STATE OF NEW YORK

1991

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

January 16, 2021

Introduced by Sens. JACKSON, SALAZAR, RAMOS, RIVERA -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Investigations and Government Operations

AN ACT to amend the civil rights law, in relation to providing a civil action for deprivation of rights

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

Section 1. The civil rights law is amended by adding a new section 79-q to read as follows:

§ 79-q. Civil action for deprivation of rights. 1. (a) A person or public entity acting under color of law that subjects or causes to be subjected any other person to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the federal or state Constitution or laws, is liable to the injured party for legal or equitable relief or any other appropriate relief. For the purposes of this section, a public entity subjects, or causes to be subjected, any person to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the federal or state Constitution or laws, by employing any person who violates this section.

(b) Notwithstanding any other law to the contrary, in any action brought pursuant to this section or the New York human rights law, a court shall award reasonable attorney fees and costs to a prevailing plaintiff. For the purposes of this section, the term "prevailing" includes a plaintiff whose commencement of litigation has acted as a catalyst to effect change in the defendant's conduct, regardless of whether that change has been implemented as a result of a judgment in such plaintiff's favor. When a judgment is entered in favor of a defendant, the court may award reasonable costs and attorney fees to the defendant only for defending any claims the court finds frivolous.

2. (a) If a person or public entity acting under color of law that subjects or causes to be subjected any other person to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the federal or state

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

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Constitution or laws, the attorney general may bring a civil action for legal or equitable relief or other proper redress. The civil action shall be brought in the name of the state and may be brought on behalf of the injured party. A civil action brought by the attorney general shall not foreclose an injured party from bringing their own civil action for legal or equitable relief or other proper redress. A civil action brought by an injured party shall not foreclose the attorney general from bringing a civil action for legal or equitable relief or other proper redress.

(b) If the attorney general prevails in an action brought pursuant to this section, the court shall order the distribution of any award of damages to the injured party.

3. (a) Statutory immunities and statutory limitations on liability, damages or attorney fees do not apply to claims brought pursuant to this section.

(b) It shall not be a defense or immunity to any action brought for the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the federal or state Constitution and laws, that such defendant was acting in good faith, or that the defendant believed, reasonably or otherwise, that their conduct was lawful at the time such conduct was committed. Nor shall it be a defense or immunity that the rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the federal or state Constitution or laws were not clearly established at the time of their deprivation by the defendant, or that the state of the law was otherwise such that the defendant could not reasonably have been expected to know whether their conduct was lawful.

4. A civil action pursuant to this section shall be commenced within three years after the cause of action accrues.

5. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a public entity shall indemnify its public employee for any liability incurred by the employee and for any judgment entered against the employee for claims arising under this section; except that a public entity shall not indemnify a public employee if the employee was convicted of a criminal violation for the conduct from which the claim arises.

6. For the purpose of this section, "public entity" shall mean the state, any county, city and county, municipality, and every other political subdivision of the state; and any private entity that engages in state action.

7. The immunity granted pursuant to subdivision one of section twenty-four of the correction law shall not extend to actions brought pursuant to this section.

8. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, including but not limited to subdivision two of section twenty-four of the correction law, actions brought pursuant to this section may be commenced in any court of competent jurisdiction, including the supreme court.

§ 2. Severability clause. If any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section or part of this act shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section or part thereof directly involved in the controversy in which such judgment shall have been rendered. It is hereby declared to be the intent of the legislature that this act would have been enacted even if such invalid provisions had not been included herein.

§ 3. This act shall take effect on the thirtieth day after it shall have become a law.