

**Assembly Bill No. 2472**

CHAPTER 531

An act to add Article 5 (commencing with Section 44110) to Chapter 1 of Part 25 of, and to add Article 6 (commencing with Section 87160) to Chapter 1 of Part 51 of, the Education Code, relating to public school employees.

[Approved by Governor September 18, 2000. Filed  
with Secretary of State September 19, 2000.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2472, Romero. Public school employees: disclosure of improper governmental activities.

Under the California Whistleblower Protection Act, the State Auditor is authorized to conduct an investigative audit upon receiving confirmation that an employee or state agency, as defined, has engaged in an improper governmental activity. The act prohibits an employee from using his or her official authority or influence to intimidate, threaten, coerce, or command any person in order to interfere with that person's right to make a disclosure under the act. The act protects employees who, among other things, make disclosures to anyone of information that may evidence an improper governmental activity, refusal to obey an illegal order, or any condition that may significantly threaten the health or safety of employees or the public if the disclosure is made for the purpose of remedying the condition.

The act also provides that a state employee who files a written complaint with his or her supervisor, manager, or the appointing power alleging actual or attempted acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar improper acts because he or she has made a protected disclosure under the act, may also file a copy of the written complaint with the State Personnel Board, as specified. Any person who engages in the above-specified acts is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a \$10,000 fine, and is also subject to civil liability, as specified, except for any action or inaction that is justified on the basis of evidence separate and apart from the fact that the person has made a protected disclosure.

This bill would enact the Reporting by School Employees of Improper Governmental Activities Act and the Reporting by Community College Employees of Improper Governmental Activities Act which would enact provisions similar to the California Whistleblower Protection Act applicable to employees of any public school employer, as defined, and would add provisions by which a public school employee is authorized to file a written complaint with



the local law enforcement agency, as specified, alleging acts or attempted acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar improper acts. By expanding the scope of an existing crime, the bill would create a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

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

SECTION 1. Article 5 (commencing with Section 44110) is added to Chapter 1 of Part 25 of the Education Code, to read:

Article 5. Reporting by School Employees of Improper  
Governmental Activities

44110. This article shall be known and may be referred to as the Reporting by School Employees of Improper Governmental Activities Act.

44111. It is the intent of the Legislature that school employees and other persons disclose, to the extent not expressly prohibited by law, improper governmental activities.

44112. For the purposes of this article, the following terms have the following meanings:

(a) "Employee" means a public school employee as defined in subdivision (j) of Section 3540.1 of the Government Code.

(b) "Illegal order" means any directive to violate or assist in violating a federal, state, or local law, rule, or regulation or an order to work or cause others to work in conditions outside of their line of duty that would unreasonably threaten the health or safety of employees or the public.

(c) "Improper governmental activity" means an activity by a public school agency or by an employee that is undertaken in the performance of the employee's official duties, whether or not that activity is within the scope of his or her employment, and that meets either of the following descriptions:

(1) The activity violates a state or federal law or regulation, including, but not limited to, corruption, malfeasance, bribery, theft of government property, fraudulent claims, fraud, coercion, conversion, malicious prosecution, misuse of government property, or willful omission to perform duty.

(2) The activity is economically wasteful or involves gross misconduct, incompetency, or inefficiency.



(d) “Person” means any individual, corporation, trust, association, any state or local government, or any agency or instrumentality of any of the foregoing.

(e) “Protected disclosure” means a good faith communication that discloses or demonstrates an intention to disclose information that may evidence either of the following:

(1) An improper governmental activity.

(2) Any condition that may significantly threaten the health or safety of employees or the public if the disclosure or intention to disclose was made for the purpose of remedying that condition.

(f) “Public school employer” has the same meaning as in subdivision (k) of Section 3540.1 of the Government Code.

44113. (a) An employee may not directly or indirectly use or attempt to use the official authority or influence of the employee for the purpose of intimidating, threatening, coercing, commanding, or attempting to intimidate, threaten, coerce, or command any person for the purpose of interfering with the right of that person to disclose to an official agent matters within the scope of this article.

(b) For the purpose of subdivision (a), “use of official authority or influence” includes promising to confer or conferring any benefit; affecting or threatening to affect any reprisal; or taking, directing others to take, recommending, processing, or approving any personnel action, including, but not limited to appointment, promotion, transfer, assignment, performance evaluation, suspension, or other disciplinary action.

(c) For the purpose of subdivision (a), “official agent” includes a school administrator, member of the governing board of a school district or county board of education, county superintendent of schools, or the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(d) An employee who violates subdivision (a) may be liable in an action for civil damages brought against the employee by the offended party.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize an individual to disclose information otherwise prohibited by or under law.

44114. (a) A public school employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer who files a written complaint with his or her supervisor, a school administrator, or the public school employer alleging actual or attempted acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar improper acts prohibited by Section 44113 for having disclosed improper governmental activities or for refusing to obey an illegal order may also file a copy of the written complaint with the local law enforcement agency together with a sworn statement that the contents of the written complaint are true, or are believed by the affiant to be true, under penalty of perjury. The complaint filed with the local law enforcement agency



shall be filed within 12 months of the most recent act of reprisal that is the subject of the complaint.

(b) A person who intentionally engages in acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar acts against a public school employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer for having made a protected disclosure is subject to a fine not to exceed ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) and imprisonment in the county jail for a period not to exceed one year. Any public school employee, officer, or administrator who intentionally engages in that conduct shall also be subject to discipline by the public school employer. If no adverse action is instituted by the public school employer, and it is determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that an act of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar acts prohibited by Section 44113, the local law enforcement agency may report the nature and details of the activity to the governing board of the school district or county board of education, as appropriate.

(c) In addition to all other penalties provided by law, a person who intentionally engages in acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar acts against a public school employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer for having made a protected disclosure shall be liable in an action for damages brought against him or her by the injured party. Punitive damages may be awarded by the court where the acts of the offending party are proven to be malicious. Where liability has been established, the injured party shall also be entitled to reasonable attorney's fees as provided by law. However, an action for damages shall not be available to the injured party unless the injured party has first filed a complaint with the local law enforcement agency.

(d) This section is not intended to prevent a public school employer, school administrator, or supervisor from taking, failing to take, directing others to take, recommending, or approving a personnel action with respect to a public school employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer if the public school employer, school administrator, or supervisor reasonably believes the action or inaction is justified on the basis of evidence separate and apart from the fact that the person has made a protected disclosure as defined in subdivision (e) of Section 44112.

(e) In any civil action or administrative proceeding, once it has been demonstrated by a preponderance of evidence that an activity protected by this article was a contributing factor in the alleged retaliation against a former, current, or prospective public school employee, the burden of proof shall be on the supervisor, school administrator, or public school employer to demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that the alleged action would have occurred for legitimate, independent reasons even if the public school employee had not engaged in protected disclosures or refused an illegal order.



If the supervisor, school administrator, or public school employer fails to meet this burden of proof in an adverse action against the public school employee in any administrative review, challenge, or adjudication in which retaliation has been demonstrated to be a contributing factor, the public school employee shall have a complete affirmative defense in the adverse action.

(f) Nothing in this article shall be deemed to diminish the rights, privileges, or remedies of a public school employee under any other federal or state law or under an employment contract or collective bargaining agreement.

(g) If the provisions of this section are in conflict with the provisions of a memorandum of understanding reached pursuant to Chapter 10.7 (commencing with Section 3540) of Division 4 of Title 1 of the Government Code, the memorandum of understanding shall be controlling without further legislative action.

SEC. 2. Article 6 (commencing with Section 87160) is added to Chapter 1 of Part 51 of the Education Code, to read:

Article 6. Reporting by Community College Employees of Improper Governmental Activities

87160. This article shall be known and may be referred to as the Reporting by Community College Employees of Improper Governmental Activities Act.

87161. It is the intent of the Legislature that community college employees and other persons disclose, to the extent not expressly prohibited by law, improper governmental activities.

87162. For the purposes of this article, the following terms have the following meanings:

(a) "Employee" means a public school employee as defined in subdivision (j) of Section 3540.1 of the Government Code as construed to include community college employees.

(b) "Illegal order" means any directive to violate or assist in violating a federal, state, or local law, rule, or regulation or an order to work or cause others to work in conditions outside of their line of duty that would unreasonably threaten the health or safety of employees or the public.

(c) "Improper governmental activity" means an activity by a community college or by an employee that is undertaken in the performance of the employee's official duties, whether or not that activity is within the scope of his or her employment, and that meets either of the following descriptions:

(1) The activity violates a state or federal law or regulation, including, but not limited to, corruption, malfeasance, bribery, theft of government property, fraudulent claims, fraud, coercion, conversion, malicious prosecution, misuse of government property, or willful omission to perform duty.



(2) The activity is economically wasteful or involves gross misconduct, incompetency, or inefficiency.

(d) “Person” means any individual, corporation, trust, association, any state or local government, or any agency or instrumentality of any of the foregoing.

(e) “Protected disclosure” means a good faith communication that discloses or demonstrates an intention to disclose information that may evidence either of the following:

(1) An improper governmental activity.

(2) Any condition that may significantly threaten the health or safety of employees or the public if the disclosure or intention to disclose was made for the purpose of remedying that condition.

(f) “Public school employer” has the same meaning as in subdivision (k) of Section 3540.1 of the Government Code as construed to include community college districts.

87163. (a) An employee may not directly or indirectly use or attempt to use the official authority or influence of the employee for the purpose of intimidating, threatening, coercing, commanding, or attempting to intimidate, threaten, coerce, or command any person for the purpose of interfering with the right of that person to disclose to an official agent matters within the scope of this article.

(b) For the purpose of subdivision (a), “use of official authority or influence” includes promising to confer or conferring any benefit; affecting or threatening to affect any reprisal; or taking, directing others to take, recommending, processing, or approving any personnel action, including, but not limited to appointment, promotion, transfer, assignment, performance evaluation, suspension, or other disciplinary action.

(c) For the purpose of subdivision (a), “official agent” includes a community college administrator, member of the governing board of a community college district, or the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges.

(d) An employee who violates subdivision (a) may be liable in an action for civil damages brought against the employee by the offended party.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize an individual to disclose information otherwise prohibited by or under law.

87164. (a) An employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer who files a written complaint with his or her supervisor, a community college administrator, or the public school employer alleging actual or attempted acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar improper acts prohibited by Section 87163 for having disclosed improper governmental activities or for refusing to obey an illegal order may also file a copy of the written complaint with the local law enforcement agency, together with a sworn statement that the contents of the written complaint are true,



or are believed by the affiant to be true, under penalty of perjury. The complaint filed with the local law enforcement agency shall be filed within 12 months of the most recent act of reprisal that is the subject of the complaint.

(b) A person who intentionally engages in acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar acts against an employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer for having made a protected disclosure is subject to a fine not to exceed ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) and imprisonment in the county jail for a period not to exceed one year. An employee, officer, or administrator who intentionally engages in that conduct shall also be subject to discipline by the public school employer. If no adverse action is instituted by the public school employer, and it is determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that an act of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar acts prohibited by Section 87163, the local law enforcement agency may report the nature and details of the activity to the governing board of the community college district.

(c) In addition to all other penalties provided by law, a person who intentionally engages in acts of reprisal, retaliation, threats, coercion, or similar acts against an employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer for having made a protected disclosure shall be liable in an action for damages brought against him or her by the injured party. Punitive damages may be awarded by the court where the acts of the offending party are proven to be malicious. Where liability has been established, the injured party shall also be entitled to reasonable attorney's fees as provided by law. However, an action for damages shall not be available to the injured party unless the injured party has first filed a complaint with the local law enforcement agency.

(d) This section is not intended to prevent a public school employer, school administrator, or supervisor from taking, failing to take, directing others to take, recommending, or approving a personnel action with respect to an employee or applicant for employment with a public school employer if the public school employer, school administrator, or supervisor reasonably believes an action or inaction is justified on the basis of evidence separate and apart from the fact that the person has made a protected disclosure as defined in subdivision (e) of Section 87162.

(e) In any civil action or administrative proceeding, once it has been demonstrated by a preponderance of evidence that an activity protected by this article was a contributing factor in the alleged retaliation against a former, current, or prospective employee, the burden of proof shall be on the supervisor, school administrator, or public school employer to demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that the alleged action would have occurred for legitimate, independent reasons even if the employee had not engaged in protected disclosures or refused an illegal order. If the supervisor,



school administrator, or public school employer fails to meet this burden of proof in an adverse action against the employee in any administrative review, challenge, or adjudication in which retaliation has been demonstrated to be a contributing factor, the employee shall have a complete affirmative defense in the adverse action.

(f) Nothing in this article shall be deemed to diminish the rights, privileges, or remedies of an employee under any other federal or state law or under an employment contract or collective bargaining agreement.

(g) If the provisions of this section are in conflict with the provisions of a memorandum of understanding reached pursuant to Chapter 10.7 (commencing with Section 3540) of Division 4 of Title 1 of the Government Code, the memorandum of understanding shall be controlling without further legislative action.

SEC. 3. Nothing in this act is intended to supersede or limit the application of the privilege of subdivision (b) of Section 47 of the Civil Code to informants and proceedings conducted pursuant to Article 3 (commencing with Section 8547) of Chapter 6.5 of Division 1 of Title 2 of the Government Code, as confirmed in *Braun v. Bureau of State Audits* (1998) 67 Cal.App.4th 1382.

SEC. 4. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.

