

House Bill 512

By: Representatives Watson of the 172nd, Holmes of the 129th, McCall of the 33rd, Mathis of the 144th, Dickey of the 140th, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 8 of Title 2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
2 agricultural commodities promotion, so as to provide for an Agricultural Commodity
3 Commission for Propane; to provide for definitions; to provide for composition and powers
4 and terms of office of the commission; to provide for representation of the commission by
5 the Attorney General of Georgia; to provide for funds to be held in trust; to provide for
6 bonding of those handling trust funds; to provide for liability of members and employees of
7 the commission; to provide for marketing orders and hearings regarding same; to provide for
8 referenda and items included in the referenda regarding the effectiveness of marketing
9 orders; to render unlawful certain activities regarding performance noncompliance or
10 violations of marketing orders; to provide for civil penalties and injunctive relief; to
11 authorize promulgation of regulations; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting
12 laws; and for other purposes.

13 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

14 style="text-align:center">**SECTION 1.**

15 Chapter 8 of Title 2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to agricultural
16 commodities promotion, is amended by adding a new article to read as follows:

17 style="text-align:center">"ARTICLE 6

18 2-8-200.

19 As used in this article, the term:

20 (1) 'Commission' means the Agricultural Commodity Commission for Propane created
21 under this article.

22 (2) 'Dealer' means any person to whom the office of the Commissioner of Insurance
23 issues a liquid propane license. The term shall not include any person who offers for

24 retail sale propane in containers of less than 50 pounds water capacity and whose
25 business does not involve the filling or transportation of such containers.

26 (3) 'Distributor' means any person engaged in the business of selling propane to a dealer
27 in the state.

28 (4) 'Marketing order' means an order issued pursuant to this article establishing an
29 assessment for financing the programs established under this article.

30 (5) 'Person' means an individual, sole proprietorship, partnership, limited partnership,
31 firm, corporation, limited liability company, association, or any other business entity, or
32 any combination thereof.

33 2-8-201.

34 The Agricultural Commodity Commission for Propane is hereby created. The commission
35 shall be organized and constituted, have corporate existence, possess powers and duties,
36 and be governed and controlled as provided in this article.

37 2-8-202.

38 (a) The commission shall be composed of:

39 (1) Three members elected by the House Committee on Agriculture and Consumer
40 Affairs with a quorum present and a majority of those present concurring, each of whom
41 shall be a dealer or distributor and shall not be a member of the General Assembly;

42 (2) Two members elected by the Senate Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee
43 with a quorum present and a majority of those present concurring, each of whom shall be
44 a dealer or distributor and shall not be a member of the General Assembly; and

45 (3) One member elected by a majority of the members of the commission as specified
46 in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this subsection, who shall be a dealer or distributor and shall
47 not be a member of the General Assembly.

48 (b) Vacancies in the membership of the commission shall be filled in the same manner as
49 that of the original election of such members. Any person selected to fill a vacancy shall
50 serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

51 (c) There shall be no compensation or reimbursement of expenses for members of the
52 commission.

53 (d) It shall be the duty of the commission to certify to the Secretary of State the
54 membership of the commission and each change in membership as the same occurs.

55 (e) The commission shall name its chairperson and determine a quorum for the transaction
56 of business.

57 2-8-203.

58 (a) The commission is authorized to appoint advisory boards, special committees, and
59 individuals, including technical and clerical personnel, to advise, aid, and assist the
60 commission in the performance of its duties. Compensation for such services shall be fixed
61 by the commission and shall be paid from the funds of the commission.

62 (b) The Attorney General shall represent the commission in legal matters and shall be the
63 attorney for the commission. If the Attorney General determines that outside legal counsel
64 is necessary or desirable in connection with any legal matter of the commission, he or she
65 shall so inform the commission and, upon approval of the commission, shall employ such
66 outside counsel. Compensation for such outside counsel shall be agreed upon between
67 such counsel and the Attorney General, subject to the approval of the commission. Such
68 compensation shall be paid from the funds of the commission. Neither Code
69 Section 16-10-9 nor any other law shall prohibit or be applicable to the employment of
70 such counsel.

71 (c) The commission is authorized to accept donations, gifts, and other property and to use
72 the same for commission purposes.

73 (d) The commission is authorized to acquire, lease as lessee, purchase, hold, own, and use
74 any franchise or real or personal property, whether tangible or intangible, or any interest
75 therein and, whenever the same is no longer required for purposes of the commission, to
76 sell, lease as lessor, transfer, or dispose thereof or exchange the same for other property or
77 rights which are useful for its purposes.

78 2-8-204.

79 The commission shall be a public corporation and an instrumentality of the State of
80 Georgia. By that name, style, and title, the commission may contract and be contracted
81 with, implead and be impleaded, and complain and defend in all courts. The commission
82 shall assume the duties and exercise the authority provided in this article without further
83 formality than that provided in this article. Each member of the commission shall be a
84 public officer and shall take an oath of office to faithfully perform his or her duties. Such
85 oath shall be administered by the Governor or some other person qualified to administer
86 oaths.

87 2-8-205.

88 The commission is authorized, and it shall be its duty to receive, collect, and disburse the
89 funds of the commission.

90 2-8-206.

91 Funds received by the commission under this article shall be held in trust for the
92 commission. Such funds shall be deposited, accounted for, and disbursed in the same
93 manner as that of the funds of this state but shall not be required to be deposited in the state
94 treasury and appropriated therefrom. It is the express intent and purpose of this article to
95 authorize the receipt, collection, and disbursement by the commission of such funds as trust
96 funds of the commission without complying with the requirement applicable to funds
97 collected for the use and benefit of the state.

98 2-8-207.

99 Any persons who handle funds under this article shall be bonded with good and sufficient
100 surety in an amount determined by the commission for the accounting of such funds. All
101 checks, drafts, and negotiable instruments which are drawn on or payable from the funds
102 of the commission shall be signed by the chairperson of the commission.

103 2-8-208.

104 The members and employees of the commission shall not be held individually responsible
105 to any dealer or distributor or to any other person for errors in judgment, mistakes, or other
106 acts as principal, agent, person, or employee, except for their own individual acts of
107 dishonesty or crime. No such member, person, or employee shall be held individually
108 responsible for any act or omission of any other member of the commission. The liability
109 of the members of the commission shall be several and not joint, and no member shall be
110 liable for the default of any other member.

111 2-8-209.

112 (a) The commission is authorized to issue, administer, and enforce marketing orders.

113 (b)(1) Whenever the commission has reason to believe that the issuance of a marketing
114 order will tend to effectuate the declared policy of this article with respect to propane, it
115 shall give due notice of and an opportunity for a public hearing thereon.

116 (2) Notice of any hearing called for such purpose shall be given by the commission by
117 publishing a notice of such hearing for a period of not less than five days in a newspaper
118 of general circulation published in the City of Atlanta and in such other newspapers as
119 the commission may prescribe. No such public hearing shall be held prior to five days
120 after the last day of such period of publication. The commission shall also mail a copy
121 or communicate electronically such notice of hearing and a copy of such proposed
122 marketing order or proposed amendments to all dealers and distributors of propane whose
123 names and addresses are on file with the commission. Such notice of hearing shall in all

124 respects comply with the requirements of Chapter 13 of Title 50, the 'Georgia
 125 Administrative Procedure Act.'

126 (3) The hearing shall be public, and all testimony shall be received under oath. A full
 127 and complete record of the proceedings at such hearing shall be made and maintained on
 128 file in the office of the commission. The hearing shall, in all respects, be conducted in
 129 accordance with Chapter 13 of Title 50, the 'Georgia Administrative Procedure Act.' The
 130 hearing may be conducted by the commission or by a member of the commission, as may
 131 be designated by the commission in each instance, but no decision shall be made based
 132 on hearings conducted other than by the commission itself, at which a majority of the
 133 members thereof are present, until the members of the commission have been afforded
 134 an opportunity to review the hearing record. When the commission conducts hearings,
 135 its recommendation shall be based on the findings reached after a review of the record
 136 of such hearings.

137 2-8-210.

138 If, upon the basis of the record of testimony and documentary evidence received at the
 139 hearing as provided for in Code Section 2-8-209 and the facts officially noticed therein
 140 from official publications or institutions of recognized standing, the commission
 141 determines that the issuance of a marketing order will tend to effectuate the intent and
 142 purpose of this article, it may recommend the promulgation of a marketing order with
 143 respect to the matters specified in the hearing notice and supported by the record; such
 144 order shall account for provisions to promote propane education, training, safety
 145 compliance, equipment replacement for low-income customers, marketing, advertising,
 146 promotion, and customer rebates to encourage energy-efficient appliance and equipment
 147 purchases by residential, commercial, industrial, motor fuel or agricultural consumers. No
 148 funds collected pursuant to this article shall be used in any manner for lobbying or for
 149 influencing state or federal legislation. No more than 10 percent of the funds collected and
 150 no less than the actual administrative expense pursuant to this article shall be used for
 151 administrative expenses relating to the expenditure of the funds. The commission may
 152 advance costs of conducting referenda pursuant to this article and reimburse those costs
 153 from the assessment funds.

154 2-8-211.

155 (a)(1) No marketing order issued pursuant to this article shall be made effective by the
 156 commission until a referendum thereon is held.

157 (2) The commission shall determine:

158 (A) The amount of the proposed assessment established by the marketing order;

- 159 (B) The time and place of the referendum;
 160 (C) Procedures for conducting the referendum and the counting of votes;
 161 (D) The proposed effective date for the imposition of the assessment established by the
 162 marketing order, which shall be no be less than 90 days from the date the referendum
 163 ballot is required to be returned to the commission in order to be considered on the
 164 question presented; and
 165 (E) Any other matters pertaining to the referendum.
- 166 (b) The amount of the proposed assessment established by the marketing order shall be
 167 stated on the referendum ballot. The amount may not exceed four-tenths of one cent for
 168 each gallon of propane sold in this state by distributors to dealers.
- 169 (c) All dealers may vote in the referendum. Each dealer shall have one vote. Any dispute
 170 over eligibility to vote or any other matter relating to the referendum shall be resolved by
 171 the commission. The commission shall make reasonable efforts to provide all dealers with
 172 notice of the referendum and an opportunity to vote.
- 173 (d) A proposed assessment shall become effective if more than 50 percent of the eligible
 174 dealers in the state vote and more than 50 percent of the eligible votes cast by the dealers
 175 are cast in favor of the assessment. If the assessment is approved by the referendum, then
 176 the commission shall notify the department of the amount and the effective date of the
 177 assessment. The department shall notify all dealers of the assessment.
- 178 (e)(1) Each distributor, as the owner of propane at the time of odorization, or at the time
 179 of import of odorized propane, shall make the assessment based on the volume of
 180 odorized propane sold in this state and placed in commerce in this state.
- 181 (2) Each distributor shall collect the assessment from the dealer to whom the sale is made
 182 and shall remit to the commission the sum of the amount of the assessment multiplied by
 183 the number of gallons of propane sold to any dealer during the assessment period.
- 184 (f) A distributor shall keep records of the number of gallons of propane sold to dealers.
 185 All documents or records regarding purchases and sales shall be made available to the
 186 commission upon its written request for the purpose of determining the distributor's
 187 compliance with the provisions of this article. The commission shall keep the records
 188 confidential and shall not disclose the records except to its accountants, attorneys, or
 189 financial advisors without a court order directing it to do so.
- 190 2-8-212.
 191 A dealer can opt out of this article only once per year between September 1 and
 192 September 30. Any dealer who opts out of this article in accordance with this subsection
 193 shall not be eligible to receive the benefit of any marketing order for a period of one year

194 following the date of his or her request to opt out under this Code section and shall not be
195 entitled to the payment of any interest by the commission on the amount refunded.

196 2-8-213.

197 A referendum shall be held once every five years to vote on the continuation of the
198 commission. For the results to be valid, at least 50 percent of the eligible dealers in this
199 state must vote, and if more than 50 percent of the dealers voting vote in favor of
200 continuing the commission, then the commission will continue for another five years.

201 2-8-214.

202 (a) Any assessment established in accordance with this article shall constitute a personal
203 debt of every person so assessed and shall be due and payable to the commission when
204 payment is called for by the commission. If such person fails to pay any such assessment,
205 the commission may file an action against such person in a court of competent jurisdiction
206 for the collection thereof.

207 (b) In the event that any person duly assessed pursuant to this article fails to pay to the
208 commission the amount so assessed, the commission shall be authorized to add to such
209 unpaid assessment an amount not exceeding 10 percent of such unpaid assessment to
210 defray the cost of enforcing the collection of the unpaid assessment.

211 (c) The provisions of this Code section shall be cumulative, and any other remedies may
212 be pursued concurrently until satisfaction is obtained. Any penalty recovered shall become
213 a part of the principal assessment levied and shall be for the use of the commission.

214 2-8-215.

215 (a) Any person who violates any provision of this article or any marketing order duly
216 issued and effective under this article shall be civilly liable to the commission for a penalty
217 in an amount not to exceed \$500.00 for each and every violation thereof, the amount of
218 such penalty to be fixed by the commission after notice and hearing as provided by
219 Chapter 13 of Title 50, the 'Georgia Administrative Procedure Act,' for contested cases and
220 recoverable by a civil action brought in the name of the commission. Any moneys
221 recovered pursuant to this Code section shall be applied for the use of the commission.

222 2-8-216.

223 (a) The Attorney General of this state shall, upon complaint by the commission, or may,
224 after examining the complaint and the evidence and believing that a violation has occurred,
225 bring an action in the superior court in the name of the commission for civil penalties or

226 for injunctive relief, including the specific performance of any marketing order duly issued
227 by the commission under this article.

228 (b) If there is an application for a preliminary injunction, a hearing of any order to show
229 cause why such injunction should not be issued, or a hearing of any motion for a
230 preliminary injunction suggesting that, or if the court finds in any such action that a
231 defendant therein is violating or has violated any provision of this article or of any
232 marketing order duly issued by the commission under this article, then the court shall
233 enjoin the defendant from committing further violations and may compel specific
234 performance of any obligation imposed by a marketing order issued by the commission
235 under this article. It shall not be necessary in such event to allege or prove lack of an
236 adequate remedy at law.

237 (c) In any action brought by the Attorney General to enforce any of the provisions of this
238 article or of any marketing order issued by the commission and effective under this article
239 or of any rule or regulation issued by the commission pursuant to any marketing order, a
240 judgment in favor of the commission may provide that the defendant pay the commission
241 the costs it incurred in the prosecution of such action.

242 2-8-217.

243 (a) The commission on its own motion or upon the complaint of any interested party may
244 refer to the Attorney General of this state or to any prosecuting attorney of this state any
245 charges of a violation of any provision of this article or of any marketing order or any rule
246 or regulation issued by the commission and effective under this article for the institution
247 of legal proceedings thereupon or, if the commission deems it necessary or advisable,
248 immediately call an administrative hearing, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 13 of
249 Title 50, the 'Georgia Administrative Procedure Act,' governing contested cases, to
250 consider the charges set forth in such verified complaint.

251 (b) In case the matter is referred directly by the commission to the Attorney General or any
252 prosecuting attorney, it shall be the duty of such officer, if after examination of the
253 complaint and the evidence he or she believes that a violation has occurred, to bring an
254 appropriate action or actions in a court or courts of competent jurisdiction.

255 (c) After an administrative hearing, if the commission finds that a violation has occurred,
256 it shall enter its findings and notify the parties to such complaint. In its discretion, the
257 commission shall either refer the matter to the Attorney General for the institution of legal
258 proceedings or notify such parties to cease and desist from further violation. Upon the
259 refusal or failure of such parties to comply or if the commission finds that the facts or
260 circumstances warrant immediate prosecution, the commission shall file a complaint with
261 the Attorney General or with any prosecuting attorney of this state, requesting that such

262 officer commence any or all actions authorized in this article against such respondent or
263 respondents in a court of competent jurisdiction.

264 2-8-218.

265 (a) Any person who willfully renders or furnishes a false or fraudulent report, statement,
266 or record required pursuant to this article or any marketing order effective under this article
267 shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

268 (b) Any person who violates any provision of this article or any provision of any
269 marketing order duly issued by the commission under this article shall be guilty of a
270 misdemeanor.

271 (c) The penalties and remedies prescribed in this article with respect to any violation
272 mentioned shall be concurrent and alternative. Neither singly nor combined shall such
273 penalties and remedies be exclusive; rather, either singly or combined, such penalties and
274 remedies shall be cumulative with any and all other civil, criminal, or alternative rights,
275 remedies, forfeitures, or penalties provided or allowed by law with respect to any such
276 violation.

277 2-8-219.

278 The department shall promulgate rules for the administration and enforcement of this
279 article. The promulgation, adoption, and amendment of rules and regulations by the
280 commission shall be subject to the requirements of Chapter 13 of Title 50, the 'Georgia
281 Administrative Procedure Act'."

282 **SECTION 2.**

283 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.