
DIGEST

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HB 987 Reengrossed

2016 Regular Session

Mike Johnson

Abstract: Prohibits false or fraudulent claims for or false or misleading statements in relation to obtaining funds, property, use of property, or other compensation from state government. Authorizes civil actions by the attorney general or by persons to recover amounts obtained in violation of proposed law. Protects whistleblowers against reprisals by persons violating the provisions of proposed law.

Proposed law prohibits persons from conspiring to or knowingly presenting or causing to be presented a false or fraudulent claim or misrepresentation to obtain funds, property, use of property, or other compensation from state government.

Proposed law prohibits persons from knowingly making a false or misleading statement on any form used for the purpose of qualifying any person for eligibility for state programs.

Proposed law authorizes the attorney general to institute a civil action to seek recovery from persons who violate the provisions of proposed law. Further authorizes an action to recover costs, expenses, fees, and attorney fees.

Proposed law authorizes a prevailing defendant to seek recovery for costs, expenses, fees, and attorney fees actually incurred if the court finds that the action was instituted by the attorney general after it should have been determined to be frivolous, vexatious, or brought primarily for the purpose of harassment.

Proposed law provides that no action shall be instituted later than 10 years after the date upon which the alleged violation occurred; however, the action shall be instituted within one year of when the attorney general knew that the prohibited conduct occurred.

Proposed law provides that actual damages, plus legal interest, incurred as a result of a violation shall be recovered only once on behalf of the state.

Proposed law authorizes a civil fine in an amount not to exceed two times the amount of actual damages sustained by the state as a result of the violation.

Proposed law authorizes civil monetary penalties of not more than \$10,000 for each false or fraudulent claim, misrepresentation, illegal remuneration, or other act prohibited by proposed law.

Proposed law provides that any person who is found to have violated proposed law shall be liable

for all costs, expenses, and fees related to investigations and proceedings associated with the violation, including attorney fees.

Proposed law authorizes a private person to institute a civil action, or "qui tam action" to seek recovery on behalf of the state and himself for violations of proposed law. Provides that all qui tam plaintiffs shall be original sources of the information which serves as the basis for the alleged violation.

Proposed law provides that no qui tam action shall be instituted later than one year after the date a qui tam complaint is received by the attorney general.

Proposed law provides that no court shall have jurisdiction over a qui tam action based upon a disclosure of allegations or transactions in a criminal, civil, or administrative hearing or as the result of disclosure of an audit report, investigation, or hearing or through the media unless the person bringing the action is an original source of the information.

Proposed law provides that a person who is or was a public employee or public official or a person who is or was acting on behalf of the state shall not bring a qui tam action if the person: (1) has a duty to report, investigate, or pursue allegations of wrongdoing or misconduct by persons or (2) has access to records of the state through the normal course and scope of his employment or other relationship with the state. Further provides that a person participating in the wrongdoing or misconduct shall not bring a qui tam action.

Proposed law prohibits an employer of a qui tam plaintiff from discharging, demoting, suspending, threatening, harassing, or discriminating against a qui tam plaintiff because he instituted an action unless the court finds that the action is frivolous, vexatious, or harassing.

Proposed law provides that the court shall allow the attorney general to intervene and proceed with the qui tam action at any time during the qui tam action proceedings.

Proposed law provides that a qui tam complaint and information filed with the attorney general shall not be subject to discovery or become public record until judicial service of the qui tam action is made on the defendants, except that the information contained therein may be given to other governmental entities or their authorized agents for review and investigation.

Proposed law provides for the procedure for qui tam actions, including the following:

- (1) A copy of the qui tam complaint and accompanying documentation shall be filed with the attorney general within one year of the date the qui tam plaintiff knew or should have known of the information forming the basis of the complaint.
- (2) At least 60 days after filing with the attorney general, the qui tam complaint and information may be filed with the appropriate district court. On the same date as the qui tam action is filed, the qui tam plaintiff shall serve the attorney general with notice of the filing.

- (3) If more than one qui tam action arising out of the same information and allegations is filed, the court shall dismiss all qui tam actions where the complaint was filed 30 days or more after the first qui tam complaint.
- (4) The complaint and information filed with the court shall be made under seal and shall be served on the defendant when the seal is removed.
- (5) If the attorney general elects to intervene in the action, he shall not be bound by any act of a qui tam plaintiff and he shall control the proceedings.
- (6) If requested by the attorney general, the court may dismiss the qui tam action, provided the qui tam plaintiff has been notified and the court has provided the qui tam plaintiff a contradictory hearing on the motion.
- (7) If the attorney general does not intervene, the qui tam plaintiff may proceed with the action unless the attorney general shows that proceeding would adversely affect the prosecution of any pending criminal actions or investigations into the activities of the defendant.
- (8) If a qui tam plaintiff fails to comply with proposed law, the court may dismiss the plaintiff.

Proposed law provides that a defendant shall have 30 days from the time a complaint is served on him to file a responsive pleading. Requires the plaintiff and the defendant to serve all pleadings and papers filed, as well as discovery, on the attorney general.

Proposed law provides that the court may stay any proposed discovery under certain circumstances involving ongoing criminal or civil investigation or proceeding arising out of the same facts.

Proposed law provides that the attorney general may elect to pursue an administrative or civil action against a qui tam defendant through any alternative remedy available to him.

Proposed law provides that, if the attorney general intervenes in the action brought by a qui tam plaintiff, the plaintiff shall receive between 15% and 25% of actual damages and civil fines awarded by the court, but if the attorney general does not intervene, he shall receive between 25% and 30% of actual damages, civil fines, and civil monetary penalties which the court decides is reasonable.

Proposed law provides that the qui tam plaintiff shall be entitled to an award against the defendant for reasonable costs, expenses, fees, and attorney fees.

Proposed law provides that if the attorney general does not intervene and the qui tam plaintiff conducts the action, the court shall award costs, expenses, fees, and attorney fees to a prevailing defendant if the court finds that the allegations made by the qui tam plaintiff were meritless or brought primarily for the purposes of harassment.

Proposed law provides that in no instance shall the attorney general or state be liable for any costs, expenses, fees, or attorney fees incurred by the plaintiff or for any award entered against the plaintiff.

Proposed law provides that the percentage of the share awarded to or settled for by the plaintiff shall be determined using the total amount of the award. Further provides the total amount of funds lost from the state must be made whole through the payment of all actual damages prior to the disbursement of any funds to any plaintiff.

Proposed law authorizes the attorney general to provide a reward of up to \$2,000 to an individual who submits information which results in recovery pursuant to proposed law, provided such individual is not himself subject to recovery. The rewards shall be granted only to the extent monies are appropriated for this purpose.

Proposed law provides that no employee shall be discharged, demoted, suspended, threatened, harassed, or discriminated against in any manner in the terms and conditions of his employment because of any lawful act engaged in by the employee or on behalf of the employee in furtherance of any action taken pursuant to proposed law.

Proposed law provides that no individual shall be threatened, harassed, or discriminated against in any manner by a business organization, governmental agency, or other person because of any lawful act engaged in by the individual or on behalf of the individual in furtherance of any action taken pursuant to proposed law.

Proposed law excludes applicability of proposed law to the filing or submission of state income tax returns.

Proposed law provides for exception of proposed law to present law laws relative to public records.

Effective upon signature of governor or lapse of time for gubernatorial action.

(Amends R.S. 44:4.1(B)(28); Adds R.S. 42:1231-1242)

Summary of Amendments Adopted by House

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Civil Law and Procedure to the original bill:

1. Changes the civil fine from three to two times the amount of actual damages.
2. Adds provisions specifying that a participant in the wrongdoing shall not bring a qui tam action and shall not be entitled to a monetary award as a qui tam plaintiff.
3. Removes provisions relative to the qui tam plaintiff objecting to a settlement proposed by the attorney general.
4. Increases the available award to a qui tam plaintiff from between 10% and 20% to between 15% and 25% of actual damages and fines when the attorney general intervenes.

5. Limits the available award to a qui tam plaintiff from no more than 30% to between 25% and 30% of actual damages and fines when the attorney general does not intervene.
6. Removes provision entitling an employee of a private entity to three times the amount of actual damages incurred as a result of the employers violation of the whistleblower protection provisions.
7. Excludes applicability of proposed law to the filing or submission of state income tax returns.

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on House and Governmental Affairs to the engrossed bill:

1. Add to the Public Records Law a reference to the exception in proposed law to present law relative to public records.