

Assembly Bill No. 491

CHAPTER 661

An act to amend Section 1936 of the Civil Code, relating to rental vehicles.

[Approved by Governor October 9, 2001. Filed with Secretary of State October 10, 2001.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 491, Frommer. Rental vehicles: passenger vehicles.

Existing law, scheduled to become operative on January 1, 2002, establishes definitions and restrictions governing the terms of rental agreements for passenger vehicles.

This bill would revise provisions governing a renter's liability for loss due to theft, a rental company's loss of use, or damage or loss to a rental vehicle, a renter's credit card liability, the submission of insurance claims, damage waivers and damage waiver fees, and notice to a renter regarding financial responsibility and optional damage waivers; and would add provisions thereto regulating the imposition of customer facility charges, as defined, and the disclosure of those charges in advertisements, quotations, or reservations, as specified.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 1936 of the Civil Code, as added by Section 2 of Chapter 992 of the Statutes of 1996, is amended to read:

1936. (a) For the purpose of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) "Rental company" means any person or entity in the business of renting passenger vehicles to the public.

(2) "Renter" means any person in any manner obligated under a contract for the lease or hire of a passenger vehicle from a rental company for a period of less than 30 days.

(3) "Authorized driver" means (A) the renter, (B) the renter's spouse if that person is a licensed driver and satisfies the rental company's minimum age requirement, (C) the renter's employer or coworker if they are engaged in business activity with the renter, are licensed drivers, and satisfy the rental company's minimum age requirement, and (D) any person expressly listed by the rental company on the renter's contract as an authorized driver.

(A) “Customer facility charge” means a fee required by an airport to be collected by a rental company from a renter for any of the following purposes:

(i) The fee shall be used to finance, design, and construct consolidated airport car rental facilities.

(ii) The fee shall be used to finance, design, construct, and provide common use transportation systems that move passengers between airport terminals and those consolidated car rental facilities.

(B) The aggregate amount to be collected shall not exceed the reasonable costs, as determined by an independent audit paid for by the airport, to finance, design, and construct those facilities. Copies of the audit shall be provided to the Assembly and Senate Committees on Judiciary and Committees on Transportation. In the case of a transportation system, the audit shall also consider the reasonable costs of providing the transit system or busing network. At the Burbank Airport, and at all other airports, the fees designated as a Customer Facility Charge may not be used to pay for terminal expansion, gate expansion, runway expansion, changes in hours of operation, or changes in the number of flights arriving or departing from the airport.

(C) The authorization given pursuant to this section for an airport to impose a customer facility charge shall become inoperative when the bonds used for financing are paid.

(5) “Damage waiver” means a rental company’s agreement not to hold a renter liable for all or any portion of any damage or loss related to the rented vehicle, any loss of use of the rented vehicle, or any storage, impound, towing, or administrative charges.

(6) “Estimated time for replacement” means the number of hours of labor, or fraction thereof, needed to replace damaged vehicle parts as set forth in collision damage estimating guides generally used in the vehicle repair business and commonly known as “crash books.”

(7) “Estimated time for repair” means a good faith estimate of the reasonable number of hours of labor, or fraction thereof, needed to repair damaged vehicle parts.

(8) “Passenger vehicle” means a passenger vehicle as defined in Section 465 of the Vehicle Code.

(b) Except as limited by subdivision (c), a rental company and a renter may agree that the renter will be responsible for no more than all of the following:

(1) Physical or mechanical damage to the rented vehicle up to its fair market value, as determined in the customary market for the sale of that vehicle, resulting from collision regardless of the cause of the damage.

(2) Loss due to theft of the rented vehicle up to its fair market value, as determined in the customary market for the sale of that vehicle,



provided that the rental company establishes by clear and convincing evidence that the renter or the authorized driver failed to exercise ordinary care while in possession of the vehicle. In addition, the renter shall be presumed to have no liability for any loss due to theft if (A) an authorized driver has possession of the ignition key furnished by the rental company or an authorized driver establishes that the ignition key furnished by the rental company was not in the vehicle at the time of the theft, and (B) an authorized driver files an official report of the theft with the police or other law enforcement agency within 24 hours of learning of the theft and reasonably cooperates with the rental company and the police or other law enforcement agency in providing information concerning the theft. The presumption set forth in this paragraph is a presumption affecting the burden of proof which the rental company may rebut by establishing that an authorized driver committed, or aided and abetted the commission of, the theft.

(3) Physical damage to the rented vehicle up to its fair market value, as determined in the customary market for the sale of that vehicle, resulting from vandalism occurring after, or in connection with, the theft of the rented vehicle; however, the renter shall have no liability for any damage due to vandalism if the renter would have no liability for theft pursuant to paragraph (2).

(4) Physical damage to the rented vehicle up to a total of five hundred dollars (\$500) resulting from vandalism unrelated to the theft of the rented vehicle.

(5) Actual charges for towing, storage, and impound fees paid by the rental company if the renter is liable for damage or loss.

(6) An administrative charge which shall include the cost of appraisal and all other costs and expenses incident to the damage, loss, repair, or replacement of the rented vehicle.

(c) The total amount of the renter's liability to the rental company resulting from damage to the rented vehicle shall not exceed the sum of the following:

(1) The estimated cost of parts which the rental company would have to pay to replace damaged vehicle parts. All discounts and price reductions or adjustments that are or will be received by the rental company shall be subtracted from the estimate to the extent not already incorporated in the estimate or otherwise promptly credited or refunded to the renter.

(2) The estimated cost of labor to replace damaged vehicle parts which shall not exceed the product of (A) the rate for labor usually paid by the rental company to replace vehicle parts of the type that were damaged and (B) the estimated time for replacement. All discounts and price reductions or adjustments that are or will be received by the rental



company shall be subtracted from the estimate to the extent not already incorporated in the estimate or otherwise promptly credited or refunded to the renter.

(3) (A) The estimated cost of labor to repair damaged vehicle parts which shall not exceed the lesser of the following:

(i) The product of the rate for labor usually paid by the rental company to repair vehicle parts of the type that were damaged and the estimated time for repair.

(ii) The sum of the estimated labor and parts costs determined under paragraphs (1) and (2) to replace the same vehicle parts.

(B) All discounts and price reductions or adjustments that are or will be received by the rental company shall be subtracted from the estimate to the extent not already incorporated in the estimate or otherwise promptly credited or refunded to the renter.

(4) For the purpose of converting the estimated time for repair into the same units of time in which the rental rate is expressed, a day shall be deemed to consist of eight hours.

(5) Actual charges for towing, storage, and impound fees paid by the rental company.

(6) The administrative charge described in paragraph (6) of subdivision (b) shall not exceed (A) fifty dollars (\$50) if the total estimated cost for parts and labor is more than one hundred dollars (\$100) up to and including five hundred dollars (\$500), (B) one hundred dollars (\$100) if the total estimated cost for parts and labor exceeds five hundred dollars (\$500) up to and including one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500), and (C) one hundred fifty dollars (\$150) if the total estimated cost for parts and labor exceeds one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500). No administrative charge shall be imposed if the total estimated cost of parts and labor is one hundred dollars (\$100) or less.

(d) (1) The total amount of an authorized driver's liability to the rental company, if any, for damage occurring during the authorized driver's operation of the rented vehicle shall not exceed the amount of the renter's liability under subdivision (c).

(2) A rental company shall not recover from the renter or other authorized driver an amount exceeding the renter's liability under subdivision (c).

(3) A claim against a renter resulting from damage or loss, excluding loss of use, to a rental vehicle shall be reasonably and rationally related to the actual loss incurred. A rental company shall mitigate damages where possible and may not assert or collect any claim for physical damage which exceeds the actual costs of the repairs performed or the estimated cost of repairs, if the rental company chooses not to repair the vehicle, including all discounts and price reductions. However, if the



vehicle is a total loss vehicle, the claim shall not exceed the total loss vehicle value established in accordance with procedures that are customarily used by insurance companies when paying claims on total loss vehicles, less the proceeds from salvaging the vehicle, if those proceeds are retained by the rental company.

(4) If insurance coverage exists under the renter's applicable personal or business insurance policy and the coverage is confirmed during regular business hours, the renter may require that the rental company submit any claims to the renter's applicable personal or business insurance carrier. The rental company shall not make any written or oral representations that it will not present claims or negotiate with the renter's insurance carrier. For purposes of this paragraph, confirmation of coverage includes telephone confirmation from insurance company representatives during regular business hours. Upon request of the renter and after confirmation of coverage, the amount of claim shall be resolved between the insurance carrier and the rental company. The renter shall remain responsible for payment to the rental car company for any loss sustained that the renter's applicable personal or business insurance policy does not cover.

(5) A rental company shall not recover from the renter or other authorized driver for any item described in subdivision (b) to the extent the rental company obtains recovery from any other person.

(6) This section applies only to the maximum liability of a renter or other authorized driver to the rental company resulting from damage to the rented vehicle and not to the liability of any other person.

(e) (1) Except as provided in subdivision (f), every damage waiver shall provide or, if not expressly stated in writing, shall be deemed to provide that the renter has no liability for any damage, loss, loss of use, or any cost or expense incident thereto.

(2) Except as provided in subdivision (f), every limitation, exception, or exclusion to any damage waiver is void and unenforceable.

(f) A rental company may provide in the rental contract that a damage waiver does not apply under any of the following circumstances:

(1) Damage or loss results from an authorized driver's (A) intentional, willful, wanton, or reckless conduct, (B) operation of the vehicle under the influence of drugs or alcohol in violation of Section 23152 of the Vehicle Code, (C) towing or pushing anything, or (D) operation of the vehicle on an unpaved road if the damage or loss is a direct result of the road or driving conditions.

(2) Damage or loss occurs while the vehicle is (A) used for commercial hire, (B) used in connection with conduct that could be properly charged as a felony, (C) involved in a speed test or contest or



in driver training activity, (D) operated by a person other than an authorized driver, or (E) operated outside of the United States.

(3) Any authorized driver who has (A) provided fraudulent information to the rental company, or (B) provided false information and the rental company would not have rented the vehicle if it had instead received true information.

(g) (1) A rental company which offers or provides a damage waiver for any consideration in addition to the rental rate shall clearly and conspicuously disclose the following information in the rental contract or holder in which the contract is placed and, also, in signs posted at the place, such as the counter, where the renter signs the rental contract: (A) the nature of the renter's liability, e.g., liability for all collision damage regardless of cause, (B) the extent of the renter's liability, e.g., liability for damage or loss up to a specified amount, (C) the renter's personal insurance policy or the credit card used to pay for the car rental transaction may provide coverage for all or a portion of the renter's potential liability, (D) the renter should consult with his or her insurer to determine the scope of insurance coverage, including the amount of the deductible, if any, for which the renter is obligated, (E) the renter may purchase an optional damage waiver to cover all liability, subject to whatever exceptions the rental company expressly lists that are permitted under subdivision (f), and (F) the range of charges for the damage waiver.

(2) In addition to the requirements of paragraph (1), a rental company that offers or provides damage waiver shall, on that part of the contract where the renter indicates his or her acceptance or declination of the damage waiver, indicate that the purchase of the damage waiver is optional.

(3) The following is an example, for purposes of illustration and not limitation, of a notice fulfilling the requirements of paragraph (1) for a rental company that imposes liability on the renter for collision damage to the full value of the vehicle:

NOTICE ABOUT YOUR FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND OPTIONAL DAMAGE WAIVER

You are responsible for all collision damage to the rented vehicle even if someone else caused it or the cause is unknown. You are responsible for the cost of repair up to the value of the vehicle, and towing, storage, and impound fees.

Your own insurance, or the issuer of the credit card you use to pay for the car rental transaction, may cover all or part of your financial responsibility for the rented vehicle. You should check with your



insurance company, or credit card issuer, to find out about your coverage and the amount of the deductible, if any, for which you may be liable.

Further, if you use a credit card that provides coverage for your potential liability, you should check with the issuer to determine if you must first exhaust the coverage limits of your own insurance before the credit card coverage applies.

The rental company will not hold you responsible if you buy a damage waiver. But a damage waiver will not protect you if (list exceptions).

(A) When the above notice is printed in the contract or contractholder, the following shall be printed immediately following the notice:

“The cost of an optional damage waiver is \$ ____ for every (day or week).”

(B) When the above notice appears on a sign, the following shall appear immediately adjacent to the notice:

“The cost of an optional damage waiver is \$ ____ to \$ ____ for every (day or week), depending upon the vehicle rented.”

(h) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a rental company may sell a damage waiver subject to the following rate limitations for each full or partial 24-hour rental day for the damage waiver.

(1) For rental vehicles that the rental company designates as an “economy car,” “subcompact car,” “compact car,” or any other term having similar meaning when offered for rental, or any other vehicle having a manufacturer’s suggested retail price of nineteen thousand dollars (\$19,000) or less, the rate may not exceed nine dollars (\$9).

(2) For rental vehicles that have a manufacturer’s suggested retail price from nineteen thousand one dollars (\$19,001) to thirty-four thousand nine hundred ninety-nine dollars (\$34,999), inclusive, and that is also either a vehicle of the next year’s model year or not older than the previous year’s model year, the rate may not exceed fifteen dollars (\$15). For those rental vehicles older than the previous year’s model year, the rate may not exceed nine dollars (\$9).

(i) On or after January 1, 2003, the manufacturer’s suggested retail prices described in subdivision (h) shall be adjusted annually to reflect changes from the previous year in the Consumer Price Index. For the purposes of this section, “Consumer Price Index” means the United States Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, for all items.

(j) A rental company which disseminates in this state an advertisement containing a rental rate shall include in that advertisement a clearly readable statement of the charge for damage waiver and a statement that damage waiver is optional.

(k) (1) A rental company shall not require the purchase of a damage waiver, optional insurance, or any other optional good or service.



(2) A rental company shall not engage in any unfair, deceptive, or coercive conduct to induce a renter to purchase damage waiver, optional insurance, or any other optional good or service, including conduct such as, but not limited to, refusing to honor the renter's reservation, limiting the availability of vehicles, requiring a deposit, or debiting or blocking the renter's credit card account for a sum equivalent to a deposit if the renter declines to purchase damage waiver, optional insurance, or any other optional good or service.

(l) (1) In the absence of express permission granted by the renter subsequent to damage to, or loss of, the vehicle, a rental company shall not seek to recover any portion of any claim arising out of damage to, or loss of, the rented vehicle by processing a credit card charge or causing any debit or block to be placed on the renter's credit card account.

(2) A rental company shall not engage in any unfair, deceptive, or coercive tactics in attempting to recover or in recovering on any claim arising out of damage to, or loss of, the rented vehicle.

(m) (1) A customer facility charge may be collected by a rental company under the following circumstances:

(A) Collection of the fee by the rental company is required by an airport operated by a city, a county, a city and county, a joint powers authority, or a special district.

(B) The fee is calculated on a per-contract basis.

(C) The fee is a user fee, not a tax imposed upon real property or an incidence of property ownership under Article XIII D of the California Constitution.

(D) Except as otherwise provided in subparagraph (E), the fee shall be ten dollars (\$10) per contract.

(E) If the fee imposed by the airport is for both a consolidated rental car facility and a common use transportation system, the fee collected from customers of on-airport rental car companies shall be ten dollars (\$10), but the fee imposed on customers of off-airport rental car companies who are transported on the common use transportation system is proportionate to the costs of the common use transportation system only. The fee is uniformly applied to each class of on-airport or off-airport customers, provided the airport requires off-airport customers to use the common use transportation system.

(F) Revenues collected from the fee do not exceed the reasonable costs of financing, designing, constructing, or operating the facility or services and may not be used for any other purpose.

(G) The fee is separately identified on the rental agreement.

(H) This paragraph does not apply to airports whose fees are governed by Section 1936.5 of the Civil Code, Section 50474.1 of the Government Code, or Section 57.5 of the San Diego Unified Port District Act.



(2) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, including, but not limited to, Part 1 (commencing with Section 6001) to Part 1.7 (commencing with Section 7280), inclusive, of Division 2 of the Revenue and Taxation Code, the fees collected pursuant to this section, or any other law whereby a local agency operating an airport requires a rental car company to collect a facility financing fee from its customers, shall not be subject to sales, use, or transaction taxes.

(n) (1) A rental company shall only advertise, quote, and charge a rental rate that includes the entire amount except taxes, a customer facility charge, if any, and a mileage charge, if any, which a renter must pay to hire or lease the vehicle for the period of time to which the rental rate applies. A rental company shall not charge in addition to the rental rate, taxes, a customer facility charge, if any, and a mileage charge, if any, any fee which must be paid by the renter as a condition of hiring or leasing the vehicle, such as, but not limited to, required fuel or airport surcharges other than customer facility charges, nor any fee for transporting the renter to the location where the rented vehicle will be delivered to the renter.

(2) In addition to the rental rate, taxes, customer facility charges, if any, and mileage charges, if any, a rental company may charge for an item or service provided in connection with a particular rental transaction if the renter could have avoided incurring the charge by choosing not to obtain or utilize the optional item or service. Items and services for which the rental company may impose an additional charge, include, but are not limited to, optional insurance and accessories requested by the renter, service charges incident to the renter's optional return of the vehicle to a location other than the location where the vehicle was hired or leased, and charges for refueling the vehicle at the conclusion of the rental transaction in the event the renter did not return the vehicle with as much fuel as was in the fuel tank at the beginning of the rental. A rental company also may impose an additional charge based on reasonable age criteria established by the rental company.

(3) A rental company shall not charge any fee for authorized drivers in addition to the rental charge for an individual renter.

(4) If a rental company states a rental rate in print advertisement or in a telephonic, in-person, or computer-transmitted quotation, the rental company shall clearly disclose in that advertisement or quotation the terms of any mileage conditions relating to the advertised or quoted rental rate, including, but not limited to, to the extent applicable, the amount of mileage and gas charges, the number of miles for which no charges will be imposed, and a description of geographic driving limitations within the United States and Canada.



(5) (A) When a rental rate is stated in an advertisement, quotation, or reservation in connection with a car rental at an airport where a customer facility charge is imposed, the rental company shall clearly disclose the existence and amount of the customer facility charge. For the purposes of this subparagraph, advertisements include radio, television, other electronic media, and print advertisements. For purposes of this subparagraph, quotations and reservations include those that are telephonic, in-person, and computer-transmitted. If the rate advertisement is intended to include transactions at more than one airport imposing a customer facility charge, a range of fees may be stated in the advertisement. However, all rate advertisements that include car rentals at airport destinations shall clearly and conspicuously include a toll-free telephone number whereby a customer can be told the specific amount of the customer facility charge to which the customer will be obligated.

(B) If any person or entity other than a rental car company, including a passenger carrier or a seller of travel services, advertises or quotes a rate for a car rental at an airport where a customer facility charge is imposed, that person or entity shall, provided they are provided with information about the existence and amount of the fee, to the extent not specifically prohibited by federal law, clearly disclose the existence and amount of the fee in any telephonic, in-person, or computer-transmitted quotation at the time of making an initial quotation of a rental rate and at the time of making a reservation of a rental car. If a rental car company provides the person or entity with rate and customer facility charge information, the rental car company shall not be responsible for the failure of that person or entity to comply with this subparagraph when quoting or confirming a rate to a third person or entity.

(6) If a rental company delivers a vehicle to a renter at a location other than the location where the rental company normally carries on its business, the rental company shall not charge the renter any amount for the rental for the period before the delivery of the vehicle. If a rental company picks up a rented vehicle from a renter at a location other than the location where the rental company normally carries on its business, the rental company shall not charge the renter any amount for the rental for the period after the renter notifies the rental company to pick up the vehicle.

(o) A renter may bring an action against a rental company for the recovery of damages and appropriate equitable relief for a violation of this section. The prevailing party shall be entitled to recover reasonable attorney's fees and costs.

(p) A rental company that brings an action against a renter for loss due to theft of the vehicle shall bring the action in the county in which the



renter resides or if the renter is not a resident of this state in the jurisdiction in which the renter resides.

(q) Any waiver of any of the provisions of this section shall be void and unenforceable as contrary to public policy.

(r) This section shall become operative on January 1, 2002.

O

