



Senate Bill No. 359

Public Act No. 19-69

AN ACT EXTENDING WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTIONS TO EMPLOYEES OF BUSINESSES RECEIVING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE STATE.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 4-61dd of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2019*):

(a) Any person having knowledge of any matter involving (1) corruption, unethical practices, violation of state laws or regulations, mismanagement, gross waste of funds, abuse of authority or danger to the public safety occurring in any state department or agency, any quasi-public agency, as defined in section 1-120, or any Probate Court, [or any person having knowledge of any matter involving] (2) corruption, violation of state or federal laws or regulations, gross waste of funds, abuse of authority or danger to the public safety occurring in any large state contract, or (3) corruption by an entity receiving financial assistance pursuant to title 32 that has failed to meet its contractual obligations or has failed to satisfy any condition regarding such financial assistance, may transmit all facts and information in such person's possession concerning such matter to the Auditors of Public Accounts. The Auditors of Public Accounts shall review such matter and report their findings and any

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recommendations to the Attorney General. Upon receiving such a report, the Attorney General shall make such investigation as the Attorney General deems proper regarding such report and any other information that may be reasonably derived from such report. Prior to conducting an investigation of any information that may be reasonably derived from such report, the Attorney General shall consult with the Auditors of Public Accounts concerning the relationship of such additional information to the report that has been issued pursuant to this subsection. Any such subsequent investigation deemed appropriate by the Attorney General shall only be conducted with the concurrence and assistance of the Auditors of Public Accounts. At the request of the Attorney General or on their own initiative, the auditors shall assist in the investigation.

(b) (1) The Auditors of Public Accounts may reject any complaint received pursuant to subsection (a) of this section if the Auditors of Public Accounts determine one or more of the following:

(A) There are other available remedies that the complainant can reasonably be expected to pursue;

(B) The complaint is better suited for investigation or enforcement by another state agency;

(C) The complaint is trivial, frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith;

(D) Other complaints have greater priority in terms of serving the public good;

(E) The complaint is not timely or is too long delayed to justify further investigation; or

(F) The complaint could be handled more appropriately as part of an ongoing or scheduled regular audit.

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(2) If the Auditors of Public Accounts reject a complaint pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection, the Auditors of Public Accounts shall provide a report to the Attorney General setting out the basis for the rejection.

(3) If at any time the Auditors of Public Accounts determine that a complaint is more appropriately investigated by another state agency, the Auditors of Public Accounts shall refer the complaint to such agency. The investigating agency shall provide a status report regarding the referred complaint to the Auditors of Public Accounts upon request.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 12-15, the Commissioner of Revenue Services may, upon written request by the Auditors of Public Accounts, disclose return or return information, as defined in section 12-15, to the Auditors of Public Accounts for purposes of preparing a report under subsection (a) or (b) of this section. Such return or return information shall not be published in any report prepared in accordance with subsection (a) or (b) of this section, and shall not otherwise be redisclosed, except that such information may be redisclosed to the Attorney General for purposes of an investigation authorized by subsection (a) of this section. Any person who violates the provisions of this subsection shall be subject to the provisions of subsection (g) of section 12-15.

(d) The Attorney General may summon witnesses, require the production of any necessary books, papers or other documents and administer oaths to witnesses, where necessary, for the purpose of an investigation pursuant to this section or for the purpose of investigating a suspected violation of subsection (a) of section 4-275 until such time as the Attorney General files a civil action pursuant to section 4-276. Service of a subpoena ad testificandum, subpoena duces tecum and a notice of deposition, may be made by: (1) Personal service or service at the usual place of abode; or (2) registered or certified mail,

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return receipt requested, a duly executed copy thereof addressed to the person to be served at such person's principal place of business in this state, or, if such person has no principal place of business in this state, at such person's principal office or such person's residence. Upon the conclusion of the investigation, the Attorney General shall where necessary, report any findings to the Governor, or in matters involving criminal activity, to the Chief State's Attorney. In addition to the exempt records provision of section 1-210, the Auditors of Public Accounts and the Attorney General shall not, after receipt of any information from a person under the provisions of this section or sections 4-276 to 4-280, inclusive, disclose the identity of such person without such person's consent unless the Auditors of Public Accounts or the Attorney General determines that such disclosure is unavoidable, and may withhold records of such investigation, during the pendency of the investigation. All documentary material or other information furnished to the Attorney General, his or her deputy or any assistant attorney general designated by the Attorney General, pursuant to a demand issued under this subsection for the purpose of investigating a suspected violation of subsection (a) of section 4-275, shall be returned to the person furnishing such documentary material or other information upon the termination of the Attorney General's investigation or final determination of any action or proceeding commenced thereunder.

(e) (1) No state officer or employee, as defined in section 4-141, no quasi-public agency officer or employee, no officer or employee of a large state contractor and no appointing authority shall take or threaten to take any personnel action against any state or quasi-public agency employee or any employee of a large state contractor in retaliation for (A) such employee's or contractor's disclosure of information to (i) an employee of the Auditors of Public Accounts or the Attorney General under the provisions of subsection (a) of this section; (ii) an employee of the state agency or quasi-public agency

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where such state officer or employee is employed; (iii) an employee of a state agency pursuant to a mandated reporter statute or pursuant to subsection (b) of section 17a-28; (iv) an employee of the Probate Court where such employee is employed; or (v) in the case of a large state contractor, an employee of the contracting state agency concerning information involving the large state contract; or (B) such employee's testimony or assistance in any proceeding under this section.

(2) (A) Not later than ninety days after learning of the specific incident giving rise to a claim that a personnel action has been threatened or has occurred in violation of subdivision (1) of this subsection, a state or quasi-public agency employee, an employee of a large state contractor or the employee's attorney may file a complaint against the state agency, quasi-public agency, Probate Court, large state contractor or appointing authority concerning such personnel action with the Chief Human Rights Referee designated under section 46a-57. Such complaint may be amended if an additional incident giving rise to a claim under this subdivision occurs subsequent to the filing of the original complaint. The Chief Human Rights Referee shall assign the complaint to a human rights referee appointed under section 46a-57, who shall conduct a hearing and issue a decision concerning whether the officer or employee taking or threatening to take the personnel action violated any provision of this section. The human rights referee may order a state agency, quasi-public agency or Probate Court to produce (i) an employee of such agency, quasi-public agency or Probate Court to testify as a witness in any proceeding under this subdivision, or (ii) books, papers or other documents relevant to the complaint, without issuing a subpoena. If such agency, quasi-public agency or Probate Court fails to produce such witness, books, papers or documents, not later than thirty days after such order, the human rights referee may consider such failure as supporting evidence for the complainant. If, after the hearing, the human rights referee finds a violation, the referee may award the aggrieved

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employee reinstatement to the employee's former position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits for which the employee would otherwise have been eligible if such violation had not occurred, reasonable attorneys' fees, and any other damages. For the purposes of this subsection, such human rights referee shall act as an independent hearing officer. The decision of a human rights referee under this subsection may be appealed by any person who was a party at such hearing, in accordance with the provisions of section 4-183.

(B) The Chief Human Rights Referee shall adopt regulations, in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54, establishing the procedure for filing complaints and noticing and conducting hearings under subparagraph (A) of this subdivision.

(3) As an alternative to the provisions of subdivision (2) of this subsection: (A) A state or quasi-public agency employee who alleges that a personnel action has been threatened or taken may file an appeal not later than ninety days after learning of the specific incident giving rise to such claim with the Employees' Review Board under section 5-202, or, in the case of a state or quasi-public agency employee covered by a collective bargaining contract, in accordance with the procedure provided by such contract; or (B) an employee of a large state contractor alleging that such action has been threatened or taken may, after exhausting all available administrative remedies, bring a civil action in accordance with the provisions of subsection (c) of section 31-51m.

(4) In any proceeding under subdivision (2) or (3) of this subsection concerning a personnel action taken or threatened against any state or quasi-public agency employee or any employee of a large state contractor, which personnel action occurs not later than two years after the employee first transmits facts and information concerning a matter under subsection (a) of this section or discloses information under subdivision (1) of this subsection to the Auditors of Public Accounts,

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the Attorney General or an employee of a state agency, quasi-public agency or Probate Court, as applicable, there shall be a rebuttable presumption that the personnel action is in retaliation for the action taken by the employee under subsection (a) of this section or subdivision (1) of this subsection.

(5) If a state officer or employee, as defined in section 4-141, a quasi-public agency officer or employee, an officer or employee of a large state contractor or an appointing authority takes or threatens to take any action to impede, fail to renew or cancel a contract between a state agency and a large state contractor, or between a large state contractor and its subcontractor, in retaliation for the disclosure of information pursuant to subsection (a) of this section or subdivision (1) of this subsection to any agency listed in subdivision (1) of this subsection, such affected agency, contractor or subcontractor may, not later than ninety days after learning of such action, threat or failure to renew, bring a civil action in the superior court for the judicial district of Hartford to recover damages, attorney's fees and costs.

(f) Any employee of a state agency, quasi-public agency, Probate Court or large state contractor, who is found by the Auditors of Public Accounts, the Attorney General, a human rights referee or the Employees' Review Board to have knowingly and maliciously made false charges under subsection (a) of this section, shall be subject to disciplinary action by such employee's appointing authority up to and including dismissal. In the case of a state or quasi-public agency employee, such action shall be subject to appeal to the Employees' Review Board in accordance with section 5-202, or in the case of state or quasi-public agency employees included in collective bargaining contracts, the procedure provided by such contracts.

(g) On or before September first, annually, the Auditors of Public Accounts shall submit, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, to the clerk of each house of the General Assembly a report

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indicating the number of matters for which facts and information were transmitted to the auditors pursuant to this section during the preceding state fiscal year and the disposition of each such matter.

(h) Each contract between a state or quasi-public agency and a large state contractor shall provide that, if an officer, employee or appointing authority of a large state contractor takes or threatens to take any personnel action against any employee of the contractor in retaliation for such employee's disclosure of information to any employee of the contracting state or quasi-public agency or the Auditors of Public Accounts or the Attorney General under the provisions of subsection (a) or subdivision (1) of subsection (e) of this section, the contractor shall be liable for a civil penalty of not more than five thousand dollars for each offense, up to a maximum of twenty per cent of the value of the contract. Each violation shall be a separate and distinct offense and in the case of a continuing violation each calendar day's continuance of the violation shall be deemed to be a separate and distinct offense. The executive head of the state or quasi-public agency may request the Attorney General to bring a civil action in the superior court for the judicial district of Hartford to seek imposition and recovery of such civil penalty.

(i) Each state agency or quasi-public agency shall post a notice of the provisions of this section relating to state employees and quasi-public agency employees in a conspicuous place that is readily available for viewing by employees of such agency or quasi-public agency. Each Probate Court shall post a notice of the provisions of this section relating to Probate Court employees in a conspicuous place that is readily available for viewing by employees of such court. Each large state contractor shall post a notice of the provisions of this section relating to large state contractors in a conspicuous place which is readily available for viewing by the employees of the contractor.

(j) No person who, in good faith, discloses information in

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accordance with the provisions of this section shall be liable for any civil damages resulting from such good faith disclosure.

(k) As used in this section:

(1) "Large state contract" means a contract having a value of five million dollars or more (A) between an entity and a state or quasi-public agency, [having a value of five million dollars or more] or (B) for the receipt of financial assistance by an entity from the state pursuant to title 32; and

(2) "Large state contractor" means an entity that has entered into a large state contract with a state or quasi-public agency.

(l) (1) No officer or employee of a state shellfish grounds lessee shall take or threaten to take any personnel action against any employee of a state shellfish grounds lessee in retaliation for (A) such employee's disclosure of information to an employee of the leasing agency concerning information involving the state shellfish grounds lease, or (B) such employee's testimony or assistance in any proceeding under this section.

(2) (A) Not later than ninety days after learning of the specific incident giving rise to a claim that a personnel action has been threatened or has occurred in violation of subdivision (1) of this subsection, an employee of a state shellfish grounds lessee or the employee's attorney may file a complaint against the state shellfish grounds lessee concerning such personnel action with the Chief Human Rights Referee designated under section 46a-57. Such complaint may be amended if an additional incident giving rise to a claim under this subdivision occurs subsequent to the filing of the original complaint. The Chief Human Rights Referee shall assign the complaint to a human rights referee appointed under section 46a-57, who shall conduct a hearing and issue a decision concerning whether

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the officer or employee taking or threatening to take the personnel action violated any provision of this subsection. The human rights referee may order a state shellfish grounds lessee to produce (i) an employee of such lessee to testify as a witness in any proceeding under this subdivision, or (ii) books, papers or other documents relevant to the complaint, without issuing a subpoena. If such state shellfish grounds lessee fails to produce such witness, books, papers or documents, not later than thirty days after such order, the human rights referee may consider such failure as supporting evidence for the complainant. If, after the hearing, the human rights referee finds a violation, the referee may award the aggrieved employee reinstatement to the employee's former position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits for which the employee would otherwise have been eligible if such violation had not occurred, reasonable attorneys' fees and any other damages. For the purposes of this subsection, such human rights referee shall act as an independent hearing officer. The decision of a human rights referee under this subsection may be appealed by any person who was a party at such hearing, in accordance with the provisions of section 4-183.

(B) The Chief Human Rights Referee shall adopt regulations, in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54, establishing the procedure for filing complaints and noticing and conducting hearings under subparagraph (A) of this subdivision.

(3) As an alternative to the provisions of subdivision (2) of this subsection, an employee of a state shellfish grounds lessee who alleges that a personnel action has been threatened or taken may, after exhausting all available administrative remedies, bring a civil action in accordance with the provisions of subsection (c) of section 31-51m.

(4) In any proceeding under subdivision (2) or (3) of this subsection concerning a personnel action taken or threatened against any employee of a state shellfish grounds lessee, which personnel action

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occurs not later than two years after the employee first transmits facts and information to an employee of the leasing agency concerning the state shellfish grounds lease, there shall be a rebuttable presumption that the personnel action is in retaliation for the action taken by the employee under subdivision (1) of this subsection.