

7858

I N S E N A T E

May 17, 2016

Introduced by Sen. AVELLA -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Labor

AN ACT to amend the labor law and the civil service law, in relation to protection of employees and former employees against retaliatory action by employers

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

1 Section 1. Section 740 of the labor law, as added by chapter 660 of
2 the laws of 1984, paragraph (g) of subdivision 1 as added and paragraph
3 (a) of subdivision 2 as amended by chapter 442 of the laws of 2006, and
4 paragraph (d) of subdivision 4 as added by chapter 24 of the laws of
5 2002, is amended to read as follows:
6 S 740. Retaliatory [personnel] action by employers; prohibition. 1.
7 Definitions. For purposes of this section, unless the context specif-
8 ically indicates otherwise:
9 (a) "Employee" means an individual who performs services for and under
10 the control and direction of an employer for wages or other remunera-
11 tion.
12 (b) "Employer" means any person, firm, partnership, institution,
13 corporation, or association that employs one or more employees.
14 (c) "Law, rule or regulation" includes: (I) any duly enacted FEDERAL,
15 STATE OR LOCAL statute or ordinance [or]; (II) any rule or regulation
16 promulgated pursuant to [any federal, state or local] SUCH statute or
17 ordinance; OR (III) ANY JUDICIAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION, RULING OR
18 ORDER.
19 (d) "Public body" includes the following:
20 (i) the United States Congress, any state legislature, or any [popu-
21 larly-elected] ELECTED local governmental body, or any member or employ-
22 ee thereof;
23 (ii) any federal, state, or local [judiciary] COURT, or any member or
24 employee thereof, or any grand or petit jury;
25 (iii) any federal, state, or local regulatory, administrative, or
26 public agency or authority, or instrumentality thereof; [or]

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

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(iv) any federal, state, or local law enforcement agency, prosecutorial office, or police or peace officer;

(V) ANY FEDERAL, STATE OR LOCAL DEPARTMENT OF AN EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT; OR

(VI) ANY DIVISION, BOARD, BUREAU, OFFICE, COMMITTEE, OR COMMISSION OF ANY OF THE PUBLIC BODIES DESCRIBED IN SUBPARAGRAPHS (I) THROUGH (V) OF THIS PARAGRAPH.

(e) "Retaliatory [personnel] action" means the discharge, suspension [or demotion of], DEMOTION, PENALIZATION OR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST an employee OR FORMER EMPLOYEE, or other adverse [employment] action taken against an employee OR FORMER EMPLOYEE [in the terms and conditions of employment].

(f) "Supervisor" means any individual within an employer's organization who has the authority to direct and control the work performance of [the affected] AN employee; or who has [managerial] authority to take corrective action regarding the [violation of the law, rule or regulation] ILLEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY of which the employee complains.

(g) ["Health care fraud" means health care fraud as defined by article one hundred seventy-seven of the penal law.] "AGENT" MEANS ANY INDIVIDUAL, PARTNERSHIP, ASSOCIATION, CORPORATION OR GROUP OF PERSONS ACTING ON BEHALF OF AN EMPLOYER.

(H) "ILLEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY" MEANS ANY PRACTICE, PROCEDURE, ACTION OR FAILURE TO ACT BY AN EMPLOYER, OR AN EMPLOYEE OR AGENT OF SUCH EMPLOYER, TAKEN IN THE COURSE OF THE EMPLOYER'S BUSINESS, WHETHER OR NOT WITHIN THE SCOPE OF EMPLOYMENT OR AGENCY, THAT IS IN VIOLATION OF ANY LAW, RULE OR REGULATION PUNISHABLE BY IMPRISONMENT OR CIVIL OR CRIMINAL PENALTY.

2. Prohibitions. An employer shall not take any retaliatory [personnel] action against an employee OR FORMER EMPLOYEE because such employee OR FORMER EMPLOYEE does any of the following WHILE EMPLOYED BY THE EMPLOYER, WHETHER OR NOT WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE EMPLOYEE'S JOB DUTIES:

(a) discloses TO A SUPERVISOR OR A PUBLIC BODY, or threatens to [disclose] MAKE A DISCLOSURE to a [supervisor or to a] public body UNLESS THE EMPLOYER REMEDIES THE ILLEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY, INFORMATION ABOUT an ILLEGAL BUSINESS activity[, policy or practice of the employer that is in violation of law, rule or regulation which violation creates and presents a substantial and specific danger to the public health or safety, or which constitutes health care fraud];

(b) provides information to, or testifies before, any public body conducting an investigation, hearing or inquiry into any such [violation of a law, rule or regulation by such employer] ILLEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY; or

(c) objects to, or refuses to participate in, any [such] ILLEGAL BUSINESS activity[, policy or practice in violation of a law, rule or regulation].

3. Application. The protection against retaliatory [personnel] action provided by PARAGRAPHS (A), (B) AND (C) OF SUBDIVISION TWO OF THIS SECTION SHALL APPLY TO ANY EMPLOYEE WHO IN GOOD FAITH REASONABLY BELIEVES THAT AN ILLEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY HAS OCCURRED OR WILL OCCUR, BASED ON INFORMATION THAT THE EMPLOYEE IN GOOD FAITH REASONABLY BELIEVES TO BE TRUE; PROVIDED HOWEVER THAT THE PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATORY ACTION PROVIDED BY paragraph (a) of subdivision two of this section pertaining to disclosure to a public body shall not apply to an employee who makes such disclosure to a public body unless the employee has [brought] MADE A GOOD FAITH EFFORT TO NOTIFY HIS OR HER EMPLOYER BY BRINGING the ILLEGAL BUSINESS activity[, policy or practice in violation

1 of law, rule or regulation] to the attention of a supervisor [of the
2 employer] and has afforded such employer a reasonable opportunity to
3 correct such activity[, policy or practice]. SUCH EMPLOYER NOTIFICATION
4 SHALL NOT BE REQUIRED WHERE: (A) THE EMPLOYER HAS NOT POSTED ANY NOTICE
5 REQUIRED BY SUBDIVISION EIGHT OF THIS SECTION; (B) THERE IS AN IMMINENT
6 AND SERIOUS DANGER TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH OR SAFETY; (C) THE EMPLOYEE
7 REASONABLY BELIEVES THAT REPORTING TO THE SUPERVISOR WOULD RESULT IN A
8 DESTRUCTION OF EVIDENCE OR OTHER CONCEALMENT OF THE ILLEGAL BUSINESS
9 ACTIVITY; (D) SUCH ACTIVITY COULD REASONABLY BE EXPECTED TO LEAD TO
10 ENDANGERING THE WELFARE OF A MINOR; (E) THE EMPLOYEE REASONABLY BELIEVES
11 THAT REPORTING TO THE SUPERVISOR WOULD RESULT IN PHYSICAL HARM TO THE
12 EMPLOYEE OR ANY OTHER PERSON; OR (F) THE EMPLOYEE REASONABLY BELIEVES
13 THAT THE SUPERVISOR IS ALREADY AWARE OF THE ILLEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITY
14 AND WILL NOT CORRECT SUCH ACTIVITY.

15 4. Violation; remedy. (a) An employee who has been the subject of a
16 retaliatory [personnel] action in violation of this section may insti-
17 tute a civil action in a court of competent jurisdiction for relief as
18 set forth in subdivision five of this section within [one year] TWO
19 YEARS after the alleged retaliatory [personnel] action was taken.

20 (b) Any action authorized by this section may be brought in the county
21 in which the alleged retaliatory [personnel] action occurred, in the
22 county in which the complainant resides, or in the county in which the
23 employer has its principal place of business. IN ANY SUCH ACTION, THE
24 PARTIES SHALL BE ENTITLED TO A JURY TRIAL.

25 (c) [It shall be a defense to any action brought pursuant to this
26 section that the personnel action was predicated upon grounds other than
27 the employee's exercise of any rights protected by this section.] EXCEPT
28 AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED IN THIS SECTION, A VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION IS
29 ESTABLISHED WHEN THE COMPLAINANT DEMONSTRATES THAT A MOTIVATING FACTOR
30 FOR THE RETALIATORY ACTION VIOLATES SUBDIVISION TWO OF THIS SECTION.
31 REMEDIES FOR VIOLATION OF SUBDIVISION TWO OF THIS SECTION SHALL BE
32 LIMITED SOLELY TO THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPHS (E), (F) AND (G) OF
33 SUBDIVISION FIVE OF THIS SECTION IF THE EMPLOYER DEMONSTRATES THAT IT
34 WOULD HAVE TAKEN THE SAME ACTION IN THE ABSENCE OF THE IMPERMISSIBLE
35 MOTIVATING FACTOR. It shall [also] be a defense that the individual was
36 an independent contractor.

37 [(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (c) of this
38 subdivision, a health care employee who has been the subject of a retal-
39 iatory action by a health care employer in violation of section seven
40 hundred forty-one of this article may institute a civil action in a
41 court of competent jurisdiction for relief as set forth in subdivision
42 five of this section within two years after the alleged retaliatory
43 personnel action was taken. In addition to the relief set forth in that
44 subdivision, the court, in its discretion, based upon a finding that the
45 employer acted in bad faith in the retaliatory action, may assess the
46 employer a civil penalty of an amount not to exceed ten thousand
47 dollars, to be paid to the improving quality of patient care fund,
48 established pursuant to section ninety-seven-aaaa of the state finance
49 law.]

50 5. Relief. In any action brought pursuant to subdivision four of this
51 section, the court may order relief as follows:

52 (a) [an injunction to restrain continued violation of this section;

53 (b)] the reinstatement of the employee to the same position held
54 before the retaliatory [personnel] action[,] or to an equivalent posi-
55 tion, OR FRONT PAY IN LIEU THEREOF;

1 [(c)] (B) the reinstatement of full fringe benefits and seniority
2 rights;
3 [(d)] (C) the compensation for lost wages, benefits and other remuner-
4 ation; [and
5 (e)] (D) COMPENSATORY DAMAGES FOR ECONOMIC LOSS AND FOR EMOTIONAL
6 DISTRESS;
7 (E) the payment by the employer of reasonable costs, disbursements,
8 and attorney's fees;
9 (F) AN INJUNCTION TO RESTRAIN THE EMPLOYER'S CONTINUED VIOLATION OF
10 THIS SECTION; AND
11 (G) A CIVIL PENALTY OF AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS
12 AND/OR A LIQUIDATED DAMAGES AWARD EQUAL TO AMOUNTS OF DAMAGES PURSUANT
13 TO PARAGRAPHS (C) AND (D) OF THIS SUBDIVISION, IF THE COURT, IN ITS
14 DISCRETION, FINDS THAT THE EMPLOYER ACTED IN BAD FAITH IN THE RETALIATO-
15 RY ACTION.

16 6. Employer relief. A court, in its discretion, may also order that
17 reasonable attorneys' fees and court costs and disbursements be awarded
18 to an employer if the court determines that an action brought by an
19 employee under this section was without basis in law or in fact.

20 7. Existing rights. Nothing in this section shall be deemed to dimin-
21 ish the rights, privileges, or remedies of any employee under any other
22 law or regulation or under any collective bargaining agreement or
23 employment contract[; except that the institution of an action in
24 accordance with this section shall be deemed a waiver of the rights and
25 remedies available under any other contract, collective bargaining
26 agreement, law, rule or regulation or under the common law].

27 8. PUBLICATION. EVERY EMPLOYER SHALL INFORM EMPLOYEES OF THEIR
28 PROTECTIONS, RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS UNDER THIS SECTION, BY POSTING A
29 NOTICE THEREOF. SUCH NOTICES SHALL BE POSTED CONSPICUOUSLY IN EASILY
30 ACCESSIBLE AND WELL-LIGHTED PLACES CUSTOMARILY FREQUENTED BY EMPLOYEES
31 AND APPLICANTS FOR EMPLOYMENT.

32 S 2. Subdivision 4 of section 741 of the labor law, as added by chap-
33 ter 24 of the laws of 2002, is amended to read as follows:

34 4. Enforcement. A health care employee may seek enforcement of this
35 section pursuant to [paragraph (d) of subdivision] SUBDIVISIONS four AND
36 FIVE of section seven hundred forty of this article.

37 S 3. Subdivision 2 of section 75-b of the civil service law, as added
38 by chapter 660 of the laws of 1984 and paragraph (a) as amended by chap-
39 ter 899 of the laws of 1986, is amended to read as follows:

40 2. (a) A public employer shall not dismiss, SUSPEND, DEMOTE, PENALIZE,
41 THREATEN OR DISCRIMINATE AGAINST, or take other disciplinary or other
42 [adverse personnel action] ACT OF REPRISAL against a public employee
43 regarding the employee's employment because the employee: (I) discloses
44 TO A PUBLIC BODY OR THREATENS TO MAKE A DISCLOSURE TO A PUBLIC BODY OR
45 SUPERVISOR IF THE EMPLOYER DOES NOT REMEDY THE IMPROPER CONDUCT, to a
46 governmental body information[: (i)] regarding a violation of a law,
47 rule or regulation which violation creates [and] OR presents a substan-
48 tial and specific danger to the public health or safety[; or (ii) which
49 the employee reasonably believes to be true and reasonably believes], OR
50 WHICH constitutes an improper governmental action[. "Improper govern-
51 mental action" shall mean any action by a public employer or employee,
52 or an agent of such employer or employee, which is undertaken in the
53 performance of such agent's official duties, whether or not such action
54 is within the scope of his employment, and which is in violation of any
55 federal, state or local law, rule or regulation], OR WHICH COULD REASON-
56 ABLY BE EXPECTED TO LEAD TO ENDANGERING THE WELFARE OF A MINOR; (II)

1 PROVIDES INFORMATION TO, OR TESTIFIES BEFORE, ANY PUBLIC BODY CONDUCTING
2 AN INVESTIGATION, HEARING OR INQUIRY INTO ANY VIOLATION OR IMPROPER
3 GOVERNMENTAL ACTION; OR (III) OBJECTS TO, OR REFUSES TO PARTICIPATE IN,
4 ANY SUCH VIOLATION OR IMPROPER GOVERNMENTAL ACTION.

5 (b) THE PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATORY ACTION PROVIDED IN SUBPARA-
6 GRAPHS (I) AND (II) OF PARAGRAPH (A) OF THIS SUBDIVISION SHALL APPLY TO
7 ANY EMPLOYEE WHO IN GOOD FAITH REASONABLY BELIEVES THAT A VIOLATION OR
8 IMPROPER GOVERNMENTAL ACTION HAS OCCURRED OR WILL OCCUR, BASED ON INFOR-
9 MATION THAT THE EMPLOYEE IN GOOD FAITH REASONABLY BELIEVES TO BE TRUE.

10 (C) Prior to disclosing information pursuant to SUBPARAGRAPH (I) OF
11 paragraph (a) of this subdivision, an employee shall have made a good
12 faith effort to provide the appointing authority or his or her designee
13 the information to be disclosed and shall provide the appointing author-
14 ity or designee a reasonable time to take appropriate action unless
15 there is imminent and serious danger to public health or safety. For the
16 purposes of this subdivision, an employee who acts pursuant to this
17 paragraph shall be deemed to have disclosed information to a govern-
18 mental body under paragraph (a) of this subdivision. NOTIFICATION TO
19 THE APPOINTING AUTHORITY OR DESIGNEE SHALL NOT BE REQUIRED WHERE: (I)
20 THE EMPLOYER HAS NOT POSTED ANY NOTICE REQUIRED BY SUBDIVISION FIVE OF
21 THIS SECTION; (II) THERE IS AN IMMINENT AND SERIOUS DANGER TO THE PUBLIC
22 HEALTH OR SAFETY; (III) THE EMPLOYEE REASONABLY BELIEVES THAT REPORTING
23 TO THE APPOINTING AUTHORITY OR DESIGNEE WOULD RESULT IN A DESTRUCTION OF
24 EVIDENCE OR OTHER CONCEALMENT OF THE IMPROPER GOVERNMENTAL ACTION; OR
25 (IV) SUCH ACTIVITY COULD REASONABLY BE EXPECTED TO LEAD TO ENDANGERING
26 THE WELFARE OF A MINOR.

27 (D) "IMPROPER GOVERNMENTAL ACTION" SHALL MEAN ANY PRACTICE, PROCEDURE,
28 ACTION OR FAILURE TO ACT BY A PUBLIC EMPLOYER OR EMPLOYEE, OR AN AGENT
29 OF SUCH EMPLOYER OR EMPLOYEE, WHICH IS UNDERTAKEN IN THE PERFORMANCE OF
30 SUCH AGENT'S OFFICIAL DUTIES, WHETHER OR NOT SUCH ACTION IS WITHIN THE
31 SCOPE OF SUCH PERSON'S EMPLOYMENT, AND WHICH IS IN VIOLATION OF ANY LAW,
32 RULE OR REGULATION REGARDING GOVERNMENTAL ACTION PUNISHABLE BY IMPRISON-
33 MENT OR CIVIL OR CRIMINAL PENALTY. "LAW, RULE OR REGULATION" INCLUDES:
34 (I) ANY DULY ENACTED FEDERAL, STATE OR LOCAL STATUTE OR ORDINANCE; (II)
35 ANY RULE OR REGULATION PROMULGATED PURSUANT TO ANY SUCH STATUTE OR ORDI-
36 NANCE; OR (III) ANY JUDICIAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION, RULING OR
37 ORDER.

38 S 4. Subdivision 3 of section 75-b of the civil service law, as added
39 by chapter 660 of the laws of 1984, is amended to read as follows:

40 3. (a) Where an employee is subject to dismissal or other disciplinary
41 action under a final and binding arbitration provision, or other disci-
42 plinary procedure contained in a collectively negotiated agreement, or
43 under section seventy-five of this title or any other provision of state
44 or local law, OR TO THE ELIMINATION OF JOB TITLE OR CLASSIFICATION THAT
45 UNIQUELY FITS AND SINGLES OUT SUCH EMPLOYEE and the employee reasonably
46 believes THAT SUCH dismissal [or], other disciplinary action OR OTHER
47 ADVERSE ACTION would not have been taken but for the conduct protected
48 under subdivision two of this section, he or she may assert such as a
49 defense before the designated arbitrator or hearing officer. The merits
50 of such defense shall be considered and determined as part of the arbi-
51 tration award or hearing officer decision of the matter. If there is a
52 finding that the dismissal or other disciplinary action is based solely
53 on a violation by the employer of such subdivision, the arbitrator or
54 hearing officer shall dismiss or recommend dismissal of the disciplinary
55 proceeding, as appropriate, and, if appropriate, reinstate the employee
56 with back pay, and, in the case of an arbitration procedure, may take

1 other appropriate action as is permitted in the collectively negotiated
2 agreement.

3 (b) Where an employee is subject to a collectively negotiated agree-
4 ment which contains provisions preventing an employer from taking
5 adverse [personnel] actions and which contains a final and binding arbi-
6 tration provision to resolve alleged violations of such provisions of
7 the agreement and the employee reasonably believes that such [personnel]
8 action would not have been taken but for the conduct protected under
9 subdivision two of this section, he or she may assert such as a claim
10 before the arbitrator. The arbitrator shall consider such claim and
11 determine its merits and shall, if a determination is made that such
12 adverse [personnel] ion is based on a violation by the employer of such
13 subdivision, take such action to remedy the violation as is permitted by
14 the collectively negotiated agreement.

15 (c) [Where] IN ADDITION TO OR IN LIEU OF THE PROCEDURES SET FORTH IN
16 PARAGRAPHS (A) AND (B) OF THIS SUBDIVISION, OR WHERE an employee is not
17 subject to any of the provisions of [paragraph (a) or (b) of this subdi-
18 vision] SUCH PARAGRAPHS, the employee may commence an action in a court
19 of competent jurisdiction under the same terms and conditions AND FOR
20 THE SAME RELIEF as set forth in article twenty-C of the labor law.

21 S 5. Section 75-b of the civil service law is amended by adding a new
22 subdivision 5 to read as follows:

23 5. EVERY PUBLIC EMPLOYER SHALL INFORM EMPLOYEES OF THEIR PROTECTIONS,
24 RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS UNDER THIS SECTION, BY POSTING A NOTICE THEREOF.
25 SUCH NOTICES SHALL BE POSTED CONSPICUOUSLY IN EASILY ACCESSIBLE AND
26 WELL-LIGHTED PLACES CUSTOMARILY FREQUENTED BY EMPLOYEES AND APPLICANTS
27 FOR EMPLOYMENT.

28 S 6. This act shall take effect on the ninetieth day after it shall
29 have become a law.