

Assembly Bill No. 223

CHAPTER 93

An act to amend Section 98.2 of the Labor Code, relating to employment.

[Approved by Governor July 22, 2003. Filed with Secretary of State July 22, 2003.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 223, Diaz. Employment.

Under existing law, if an employee believes an employer has failed to pay wages required by contract or statute, the employee may either file a civil action against the employer or file a wage claim with the Labor Commissioner seeking administrative relief. Where the administrative remedy is pursued, either party may appeal the decision of the Labor Commissioner to the trial court, for a hearing de novo. If an appeal is taken, and the party seeking review is unsuccessful, current statutory law requires the trial court to assess costs and reasonable attorney's fees against the party who filed the appeal. Case law interpreting this law has held that the appealing party is unsuccessful unless the court judgment is more favorable to the appealing party than the Labor Commissioner's award.

This bill instead would provide that an employee is successful so long as the employee recovers a judgment in his or her favor thereby overturning the holding in Smith v. Rae-Venter Law Group (2002) 29 Cal.4th 345 and restoring the prior holdings in Cardenas v. Mission Industries (1991) 226 Cal.App.3d 952 and Triad Data Services, Inc. v. Jackson (1984) 153 Cal.App.3d Supp. 1 on this issue.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. It is the intent of the Legislature, in enacting this act, to overturn the decision in Smith v. Rae-Venter Law Group (2002) 29 Cal.4th 345.

SEC. 2. Section 98.2 of the Labor Code is amended to read:

98.2. (a) Within 10 days after service of notice of an order, decision, or award the parties may seek review by filing an appeal to the superior court, where the appeal shall be heard de novo. A copy of the appeal request shall be served upon the Labor Commissioner by the appellant. For purposes of computing the 10-day period after service, Section 1013 of the Code of Civil Procedure shall be applicable.



(b) Whenever an employer files an appeal pursuant to this section, the employer shall post an undertaking with the reviewing court in the amount of the order, decision, or award. The undertaking shall consist of an appeal bond issued by a licensed surety or a cash deposit with the court in the amount of the order, decision, or award. The employer shall provide written notification to the other parties and the Labor Commissioner of the posting of the undertaking. The undertaking shall be on the condition that, if any judgment is entered in favor of the employee, the employer shall pay the amount owed pursuant to the judgment, and if the appeal is withdrawn or dismissed without entry of judgment, the employer shall pay the amount owed pursuant to the order, decision, or award of the Labor Commissioner unless the parties have executed a settlement agreement for payment of some other amount, in which case the employer shall pay the amount that the employer is obligated to pay under the terms of the settlement agreement. If the employer fails to pay the amount owed within 10 days of entry of the judgment, dismissal, or withdrawal of the appeal, or the execution of a settlement agreement, a portion of the undertaking equal to the amount owed, or the entire undertaking if the amount owed exceeds the undertaking, shall be forfeited to the employee.

(c) If the party seeking review by filing an appeal to the superior court is unsuccessful in the appeal, the court shall determine the costs and reasonable attorney's fees incurred by the other parties to the appeal, and assess that amount as a cost upon the party filing the appeal. An employee is successful if the court awards an amount greater than zero.

(d) If no notice of appeal of the order, decision, or award is filed within the period set forth in subdivision (a), the order, decision, or award shall, in the absence of fraud, be deemed the final order.

(e) The Labor Commissioner shall file, within 10 days of the order becoming final pursuant to subdivision (d), a certified copy of the final order with the clerk of the superior court of the appropriate county unless a settlement has been reached by the parties and approved by the Labor Commissioner. Judgment shall be entered immediately by the court clerk in conformity therewith. The judgment so entered shall have the same force and effect as, and shall be subject to all of the provisions of law relating to, a judgment in a civil action, and may be enforced in the same manner as any other judgment of the court in which it is entered. Enforcement of the judgment shall receive court priority.

(f) In order to ensure that judgments are satisfied, the Labor Commissioner may serve upon the judgment debtor, personally or by first-class mail at the last known address of the judgment debtor listed with the division, a form similar to, and requiring the reporting of the same information as, the form approved or adopted by the Judicial

Council for purposes of subdivision (a) of Section 116.830 of the Code of Civil Procedure to assist in identifying the nature and location of any assets of the judgment debtor.

The judgment debtor shall complete the form and cause it to be delivered to the division at the address listed on the form within 35 days after the form has been served on the judgment debtor, unless the judgment has been satisfied. In case of willful failure by the judgment debtor to comply with this subdivision, the division or the judgment creditor may request the court to apply the sanctions provided in Section 708.170 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

(g) Notwithstanding subdivision (e), the Labor Commissioner may stay execution of any judgment entered upon an order, decision, or award that has become final upon good cause appearing therefor and may impose the terms and conditions of the stay of execution. A certified copy of the stay of execution shall be filed with the clerk entering the judgment.

(h) When a judgment is satisfied in fact, otherwise than by execution, the Labor Commissioner may, upon the motion of either party or on its own motion, order entry of satisfaction of judgment. The clerk of the court shall enter a satisfaction of judgment upon the filing of a certified copy of the order.

(i) The Labor Commissioner shall make every reasonable effort to ensure that judgments are satisfied, including taking all appropriate legal action and requiring the employer to deposit a bond as provided in Section 240.

(j) The judgment creditor, or the Labor Commissioner as assignee of the judgment creditor, shall be entitled to court costs and reasonable attorney fees for enforcing the judgment that is rendered pursuant to this section.

