

RETALIATORY ACTION POLICY

1. Definitions. For purposes of this section, unless the context specifically indicates otherwise:

(a) "Employee" means an individual who performs services for and under the control and direction of an employer for wages or other remuneration.

(b) "Employer" means any person, firm, partnership, institution, corporation, or association that employs one or more employees.

(c) "Law, rule or regulation" includes any duly enacted statute or ordinance or any rule or regulation promulgated pursuant to any federal, state or local statute or ordinance.

(d) "Public body" includes the following:

(i) the United States Congress, any state legislature, or any popularly-elected local governmental body, or any member or employee thereof;

(ii) any federal, state, or local judiciary, or any member or employee thereof; or any grand or petit jury;

(iii) any federal, state, or local regulatory, administrative, or public agency or authority, or instrumentality thereof;

or

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

(e) "Retaliatory personnel action" means the discharge, suspension or demotion of an employee, or other adverse employment action taken against an employee in the terms and conditions of employment.

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

2. Prohibitions. An employer shall not take any retaliatory personnel action against an employee because such employee does any of the following:

(a) discloses, or threatens to disclose to a supervisor or to a public body an 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;

(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; or

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

3. Application. The protection against retaliatory personnel 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 the activity, policy or practice in violation of law, rule or regulation to the attention of a supervisor of the employer and has afforded such employer a reasonable opportunity to correct such activity, policy or practice.

4. Violation; Remedy.

(a) An employee who has been the subject of a retaliatory personnel action in violation of this section may institute a civil action in a court of competent jurisdiction for relief as set forth in subdivision five of this section within one year after the alleged retaliatory personnel action was taken.

(b) Any action authorized by this section may be brought in the county in which the alleged retaliatory personnel action occurred, in the county in which the complainant resides, or in the county in which the employer has its principal place of business.

(c) It shall be a defense to any action brought pursuant to this section that the personnel action was predicated upon grounds other than the employee's exercise of any rights protected by this section. It shall also be a defense that the individual was an independent contractor.

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

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

- (a) an injunction to restrain continued violation of this section;
- (b) the reinstatement of the employee to the same position held before the retaliatory personnel action, or to an equivalent position;
- (c) the reinstatement of full fringe benefits and seniority rights;
- (d) the compensation for lost wages, benefits and other remuneration; and
- (e) the payment by the employer of reasonable costs, disbursements, and attorney's fees.

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

7. Existing Rights. Nothing in this section shall be deemed to diminish the rights, privileges, or remedies of any employee under any other law or regulation or under any collective bargaining agreement or employment contract; except that the institution of an action in accordance with this section shall be deemed a waiver of the rights and remedies available under any other contract, collective bargaining agreement, law, rule or regulation or under the common law.