

Assembly Bill No. 54

CHAPTER 911

An act to amend Section 1021.1 of the Code of Civil Procedure, relating to actions.

[Approved by Governor October 13, 1995. Filed
with Secretary of State October 16, 1995.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 54, Weggeland. Civil actions.

Under existing law, if a party makes a specified offer for judgment that is not accepted and the party not accepting the offer fails to obtain a more favorable judgment, the party making the offer may, in the court's discretion, be awarded reasonable attorney's fees for services after the date of the offer, as specified. Existing law excludes an award pursuant to this provision in prescribed situations. These provisions only apply in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties and remain in effect until January 1, 1996, when they will be repealed.

This bill would extend the repeal date of these provisions to January 1, 1998.

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

SECTION 1. Section 1021.1 of the Code of Civil Procedure is amended to read:

1021.1. (a) Reasonable attorney's fees, may be awarded in an amount to be determined in the court's discretion, to a party to any civil action as provided by this section, and that award shall be made upon notice and motion by a party and shall be an element of the costs of suit.

(b) A party may be entitled, in the discretion of the court, to an award of attorney's fees under this section if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The party has made an offer for judgment under Section 998.

(2) That offer was not accepted within the time provided in Section 998.

(3) The party to whom the offer was made thereafter failed to obtain a more favorable judgment.

The party making the offer shall be entitled to attorney's fees only for legal services rendered after the date of the offer.

(c) In exercising its discretion to award attorney's fees the court shall consider the following factors:

(1) The reasonableness or lack thereof, of a party's failure to accept an offer for judgment under Section 998 in light of the facts



known to the party at the time, of which, in light of all of the circumstances, should have been known to the party. Reasonableness shall be determined by a consideration of at least the following matters:

(A) The then apparent merit or lack of merit in the claim that was the subject of the action.

(B) The closeness of the questions of fact and law at issue.

(C) Whether the offeror has unreasonably refused to furnish information necessary to evaluate the reasonableness of the offer.

(D) Whether the action was in the nature of a “test case,” presenting questions of far-reaching importance affecting nonparties.

(E) The relief that might reasonably have been expected if the claimant should prevail.

(F) The amount of the additional delay, cost, and expense that the offeror reasonably would be expected to incur if the litigation should be prolonged.

(G) Those other matters that the court may deem relevant in the interest of justice.

(2) The amount of damages and other relief sought and the results obtained for the client.

(3) The efforts made by the parties or the attorneys to settle the controversy.

(4) The existence of any bad faith or abuse of legal procedure by the parties or the attorneys.

(d) In exercising its discretion to determine the amount of attorney’s fees to be awarded, the court shall consider the following factors, except that in no event shall the amount awarded exceed a reasonable fee for the services actually rendered.

(1) Customary fees in the community in which the action or proceeding is pending charged by attorneys with similar experience or expertise.

(2) The time and labor reasonably required to be spent by the attorney or attorneys.

(3) The experience and ability of the attorneys generally within the profession and also with respect to the action or proceeding.

(4) The novelty and difficulty of the questions involved and the skill required to perform the services properly.

(5) The extent to which the acceptance of the particular matter imposes extraordinary burdens on the attorney or attorneys (A) by way of precluding other employment, (B) by the time limitations imposed by the client, or (C) by the circumstances.

(6) Whether the fee is fixed or contingent.

(7) Those other factors that the court may deem relevant in the interest of justice, including any of the factors described in subdivision (c).



(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to repeal or modify any other statutory provision for the award of attorney's fees or to diminish any express or implied contractual right which a party to a civil action may otherwise have to obtain an award of attorney's fees for the prosecution or defense of an action.

(f) No attorney's fees shall be awarded pursuant to this section in any of the following instances:

(1) Against a party who is proceeding in forma pauperis or a party whom the court has found not to have the financial ability to pay fees or who would suffer an unreasonable financial hardship if ordered to pay fees.

(2) For or against any party with respect to any cause of action under which an award for reasonable attorney's fees is authorized or required by any other federal or California statute.

(3) For or against any party with respect to any cause of action or proceeding commenced or prosecuted under Title 7 (commencing with Section 1230.010) of Part 3.

(4) For or against any party in any action in which one or more of plaintiffs seek to proceed as a class under Section 382.

(5) For or against any party as to any cause of action the gravamen of which is personal injury, wrongful death, or injunctive relief.

(g) The determination under this section shall be made after the final disposition of the action.

(h) This section shall apply only in Riverside County and San Bernardino County. The Legislature finds and declares that, in order to assess the impact of this section on a limited basis before making it applicable on a statewide basis, it is necessary for this section to be applicable for a limited period of time in those counties.

(i) This section shall only be in effect from July 1, 1988, until January 1, 1998, and on that date is repealed, unless a later enacted statute, which becomes effective on or before January 1, 1998, deletes or extends that date.

