

4049--A

2015-2016 Regular Sessions

I N   S E N A T E

February 26, 2015

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Introduced by Sen. LANZA -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Insurance -- committee discharged, bill amended, ordered reprinted as amended and recommitted to said committee

AN ACT to amend the insurance law, in relation to unfair claim settlement practices

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

1     Section 1. The insurance law is amended by adding a new section 2601-a  
2     to read as follows:  
3     S 2601-A. UNFAIR CLAIM SETTLEMENT PRACTICES; CIVIL REMEDY. (A) THE  
4     HOLDER OF A POLICY ISSUED OR RENEWED PURSUANT TO THIS CHAPTER SHALL HAVE  
5     A PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION AGAINST ANY INSURER DOING BUSINESS IN THIS  
6     STATE FOR DAMAGES AS PROVIDED IN THIS SECTION UPON SUCH POLICYHOLDER  
7     PROVING BY A PREPONDERANCE OF THE EVIDENCE THAT SUCH INSURER'S REFUSAL  
8     TO PAY OR UNREASONABLE DELAY IN PAYMENT TO THE POLICYHOLDER OF AMOUNTS  
9     CLAIMED TO BE DUE UNDER A POLICY WAS NOT SUBSTANTIALLY JUSTIFIED. AN  
10    INSURER IS NOT SUBSTANTIALLY JUSTIFIED IN REFUSING TO PAY OR IN UNREA-  
11    SONABLY DELAYING PAYMENT WHEN THE INSURER:  
12    (1) FAILED TO PROVIDE THE POLICYHOLDER WITH ACCURATE INFORMATION  
13    CONCERNING POLICY PROVISIONS RELATING TO THE COVERAGE AT ISSUE;  
14    (2) FAILED TO EFFECTUATE IN GOOD FAITH A PROMPT, FAIR AND EQUITABLE  
15    SETTLEMENT OF A CLAIM SUBMITTED BY SUCH POLICYHOLDER IN WHICH LIABILITY  
16    OF SUCH INSURER TO SUCH POLICYHOLDER WAS REASONABLY CLEAR;  
17    (3) FAILED TO PROVIDE A WRITTEN DENIAL OF A POLICYHOLDER'S CLAIM WITH  
18    A FULL AND COMPLETE EXPLANATION OF SUCH DENIAL, INCLUDING REFERENCES TO  
19    SPECIFIC POLICY PROVISIONS WHEREVER POSSIBLE;  
20    (4) FAILED TO MAKE A FINAL DETERMINATION AND NOTIFY THE POLICYHOLDER  
21    IN WRITING OF ITS POSITION ON BOTH LIABILITY FOR AND THE INSURER'S VALU-  
22    ATION OF A CLAIM WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF THE DATE ON WHICH IT RECEIVED  
23    ACTUAL OR CONSTRUCTIVE NOTICE OF THE LOSS UPON WHICH THE CLAIM IS BASED;  
24    (5) FAILED TO ACT IN GOOD FAITH BY COMPELLING A POLICYHOLDER TO INSTI-  
25    TUTE SUIT TO RECOVER AMOUNTS DUE UNDER ITS POLICY BY OFFERING SUBSTAN-

EXPLANATION--Matter in *ITALICS* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets  
[ ] is old law to be omitted.

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1 Tially less than the amounts ultimately recovered in suit brought by  
2 such policyholder;

3 (6) Failed to advise a policyholder that a claim may exceed policy  
4 limits, that counsel assigned by the insurer may be subject to a  
5 conflict of interest, or that the policyholder may retain independent  
6 counsel;

7 (7) Failed to provide, on request of the policyholder or their repre-  
8 sentative, all reports, letters or other documentation arising from the  
9 investigation of a claim and evaluating liability for or valuation of  
10 such claim;

11 (8) Refused to pay a claim without conducting a reasonable investi-  
12 gation;

13 (9) Negotiated or settled a claim directly with a policyholder known  
14 to be represented by an attorney without the attorney's knowledge or  
15 consent. The provisions of this paragraph shall not be deemed to prohib-  
16 it routine inquiries to a policyholder to obtain details concerning the  
17 claim;

18 (10) Failed to pay on one or more elements of a claim where there is  
19 no dispute as to liability notwithstanding the existence of disputes as  
20 to other elements of the claim where such payment can be made without  
21 prejudice to either party; or

22 (11) Acted in violation of section two thousand six hundred one of  
23 this article or any regulation promulgated pursuant thereto.

24 (B) Any policyholder who establishes liability pursuant to subsection  
25 (A) of this section shall be entitled to recover, in addition to amounts  
26 due under the policy, interest, costs and disbursements, compensatory  
27 damages, and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the policyholder  
28 from the date of the loss, in recovering monies due pursuant to the  
29 terms of the policy, as well as such additional punitive damages as the  
30 court may allow on a showing that the acts giving rise to liability  
31 occur with such frequency as to indicate a general business practice.

32 (C) Any policyholder may recover damages from an insurer doing busi-  
33 ness in this state pursuant to this section either as part of an action  
34 to recover under the terms of an insurance policy or in a separate  
35 action.

36 (D) In any trial of a cause of action asserted against an insurer  
37 pursuant to this section, evidence of settlement discussions written and  
38 verbal offers to compromise and other evidence relating to the claims  
39 process shall be admissible. If causes of action relating to liability  
40 of the insurer under the policy and under this section are alleged in  
41 the same action, the court may bifurcate the trial of issues so as to  
42 avoid prejudice to the insurer on the issue of liability under the poli-  
43 cy and facilitate admissibility of evidence on the causes of action  
44 asserted pursuant to this section.

45 (E) All amounts recovered from an insurer as damages and reasonable  
46 attorneys' fees in any action authorized in this section shall be  
47 excluded by the insurer in its determinations of the premiums it will  
48 charge all policyholders on all policies issued by it.

49 (F) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit a  
50 policyholder's right to a trial by jury for any claims arising under  
51 this section.

52 S. 2. This act shall take effect on the first of January next succeed-  
53 ing the date on which it shall have become a law, and shall apply to all  
54 acts and omissions by insurers occurring on or after such effective  
55 date.