

TITLE 47 - TELEGRAPHS, TELEPHONES, AND RADIOTELEGRAPHS
CHAPTER 5 - WIRE OR RADIO COMMUNICATION
SUBCHAPTER V-A - CABLE COMMUNICATIONS
Part IV - Miscellaneous Provisions

§ 553. Unauthorized reception of cable service

(a) Unauthorized interception or receipt or assistance in intercepting or receiving service; “assist in intercepting or receiving” defined

(1) No person shall intercept or receive or assist in intercepting or receiving any communications service offered over a cable system, unless specifically authorized to do so by a cable operator or as may otherwise be specifically authorized by law.

(2) For the purpose of this section, the term “assist in intercepting or receiving” shall include the manufacture or distribution of equipment intended by the manufacturer or distributor (as the case may be) for unauthorized reception of any communications service offered over a cable system in violation of subparagraph (1).

(b) Penalties for willful violation

(1) Any person who willfully violates subsection (a)(1) of this section shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned for not more than 6 months, or both.

(2) Any person who violates subsection (a)(1) of this section willfully and for purposes of commercial advantage or private financial gain shall be fined not more than \$50,000 or imprisoned for not more than 2 years, or both, for the first such offense and shall be fined not more than \$100,000 or imprisoned for not more than 5 years, or both, for any subsequent offense.

(3) For purposes of all penalties and remedies established for violations of subsection (a)(1) of this section, the prohibited activity established herein as it applies to each such device shall be deemed a separate violation.

(c) Civil action in district court; injunctions; damages; attorney’s fees and costs; regulation by States or franchising authorities

(1) Any person aggrieved by any violation of subsection (a)(1) of this section may bring a civil action in a United States district court or in any other court of competent jurisdiction.

(2) The court may—

(A) grant temporary and final injunctions on such terms as it may deem reasonable to prevent or restrain violations of subsection (a)(1) of this section;

(B) award damages as described in paragraph (3); and

(C) direct the recovery of full costs, including awarding reasonable attorneys’ fees to an aggrieved party who prevails.

(3) (A) Damages awarded by any court under this section shall be computed in accordance with either of the following clauses:

(i) the party aggrieved may recover the actual damages suffered by him as a result of the violation and any profits of the violator that are attributable to the violation which are not taken into account in computing the actual damages; in determining the violator’s profits, the party aggrieved shall be required to prove only the violator’s gross revenue, and the violator shall be required to prove his deductible expenses and the elements of profit attributable to factors other than the violation; or

(ii) the party aggrieved may recover an award of statutory damages for all violations involved in the action, in a sum of not less than \$250 or more than \$10,000 as the court considers just.

(B) In any case in which the court finds that the violation was committed willfully and for purposes of commercial advantage or private financial gain, the court in its discretion may

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increase the award of damages, whether actual or statutory under subparagraph (A), by an amount of not more than \$50,000.

(C) In any case where the court finds that the violator was not aware and had no reason to believe that his acts constituted a violation of this section, the court in its discretion may reduce the award of damages to a sum of not less than \$100.

(D) Nothing in this subchapter shall prevent any State or franchising authority from enacting or enforcing laws, consistent with this section, regarding the unauthorized interception or reception of any cable service or other communications service.

(June 19, 1934, ch. 652, title VI, § 633, as added Pub. L. 98-549, § 2, Oct. 30, 1984, 98 Stat. 2796; amended Pub. L. 102-385, § 21, Oct. 5, 1992, 106 Stat. 1498.)

Amendments

1992—Subsec. (b)(2). Pub. L. 102-385, § 21(1), substituted “\$50,000” for “\$25,000”, “2 years” for “1 year”, “\$100,000” for “\$50,000”, and “5 years” for “2 years”.

Subsec. (b)(3). Pub. L. 102-385, § 21(2), added par. (3).

Effective Date of 1992 Amendment

Amendment by Pub. L. 102-385 effective 60 days after Oct. 5, 1992, see section 28 of Pub. L. 102-385, set out as a note under section 325 of this title.

Effective Date

Section effective 60 days after Oct. 30, 1984, except where otherwise expressly provided, see section 9(a) of Pub. L. 98-549, set out as a note under section 521 of this title.