORT TITLE

12 USC 2601 note.

SECTION 1. This Act may be cited as the "Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act of 1974".

FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

12 USC 2601.

SEC. 2. (a) The Congress finds that significant reforms in the real estate settlement process are needed to insure that consumers throughout the Nation are provided with greater and more timely information on the nature and costs of the settlement process and are protected from unnecessarily high settlement charges caused by certain abusive practices that have developed in some areas of the country. The Congress also finds that it has been over two years since the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs submitted their joint report to the Congress on "Mortgage Settlement Costs" and that the time has come for the recommendations for Federal legislative action made in that report to be implemented.

(b) It is the purpose of this Act to effect certain changes in the settlement process for residential real estate that will result—

(1) in more effective advance disclosure to home buyers and sellers of settlement costs;

(2) in the elimination of kickbacks or referral fees that tend to increase unnecessarily the costs of certain settlement services;

(3) in a reduction in the amounts home buyers are required to place in escrow accounts established to insure the payment of real estate taxes and insurance; and

(4) in significant reform and modernization of local recordkeeping of land title information.

DEFINITIONS

12 USC 2602.

SEC. 3. For purposes of this Act—

(1) the term "federally related mortgage loan" includes any loan which—

(A) is secured by residential real property (including individual units of condominiums and cooperatives) designed principally for the occupancy of from one to four families; and

(B) (i) is made in whole or in part by any lender the deposits or accounts of which are insured by any agency of the Federal Government, or is made in whole or in part by any lender which is regulated by any agency of the Federal Government; or

(ii) is made in whole or in part, or insured, guaranteed, supplemented, or assisted in any way, by the Secretary or any other officer or agency of the Federal Government or under or in connection with a housing or urban development

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program administered by the Secretary or a housing or related program administered by any other such officer or agency; or

(iii) is eligible for purchase by the Federal National Mortgage Association, the Government National Mortgage Association, or the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, or from any financial institution from which it could be purchased by the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation; or

(iv) is made in whole or in part by any "creditor", as defined in section 103(f) of the Consumer Credit Protection Act (15 U.S.C. 1602(f)), who makes or invests in residential real estate loans aggregating more than $1,000,000 per year;

(2) the term "thing of value" includes any payment, advance, funds, loan, service, or other consideration;

(3) the term "settlement services" includes any service provided in connection with a real estate settlement including, but not limited to, the following: title searches, title examinations, the provision of title certificates, title insurance, services rendered by an attorney, the preparation of documents, property surveys, the rendering of credit reports or appraisals, pest and fungus inspections, services rendered by a real estate agent or broker, and the handling of the processing, and closing or settlement;

(4) the term "title company" means any institution which is qualified to issue title insurance, directly or through its agents, and also refers to any duly authorized agent of a title company;

(5) the term "person" includes individuals, corporations, associations, partnerships, and trusts; and

(6) the term "Secretary" means the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

UNIFORM SETTLEMENT STATEMENT

SEC. 4. The Secretary, in consultation with the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, shall develop and prescribe a standard form for the statement of settlement costs which shall be used (with such minimum variations as may be necessary to reflect unavoidable differences in legal and administrative requirements or practices in different areas of the country) as the standard real estate settlement form in all transactions in the United States which involve federally related mortgage loans. Such form shall conspicuously and clearly itemize all charges imposed upon the borrower and all charges imposed upon the seller in connection with the settlement and shall indicate whether any title insurance premium included in such charges covers or insures the lender's interest in the property, the borrower's interest, or both. Such form shall include all information and data required to be provided for such transactions under the Truth in Lending Act and the regulations issued thereunder by the Federal Reserve Board, and may be used in satisfaction of the disclosure requirements of that Act, and shall also include provision for execution of the waiver allowed by section 6(c).

12 USC 2603.

15 USC 1601 note.

SPECIAL INFORMATION BOOKLETS

SEC. 5. (a) The Secretary shall prepare and distribute booklets to help persons borrowing money to finance the purchase of residential real estate better to understand the nature and costs of real estate settlement services. The Secretary shall distribute such booklets to all lenders which make federally related mortgage loans.

12 USC 2604.

(b) Each booklet shall be in such form and detail as the Secretary shall prescribe and, in addition to such other information as the Secretary may provide, shall include in clear and concise language—

(1) a description and explanation of the nature and purpose of each cost incident to a real estate settlement;

(2) an explanation and sample of the standard real estate settlement form developed and prescribed under section 4;

(3) a description and explanation of the nature and purpose of escrow accounts when used in connection with loans secured by residential real estate;

(4) an explanation of the choices available to buyers of residential real estate in selecting persons to provide necessary services incident to a real estate settlement; and

(5) an explanation of the unfair practices and unreasonable or unnecessary charges to be avoided by the prospective buyer with respect to a real estate settlement.

Such booklets shall take into consideration differences in real estate settlement procedures which may exist among the several States and territories of the United States and among separate political subdivisions within the same State and territory.

(c) Each lender referred to in subsection (a) shall provide the booklet described in such subsection to each person from whom it receives an application to borrow money to finance the purchase of residential real estate. Such booklet shall be provided at the time of receipt of such application.

(d) Booklets may be printed and distributed by lenders if their form and content are approved by the Secretary as meeting the requirements of subsection (b) of this section.

ADVANCE DISCLOSURE OF SETTLEMENT COSTS

12 USC 2605.

SEC. 6. (a) Any lender agreeing to make a federally related mortgage loan shall provide or cause to be provided to the prospective borrower, to the prospective seller, and to any officer or agency of the Federal Government proposing to insure, guarantee, supplement, or assist such loan, at the time of the loan commitment, but in no case later than twelve calendar days prior to settlement, upon the standard real estate settlement form developed and prescribed under section 4, or upon a form developed and prescribed by the Secretary specifically for the purposes of this section, and in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary, an itemized disclosure in writing of each charge arising in connection with such settlement. For the purposes of complying with this section, it shall be the duty of the lender agreeing to make the loan to obtain or cause to be obtained from persons who provide or will provide services in connection with such settlement the amount of each charge they intend to make. In the event the exact amount of any such charge is not available, a good faith estimate of such charge may be provided.

Liability.

(b) If any lender fails to provide a prospective borrower or seller with the disclosure as required by subsection (a), it shall be liable to such borrower or seller, as the case may be, in an amount equal to—

(1) the actual damages involved or $500, whichever is greater, and

(2) in the case of any successful action to enforce the foregoing liability, the court costs of the action together with a reasonable attorney's fee as determined by the court;

except that a lender may not be held liable for a violation in any action brought under this subsection if it shows by a preponderance of the evidence that the violation was not intentional and resulted

from a bona fide error notwithstanding the maintenance of procedures adopted to avoid any such error.

(c) The provisions of subsection (a) shall be deemed to be satisfied with respect to a borrower or seller in connection with any settlement involving a federally related mortgage loan if the disclosure required by subsection (a) is provided at any time prior to settlement and the prospective borrower or seller, as the case may be, executes, under terms and conditions prescribed by regulations to be issued by the Secretary after consultation with the appropriate Federal agencies, a waiver of the requirement that the disclosure be provided at least twelve calendar days prior to such settlement. In issuing such regulations, the Secretary shall take into account the need to protect the borrower's and the seller's right to a timely disclosure.

d) With respect to any particular transaction involving a federally related mortgage loan, no borrower shall maintain an action or separate actions against any lender under both the provisions of this section and the provisions of section 130 of the Consumer Credit Protection Act (15 U.S.C. 1640).

(e) The provisions of this Act shall supersede the provisions of section 121(c) of the Consumer Credit Protection Act insofar as the latter applies to federally related mortgage loans as defined in this Act. 15 USC 1631.

DISCLOSURE OF PREVIOUS SELLING PRICE OF EXISTING REAL PROPERTY

SEC. 7. (a) No lender shall make any commitment for a federally related mortgage loan on a residence on which construction has been completed more than twelve months prior to the date of such commitment unless it has confirmed that the following information has been disclosed in writing by the seller or his agent to the buyer— 12 USC 2606.

(1) the name and address of the present owner of the property being sold;

(2) the date the property was acquired by the present owner (the year only if the property was acquired more than two years previously); and

(3) if the seller has not owned the property for at least two years prior to the date of the loan application and has not used the property as a place of residence, the date and purchase price of the last arm's length transfer of the property, a list of any subsequent improvements made to the property (excluding maintenance repairs) and the cost of such improvements.

(b) the obligations imposed upon a lender by this section shall be deemed satisfied and a commitment for a federally related mortgage loan may thereafter be made if the lender receives a copy of the written statement provided by the seller to the buyer supplying the information required by subsection (a).

(c) Whoever knowingly and willfully provides false information under this section or otherwise willfully fails to comply with its requirements shall be fined not more than $10,000 or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both. Noncompliance, penalty.

PROHIBITION AGAINST KICKBACKS AND UNEARNED FEES

SEC. 8. (a) No person shall give and no person shall accept any fee, kickback, or thing of value pursuant to any agreement or understanding, oral or otherwise, that business incident to or a part of a real estate settlement service involving a federally related mortgage loan shall be referred to any person. 12 USC 2607.

(b) No person shall give and no person shall accept any portion, split, or percentage of any charge made or received for the rendering

of a real estate settlement service in connection with a transaction involving a federally related mortgage loan other than for services actually performed.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed as prohibiting (1) the payment of a fee (A) to attorneys at law for services actually rendered or (B) by a title company to its duly appointed agent for services actually performed in the issuance of a policy of title insurance or (C) by a lender to its duly appointed agent for services actually performed in the making of a loan, or (2) the payment to any person of a bona fide salary or compensation or other payment for goods or facilities actually furnished or for services actually performed.

Penalties.

(d) (1) Any person or persons who violate the provisions of this section shall be fined not more than $10,000 or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both.

(2) In addition to the penalties provided by paragraph (1) of this subsection, any person or persons who violate the provisions of subsection (a) shall be jointly and severally liable to the person or persons whose business has been referred in an amount equal to three times the value or amount of the fee or thing of value, and any person or persons who violate the provisions of subsection (b) shall be jointly and severally liable to the person or persons charged for the settlement services involved in an amount equal to three times the amount of the portion, split, or percentage. In any successful action to enforce the liability under this paragraph, the court may award the court costs of the action together with a reasonable attorney's fee as determined by the court.

TITLE COMPANIES

12 USC 2608.

SEC. 9. (a) No seller of property that will be purchased with the assistance of a federally related mortgage loan shall require directly or indirectly, as a condition to selling the property, that title insurance covering the property be purchased by the buyer from any particular title company.

Liability.

(b) Any seller who violates the provisions of subsection (a) shall be liable to the buyer in an amount equal to three times all charges made for such title insurance.

LIMITATION ON REQUIREMENT OF ADVANCE DEPOSITS IN ESCROW ACCOUNTS

12 USC 2609.

SEC. 10. No lender, in connection with a federally related mortgage loan, shall require the borrower or prospective borrower—

(1) to deposit in any escrow account which may be established in connection with such loan for the purpose of assuring payment of taxes and insurance premiums with respect to the property, prior to or upon the date of settlement, an aggregate sum (for such purpose) in excess of—

(A) in any jurisdiction where such taxes and insurance premiums are postpaid, the total amount of such taxes and insurance premiums which will actually be due and payable on the date of settlement and the pro rata portion thereof which has accrued, or

(B) in any jurisdiction where such taxes and insurance premiums are prepaid, a pro rata portion of the estimated taxes and insurance premiums corresponding to the number of months from the last date of payment to the date of settlement,

plus one-twelfth of the estimated total amount of such taxes and insurance premiums which will become due and payable during the twelve-month period beginning on the date of settlement; or

(2) to deposit in any such escrow account in any month beginning after the date of settlement a sum (for the purpose of assuring payment of taxes and insurance premiums with respect to the property) in excess of one-twelfth of the total amount of the estimated taxes and insurance premiums which will become due and payable during the twelve-month period beginning on the first day of such month, except that in the event the lender determines there will be a deficiency on the due date he shall not be prohibited from requiring additional monthly deposits in such escrow account of pro rata portions of the deficiency corresponding to the number of months from the date of the lender's determination of such deficiency to the date upon which such taxes and insurance premiums become due and payable.

LIMITATIONS AND DISCLOSURES WITH RESPECT TO CERTAIN FEDERALLY RELATED MORTGAGE LOANS

SEC. 11. (a) The Federal Deposit Insurance Act is amended by adding at the end thereof the following new section:

"SEC. 25. (a) No insured bank, or mutual savings or cooperative bank which is not an insured bank, shall make any federally related mortgage loan to any agent, trustee, nominee, or other person acting in a fiduciary capacity without the prior condition that the identity of the person receiving the beneficial interest of such loan shall at all times be revealed to the bank. At the request of the Corporation, the bank shall report to the Corporation on the identity of such person and the nature and amount of the loan, discount, or other extension of credit. 12 USC 1831b. Report.

"(b) In addition to other available remedies, this section may be enforced with respect to mutual savings and cooperative banks which are not insured banks in accordance with section 8 of this Act, and for such purpose such mutual savings and cooperative banks shall be held and considered to be State nonmember insured banks and the appropriate Federal agency with respect to such mutual savings and cooperative banks shall be the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation."

(b) Title IV of the National Housing Act is amended by adding at the end thereof the following new section:

"SEC. 413. No insured institution shall make any federally related mortgage loan to any agent, trustee, nominee, or other person acting in a fiduciary capacity without the prior condition that the identity of the person receiving the beneficial interest of such loan shall at all times be revealed to the institution. At the request of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, the insured institution shall report to the Board on the identity of such person and the nature and amount of the loan." 12 USC 1730f.

(c) The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation or the Federal Home Loan Bank Board as appropriate may by regulation exempt classes or types of transactions from the provisions added by this section if the Corporation or the Board determines that the purposes of such provisions would not be advanced materially by their application to such transactions. 12 USC 1730f note.

FEE FOR PREPARATION OF TRUTH-IN-LENDING AND UNIFORM SETTLEMENT STATEMENTS

SEC. 12. No fee shall be imposed or charge made upon any other person (as a part of settlement costs or othewise) by a lender in connection with a federally related mortgage loan made by it (or a loan for the purchase of a mobile home), for or on account of the preparation and submission by such lender of the statement or statements required (in connection with such loan) by sections 4 and 6 of this Act or by the Truth in Lending Act. 12 USC 2610. 16 USC 1601 note.

ESTABLISHMENT ON DEMONSTRATION BASIS OF LAND PARCEL RECORDATION SYSTEM

12 USC 2611.

SEC. 13. The Secretary shall establish and place in operation on a demonstration basis, in representative political subdivisions (selected by him) in various areas of the United States, a model system or systems for the recordation of land title information in a manner and form calculated to facilitate and simplify land transfers and mortgage transactions and reduce the cost thereof, with a view to the possible development (utilizing the information and experience gained under this section) of a nationally uniform system of land parcel recordation.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY ON NECESSITY FOR FURTHER CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

Report to Congress.
12 USC 2612.

SEC. 14. (a) The Secretary, after consultation with the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, and after such study, investigation, and hearings (at which representatives of consumers groups shall be allowed to testify) as he deems appropriate, shall, not less than three years nor more than five years from the effective date of this Act, report to the Congress on whether, in view of the implementation of the provisions of this Act imposing certain requirements and prohibiting certain practices in connection with real estate settlements, there is any necessity for further legislation in this area.

Report to Congress.

(b) If the Secretary concludes that there is necessity for further legislation, he shall report to the Congress on the specific practices or problems that should be the subject of such legislation and the corrective measures that need to be taken. In addition, the Secretary shall include in his report—

(1) recommendations on the desirability of requiring lenders of federally related mortgage loans to bear the costs of particular real estate settlement services that would otherwise be paid for by borrowers;

(2) recommendations on whether Federal regulation of the charges for real estate settlement services in federally related mortgage transactions is necessary and desirable, and, if he concludes that such regulation is necessary and desirable, a description and analysis of the regulatory scheme he believes Congress should adopt; and

(3) recommendations on the ways in which the Federal Government can assist and encourage local governments to modernize their methods for the recordation of land title information, including the feasibility of providing financial assistance or incentives to local governments that seek to adopt one of the model systems developed by the Secretary in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of this Act.

DEMONSTRATION TO DETERMINE FEASIBILITY OF INCLUDING STATEMENTS OF SETTLEMENT COSTS IN SPECIAL INFORMATION BOOKLETS

12 USC 2613.

SEC. 15. The Secretary shall, on a demonstration basis in selected housing market areas, have prepared and included in the special information booklets required to be furnished under section 5 of this Act, statements of the range of costs for specific settlement services in such areas. Not later than June 30, 1976, the Secretary shall transmit to the Congress a full report on the demonstration conducted under this section. Such report shall contain the Secretary's assessment of the

Report to Congress.

feasibility of preparing and including settlement cost range statements for all housing market areas in the special information booklets for such areas.

JURISDICTION OF COURTS

SEC. 16. Any action to recover damages pursuant to the provisions of section 6, 8, or 9 may be brought in the United States district court for the district in which the property involved is located, or in any other court of competent jurisdiction, within one year from the date of the occurrence of the violation. 12 USC 2614.

VALIDITY OF CONTRACTS AND LIENS

SEC. 17. Nothing in this Act shall affect the validity or enforceability of any sale or contract for the sale of real property or any loan, loan agreement, mortgage, or lien made or arising in connection with a federally related mortgage loan. 12 USC 2615.

RELATION TO STATE LAWS

SEC. 18. (a) This Act does not annul, alter, or affect, or exempt any person subject to the provisions of this Act from complying with, the laws of any State with respect to settlement practices, except to the extent that those laws are inconsistent with any provision of this Act, and then only to the extent of the inconsistency. The Secretary is authorized to determine whether such inconsistencies exist. The Secretary may not determine that any State law is inconsistent with any provision of this Act if the Secretary determines that such law gives greater protection to the consumer. In making these determinations the Secretary shall consult with the appropriate Federal agencies. 12 USC 2616.

(b) No provision of this Act or of the laws of any State imposing any liability shall apply to any act done or omitted in good faith in conformity with any rule, regulation, or interpretation thereof by the Secretary, notwithstanding that after such act or omission has occurred, such rule, regulation, or interpretation is amended, rescinded, or determined by judicial or other authority to be invalid for any reason.

EFFECTIVE DATE

SEC. 19. The provisions of this Act, and the amendments made thereby, shall become effective one hundred and eighty days after the date of the enactment of this Act. 12 USC 2601 note.

Approved December 22, 1974.

Public Law 93-534

AN ACT

December 22, 1974 [H. R. 7072]

To allow advance payment of subscription charges for publication for official use prepared for auditory as well as visual usage.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Act of June 12, 1930 (46 Stat. 580, 31 U.S.C. 530a), as amended, is hereby amended by adding at the end thereof the following new section: Publications for official use. Advance payment. 31 USC 530b.

"SEC. 2. For the purposes of this Act, the term 'other publications' shall include any publication printed, microfilmed, photocopied, or magnetically or otherwise recorded for auditory or visual usage."

Approved December 22, 1974.