**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 39‑5‑31 SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT IT IS AN UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICE FOR A LARGE MEDICAL PRACTICE TO ACQUIRE A SMALL MEDICAL PRACTICE BY COERCION.

Whereas, the doctor/patient relationship is one of the most important relationships one may maintain over the course of one’s lifetime; and

Whereas, at a small medical practice, the patient is better able to develop a relationship with his doctor, which ultimately leads to better, more personalized care; and

Whereas, the South Carolina General Assembly recognizes the importance of the vitality of small medical practices to our State and to its citizenry and seeks to protect them from undue influence. Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Article 1, Chapter 5, Title 39 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 39‑5‑31. (A) It is an unfair trade practice, pursuant to Section 39‑5‑20, for a large medical practice to acquire a small medical practice by coercion.

(B) For purposes of this section:

(1) ‘Large medical practice’ means a medical practice comprised of twenty or more physicians organized to provide patient care services, regardless of its legal form or ownership.

(2) ‘Small medical practice’ means a medical practice comprised of nineteen or fewer physicians organized to provide patient care services, regardless of its legal form or ownership.

(3) ‘Acquire’ means to gain possession of, whether through purchase or merger.

(4) ‘By coercion’ means by pressure, threat, or intimidation.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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