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H.152

Introduced by Representatives LaLonde of South Burlington and Botzow of

Pownal

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Decedents' estates and fiduciary relations; Vermont Revised Uniform

Fiduciary Access to Digital Assets Act

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to enact the

Vermont Revised Uniform Fiduciary Access to Digital Assets Act.

An act relating to the Vermont Revised Uniform Fiduciary Access to Digital
Assets Act

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 14 V.S.A. chapter 125 is added to read:

CHAPTER 125. VERMONT REVISED UNIFORM FIDUCIARY

ACCESS TO DIGITAL ASSETS ACT

§ 3551. SHORT TITLE

This chapter may be cited as the Vermont Revised Uniform Fiduciary

Access to Digital Assets Act.

§ 3552. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

1 (1) “Account” means an arrangement under a terms-of-service
2 agreement in which a custodian carries, maintains, processes, receives, or
3 stores a digital asset of the user or provides goods or services to the user.

4 (2) “Agent” means an attorney-in-fact granted authority under a durable
5 or nondurable power of attorney.

6 (3) “Carries” means engages in the transmission of an electronic
7 communication.

8 (4) “Catalogue of electronic communications” means information that
9 identifies each person with whom a user has had an electronic communication,
10 the time and date of the communication, and the electronic address of the
11 person.

12 (5) “Content of an electronic communication” means information
13 concerning the substance or meaning of a communication that:

14 (A) has been sent or received by a user;

15 (B) is in electronic storage by a custodian providing an electronic-
16 communication service to the public or is carried or maintained by a custodian
17 providing a remote-computing service to the public; and

18 (C) is not readily accessible to the public.

19 (6) “Court” means the Probate Division of the Superior Court of
20 Vermont.

21 (7) “Custodian” means a person who carries, maintains, processes,

1 receives, or stores a digital asset of a user.

2 (8) “Designated recipient” means a person chosen by a user using an
3 online tool to administer digital assets of the user.

4 (9) “Digital asset” means an electronic record in which an individual has
5 a right or interest. The term does not include an underlying asset or liability
6 unless the asset or liability is itself an electronic record.

7 (10) “Electronic” means relating to technology having electrical, digital,
8 magnetic, wireless, optical, electromagnetic, or similar capabilities.

9 (11) “Electronic communication” has the same meaning as in 18 U.S.C.
10 § 2510(12).

11 (12) “Electronic-communication service” means a custodian who
12 provides to a user the ability to send or receive an electronic communication.

13 (13) “Fiduciary” means an original, additional, or successor personal
14 representative, guardian, agent, or trustee.

15 (14) “Guardian” means a person appointed by a court to manage the
16 estate of a living individual. The term includes a limited guardian.

17 (15) “Information” means data, text, images, videos, sounds, codes,
18 computer programs, software, databases, or the like.

19 (16) “Online tool” means an electronic service provided by a custodian
20 that allows the user, in an agreement distinct from the terms-of-service
21 agreement between the custodian and user, to provide directions for disclosure

1 or nondisclosure of digital assets to a third person.

2 (17) "Person" means an individual, estate, business or nonprofit entity,
3 public corporation, government or governmental subdivision, agency, or
4 instrumentality, or other legal entity.

5 (18) "Person under guardianship" means an individual for whom a
6 guardian has been appointed. The term includes an individual for whom an
7 application for the appointment of a guardian is pending.

8 (19) "Personal representative" means an executor, administrator, or
9 special administrator, or a person who performs substantially the same
10 function as an executor, administrator, or special administrator under law of
11 this State other than this chapter.

12 (20) "Power of attorney" means a record that grants an agent authority
13 to act in the place of a principal.

14 (21) "Principal" means an individual who grants authority to an agent in
15 a power of attorney.

16 (22) "Record" means information that is inscribed on a tangible medium
17 or that is stored in an electronic or other medium and is retrievable in
18 perceivable form.

19 (23) "Remote-computing service" means a custodian who provides a
20 user with computer-processing services or the storage of digital assets by
21 means of an electronic communications system as defined in 18 U.S.C.

1 § 2510(14).

2 (24) “Terms-of-service agreement” means an agreement that controls
3 the relationship between a user and a custodian.

4 (25) “Trustee” means a fiduciary with legal title to property under an
5 agreement or declaration that creates a beneficial interest in another. The term
6 includes a successor trustee.

7 (26) “User” means a person who has an account with a custodian.

8 (27) “Will” includes a codicil, testamentary instrument that only
9 appoints an executor, and an instrument that revokes or revises a testamentary
10 instrument.

11 § 3553. APPLICABILITY

12 (a) This chapter applies to:

13 (1) a fiduciary acting under a will or power of attorney executed before,
14 on, or after the effective date of this chapter;

15 (2) a personal representative acting for a decedent who died before, on,
16 or after the effective date of this chapter;

17 (3) a guardianship proceeding commenced before, on, or after the
18 effective date of this chapter; and

19 (4) a trustee acting under a trust created before, on, or after the effective
20 date of this chapter.

21 (b) This chapter applies to a custodian if the user resides in this State or

1 resided in this State at the time of the user's death.

2 (c) This chapter does not apply to a digital asset of an employer used by an
3 employee in the ordinary course of the employer's business.

4 § 3554. USER DIRECTION FOR DISCLOSURE OF DIGITAL ASSETS

5 (a) A user may use an online tool to direct the custodian to disclose to a
6 designated recipient or not to disclose some or all of the user's digital assets,
7 including the content of electronic communications. If the online tool allows
8 the user to modify or delete a direction at all times, a direction regarding
9 disclosure using an online tool overrides a contrary direction by the user in a
10 will, trust, power of attorney, or other record.

11 (b) If a user has not used an online tool to give direction under subsection
12 (a) of this section or if the custodian has not provided an online tool, the user
13 may allow or prohibit in a will, trust, power of attorney, or other record,
14 disclosure to a fiduciary of some or all of the user's digital assets, including
15 the content of electronic communications sent or received by the user.

16 (c) A user's direction under subsection (a) or (b) of this section overrides a
17 contrary provision in a terms-of-service agreement that does not require the
18 user to act affirmatively and distinctly from the user's assent to the terms of
19 service.

20 § 3555. TERMS-OF-SERVICE AGREEMENT

21 (a) This chapter does not change or impair a right of a custodian or a user

1 under a terms-of-service agreement to access and use digital assets of the user.

2 (b) This chapter does not give a fiduciary or designated recipient any new
3 or expanded rights other than those held by the user for whom, or for whose
4 estate, the fiduciary or designated recipient acts or represents.

5 (c) A fiduciary's or designated recipient's access to digital assets may be
6 modified or eliminated by a user, by federal law, or by a terms-of-service
7 agreement if the user has not provided direction under section 3554 of this
8 title.

9 § 3556. PROCEDURE FOR DISCLOSING DIGITAL ASSETS

10 (a) When disclosing digital assets of a user under this chapter, the
11 custodian may in its sole discretion:

12 (1) grant a fiduciary or designated recipient full access to the user's
13 account;

14 (2) grant a fiduciary or designated recipient partial access to the user's
15 account sufficient to perform the tasks with which the fiduciary or designated
16 recipient is charged; or

17 (3) provide a fiduciary or designated recipient a copy in a record of any
18 digital asset that, on the date the custodian received the request for disclosure,
19 the user could have accessed if the user were alive and had full capacity and
20 access to the account.

21 (b) A custodian may assess a reasonable administrative charge for the cost

1 of disclosing digital assets under this chapter.

2 (c) A custodian need not disclose under this chapter a digital asset deleted
3 by a user.

4 (d) If a user directs or a fiduciary requests a custodian to disclose under
5 this chapter some, but not all, of the user's digital assets, the custodian need
6 not disclose the assets if segregation of the assets would impose an undue
7 burden on the custodian. If the custodian believes the direction or request
8 imposes an undue burden, the custodian or fiduciary may seek an order from
9 the court to disclose:

10 (1) a subset limited by date of the user's digital assets;

11 (2) all of the user's digital assets to the fiduciary or designated recipient;

12 (3) none of the user's digital assets; or

13 (4) all of the user's digital assets to the court for review in camera.

14 § 3557. DISCLOSURE OF CONTENT OF ELECTRONIC

15 COMMUNICATIONS OF DECEASED USER

16 If a deceased user consented, or if a court directs disclosure of the contents
17 of electronic communications of the user, the custodian shall disclose to the
18 personal representative of the estate of the user the content of an electronic
19 communication sent or received by the user if the representative gives the
20 custodian:

21 (1) a written request for disclosure in physical or electronic form;

1 (2) a certified copy of the death certificate of the user;

2 (3) a certified copy of the certificate of appointment of a fiduciary;

3 (4) unless the user provided direction using an online tool, a copy of the
4 user's will, trust, power of attorney, or other record evidencing the user's
5 consent to disclosure of the content of electronic communications; and

6 (5) if requested by the custodian:

7 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
8 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the user's account;

9 (B) evidence linking the account to the user; or

10 (C) a finding by the court that:

11 (i) the user had a specific account with the custodian, identifiable
12 by the information specified in subdivision (A) of this subdivision (5);

13 (ii) disclosure of the content of electronic communications of the
14 user would not violate 18 U.S.C. § 2701 et seq., 47 U.S.C. § 222, or other
15 applicable law;

16 (iii) unless the user provided direction using an online tool, the
17 user consented to disclosure of the content of electronic communications; or

18 (iv) disclosure of the content of electronic communications of the
19 user is reasonably necessary for administration of the estate.

20 § 3558. DISCLOSURE OF OTHER DIGITAL ASSETS OF DECEASED

21 USER

1 Unless the user prohibited disclosure of digital assets or the court directs
2 otherwise, a custodian shall disclose to the personal representative of the estate
3 of a deceased user a catalogue of electronic communications sent or received
4 by the user, and digital assets of the user other than the content of electronic
5 communications, if the representative gives the custodian:

6 (1) a written request for disclosure in physical or electronic form;

7 (2) a certified copy of the death certificate of the user;

8 (3) a certified copy of the certificate of appointment of fiduciary; and

9 (4) if requested by the custodian:

10 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
11 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the user's account;

12 (B) evidence linking the account to the user;

13 (C) an affidavit stating that disclosure of the user's digital assets is
14 reasonably necessary for administration of the estate; or

15 (D) a finding by the court that:

16 (i) the user had a specific account with the custodian, identifiable
17 by the information specified in subdivision (A) of this subdivision (4); or

18 (ii) disclosure of the user's digital assets is reasonably necessary
19 for administration of the estate.

20 § 3559. DISCLOSURE OF CONTENT OF ELECTRONIC

21 COMMUNICATIONS OF PRINCIPAL

1 To the extent a power of attorney expressly grants an agent authority over
2 the content of electronic communications sent or received by the principal, and
3 unless directed otherwise by the principal or the court, a custodian shall
4 disclose the content of the electronic communication to the agent if the agent
5 gives the custodian:

6 (1) a written request for disclosure in physical or electronic form;

7 (2) an original or copy of the power of attorney expressly granting the
8 agent authority over the content of electronic communications of the principal;

9 (3) a certification by the agent, under penalty of perjury, that the power
10 of attorney is in effect; and

11 (4) if requested by the custodian:

12 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
13 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the principal's
14 account; or

15 (B) evidence linking the account to the principal.

16 § 3560. DISCLOSURE OF OTHER DIGITAL ASSETS OF PRINCIPAL

17 Unless otherwise ordered by the court, directed by the principal, or
18 provided by a power of attorney, a custodian shall disclose to an agent with
19 specific authority over digital assets or general authority to act on behalf of a
20 principal a catalogue of electronic communications sent or received by the
21 principal, and digital assets of the principal other than the content of electronic

1 communications, if the agent gives the custodian:

2 (1) a written request for disclosure in physical or electronic form;

3 (2) an original or a copy of the power of attorney that gives the agent
4 specific authority over digital assets or general authority to act on behalf of the
5 principal;

6 (3) a certification by the agent, under penalty of perjury, that the power
7 of attorney is in effect; and

8 (4) if requested by the custodian:

9 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
10 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the principal's
11 account; or

12 (B) evidence linking the account to the principal.

13 § 3561. DISCLOSURE OF DIGITAL ASSETS HELD IN TRUST WHEN
14 TRUSTEE IS ORIGINAL USER

15 Unless otherwise ordered by the court or provided in a trust, a custodian
16 shall disclose to a trustee that is an original user of an account any digital asset
17 of the account held in trust, including a catalogue of electronic
18 communications of the trustee and the content of electronic communications.

19 § 3562. DISCLOSURE OF CONTENTS OF ELECTRONIC

20 COMMUNICATIONS HELD IN TRUST WHEN TRUSTEE NOT
21 ORIGINAL USER

1 Unless otherwise ordered by the court, directed by the user, or provided in a
2 trust, a custodian shall disclose to a trustee that is not an original user of an
3 account the content of an electronic communication sent or received by an
4 original or successor user and carried, maintained, processed, received, or
5 stored by the custodian in the account of the trust, if the trustee gives the
6 custodian:

7 (1) a written request for disclosure in physical or electronic form;

8 (2) a certified copy of the trust instrument or a certification of the trust
9 under 14A V.S.A. § 1013 that includes consent to disclosure of the content of
10 electronic communications to the trustee;

11 (3) a certification by the trustee, under penalty of perjury, that the trust
12 exists and the trustee is a currently acting trustee of the trust; and

13 (4) if requested by the custodian:

14 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
15 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the trust's account; or

16 (B) evidence linking the account to the trust.

17 § 3563. DISCLOSURE OF OTHER DIGITAL ASSETS HELD IN TRUST

18 WHEN TRUSTEE NOT ORIGINAL USER

19 Unless otherwise ordered by the court, directed by the user, or provided in a
20 trust, a custodian shall disclose, to a trustee that is not an original user of an
21 account, a catalogue of electronic communications sent or received by an

1 original or successor user and stored, carried, or maintained by the custodian
2 in an account of the trust, and any digital assets other than the content of
3 electronic communications in which the trust has a right or interest, if the
4 trustee gives the custodian:

5 (1) a written request for disclosure in physical or electronic form;

6 (2) a certified copy of the trust instrument or a certification of the trust
7 under 14A V.S.A. § 1013;

8 (3) a certification by the trustee, under penalty of perjury, that the trust
9 exists and the trustee is a currently acting trustee of the trust; and

10 (4) if requested by the custodian:

11 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
12 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the trust's account; or

13 (B) evidence linking the account to the trust.

14 § 3564. DISCLOSURE OF DIGITAL ASSETS TO GUARDIAN OF

15 PERSON UNDER GUARDIANSHIP

16 (a) After an opportunity for a hearing under 14 V.S.A. § 3068, the court
17 may grant a guardian access to the digital assets of a person under
18 guardianship.

19 (b) Unless otherwise ordered by the court or directed by the user, a
20 custodian shall disclose to a guardian the catalogue of electronic
21 communications sent or received by a person under guardianship, and any

1 digital assets other than the content of electronic communications in which the
2 person under guardianship has a right or interest, if the guardian gives the
3 custodian:

4 (1) a written request for disclosure in physical or electronic form;

5 (2) a certified copy of the court order that gives the guardian authority
6 over the digital assets of the person under guardianship; and

7 (3) if requested by the custodian:

8 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
9 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the account of the
10 person under guardianship; or

11 (B) evidence linking the account to the person under guardianship.

12 (c) A guardian with general authority to manage the assets of a person
13 under guardianship may request a custodian of the digital assets of the person
14 under guardianship to suspend or terminate an account of the person under
15 guardianship for good cause. A request made under this section shall be
16 accompanied by a certified copy of the court order giving the guardian
17 authority over the protected person's property.

18 § 3565. FIDUCIARY DUTY AND AUTHORITY

19 (a) The legal duties imposed on a fiduciary charged with managing
20 tangible property apply to the management of digital assets, including:

21 (1) the duty of care;

1 (2) the duty of loyalty; and

2 (3) the duty of confidentiality.

3 (b) A fiduciary's or designated recipient's authority with respect to a digital
4 asset of a user:

5 (1) is subject to the applicable terms of service, except as otherwise
6 provided in section 3554 of this title;

7 (2) is subject to other applicable law, including copyright law;

8 (3) in the case of a fiduciary, is limited by the scope of the fiduciary's
9 duties; and

10 (4) shall not be used to impersonate the user.

11 (c) A fiduciary with authority over the property of a decedent, person
12 under guardianship, principal, or settlor has the right to access any digital asset
13 in which the decedent, person under guardianship, principal, or settlor had a
14 right or interest and that is not held by a custodian or subject to a terms-of-
15 service agreement.

16 (d) A fiduciary acting within the scope of the fiduciary's duties is an
17 authorized user of the property of the decedent, person under guardianship,
18 principal, or settlor for the purpose of applicable computer-fraud and
19 unauthorized-computer-access laws, including 13 V.S.A. § 4102.

20 (e) A fiduciary with authority over the tangible, personal property of a
21 decedent, person under guardianship, principal, or settlor:

1 (1) has the right to access the property and any digital asset stored in
2 it; and

3 (2) is an authorized user for the purpose of computer-fraud and
4 unauthorized-computer-access laws, including 13 V.S.A. § 4102.

5 (f) A custodian may disclose information in an account to a fiduciary of the
6 user when the information is required to terminate an account used to access
7 digital assets licensed to the user.

8 (g) A fiduciary of a user may request a custodian to terminate the user's
9 account. A request for termination shall be in writing, in either physical or
10 electronic form, and accompanied by:

11 (1) if the user is deceased, a certified copy of the death certificate of
12 the user;

13 (2) a certified copy of the certificate of appointment of fiduciary, court
14 order, power of attorney, or trust giving the fiduciary authority over the
15 account; and

16 (3) if requested by the custodian:

17 (A) a number, username, address, or other unique subscriber or
18 account identifier assigned by the custodian to identify the user's account;

19 (B) evidence linking the account to the user; or

20 (C) a finding by the court that the user had a specific account with
21 the custodian, identifiable by the information specified in subdivision (A) of

1 this subdivision (3).

2 § 3566. CUSTODIAN COMPLIANCE AND IMMUNITY

3 (a) Not later than 60 days after receipt of the information required by
4 sections 3557–3565 of this title, a custodian shall comply with a request under
5 this chapter from a fiduciary or designated recipient to disclose digital assets or
6 terminate an account. If the custodian fails to comply with the request, the
7 fiduciary or designated recipient may apply to the court for an order directing
8 compliance.

9 (b) An order under subsection (a) of this section directing compliance shall
10 contain a finding that compliance is not in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2702.

11 (c) A custodian may notify the user that a request for disclosure or to
12 terminate an account was made under this chapter.

13 (d) A custodian may deny a request under this chapter from a fiduciary or
14 designated recipient for disclosure of digital assets or to terminate an account
15 if the custodian is aware of any lawful access to the account following the
16 receipt of the fiduciary’s request.

17 (e) This chapter shall not limit a custodian’s ability to obtain, or require a
18 fiduciary or designated recipient requesting disclosure or termination under
19 this chapter to obtain, a court order that:

20 (1) specifies that an account belongs to the person under guardianship or
21 the principal;

