

STATE OF NEW YORK

4671

2017-2018 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

February 3, 2017

Introduced by M. of A. MALLIOTAKIS, CURRAN, GRAF, McKEVITT, RAIA -- read once and referred to the Committee on Insurance

AN ACT to amend the insurance law, in relation to unfair claim settlements after a natural disaster

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. Section 2601 of the insurance law, paragraph 4 of
2 subsection (a) as amended by chapter 547 of the laws of 1997, paragraphs
3 5 and 6 of subsection (a) as amended and paragraph 7 of subsection (a)
4 as added by section 27 of part H of chapter 60 of the laws of 2014, is
5 amended to read as follows:

6 § 2601. Unfair claim settlement practices; penalties. (a) No insurer
7 doing business in this state shall engage in unfair claim settlement
8 practices. Any of the following acts by an insurer, if committed without
9 just cause and performed with such frequency as to indicate a general
10 business practice, shall constitute unfair claim settlement practices,
11 provided, however, that in the event the governor has pursuant to
12 section twenty-nine-a of the executive law suspended any statute in this
13 chapter as a result of a state disaster emergency, such act shall
14 constitute an unfair claim settlement practice without respect to wheth-
15 er such act was indicative of a general business practice:

16 (1) knowingly misrepresenting to claimants pertinent facts or policy
17 provisions relating to coverages at issue;

18 (2) failing to acknowledge with reasonable promptness pertinent commu-
19 nications as to claims arising under its policies;

20 (3) failing to adopt and implement reasonable standards for the prompt
21 investigation of claims arising under its policies;

22 (4) not attempting in good faith to effectuate prompt, fair and equi-
23 table settlements of claims submitted in which liability has become
24 reasonably clear, except where there is a reasonable basis supported by
25 specific information available for review by the department that the

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

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claimant has caused the loss to occur by arson. After receiving a properly executed proof of loss, the insurer shall advise the claimant of acceptance or denial of the claim within thirty working days;

(5) compelling policyholders to institute suits to recover amounts due under its policies by offering substantially less than the amounts ultimately recovered in suits brought by them;

(6) failing to promptly disclose coverage pursuant to subsection (d) or subparagraph (A) of paragraph two of subsection (f) of section three thousand four hundred twenty of this chapter; ~~or~~

(7) submitting reasonably rendered claims to the independent dispute resolution process established under article six of the financial services law~~[-]~~; ~~or~~

(8) In addition to the foregoing, when the governor has declared a state disaster emergency, the following practices shall be deemed unfair claim settlement practices:

(A) attempting to settle a claim on the basis of a document that was altered without notice to the consumer;

(B) making a material misrepresentation for the purpose of settling a claim on less favorable terms than those provided in the policy;

(C) failing to promptly notify the insured of any additional information necessary for the processing of the claim, as well as the reasons why such information is necessary;

(D) failing to conduct an on-site inspection within seven business days from submission of the claim;

(E) failing to provide the claimant with a copy of the adjuster's report within three business days from the inspection;

(F) failing to provide a determination on the claim within thirty calendar days from furnishing claimant with a copy of the report; and

(G) if damages are determined to be covered under the policy, failing to pay at least twenty percent of the total claim upon such determination and the claim in full within thirty days of determination.

(b) Evidence as to numbers and types of complaints to the department against an insurer and as to the department's complaint experience with other insurers writing similar lines of insurance shall be admissible in evidence in any administrative or judicial proceeding under this section or article twenty-four or seventy-four of this chapter, but no insurer shall be deemed in violation of this section solely by reason of the numbers and types of such complaints.

(c) If it is found, after notice and an opportunity to be heard, that an insurer has violated this section, each instance of noncompliance with subsection (a) ~~hereof~~ of this section may be treated as a separate violation of this section for purposes of ordering a monetary penalty pursuant to subsection (b) of section one hundred nine of this chapter. A violation of this section shall not be a misdemeanor.

§ 2. The insurance law is amended by adding a new section 2601-a to read as follows:

§ 2601-a. Unfair claim settlement practices during state disaster emergency; civil remedy. (a) In the event the governor has pursuant to section twenty-nine-a of the executive law suspended any statute in this chapter as a result of a state disaster emergency an insurer doing business in this state shall be liable to the holder of a policy issued or renewed pursuant to article thirty-four of this chapter for damages as provided in this section upon such policy holder proving by a preponderance of the evidence that such insurer's refusal to pay or unreasonable delay in payment to the policy holder of amounts claimed to be due a policy was not substantially justified. An insurer is not substantially

1 justified in refusing to pay or in unreasonably delaying payment when
2 the insurer:

3 (1) intentionally, recklessly or by gross negligence failed to provide
4 the policy holder with accurate information concerning policy provisions
5 relating to the coverage at issue;

6 (2) failed to effectuate in good faith a prompt, fair and equitable
7 settlement of a claim submitted by such policy holder in which liability
8 of such insurer to such policy holder was reasonably clear;

9 (3) failed to provide a written denial of a policy holder's claim with
10 a full and complete explanation of such denial, including references to
11 specific policy provisions wherever possible;

12 (4) failed to make a final determination and notify the policy holder
13 in writing of its position on both liability for, and the insurer's
14 valuation of, a claim within ninety days of the date on which it
15 received actual or constructive notice of the loss upon which the claim
16 is based;

17 (5) failed to act in good faith by compelling policy holder to insti-
18 tute suit to recover amounts due under its policy by offering substan-
19 tially less than the amounts ultimately recovered in suit brought by
20 such policy holder; or

21 (6) has engaged in any other unfair claim settlement practice as
22 defined in paragraph eight of subsection (a) of section two thousand six
23 hundred one of this article.

24 (b) Any policy holder 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 policy holder
28 from the date of the loss, in recovering monies due pursuant to the
29 terms of the policy.

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

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

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

47 § 3. This act shall take effect immediately.