ENROLLMENT(S)



(5)

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

NOTICE

D.C. LAW 12-160

"Whistleblower Reinforcement Act of 1998".

Pursuant to Section 412 of the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act, P.L. 93-198 "the Act", the Council of the District of Columbia adopted Bill No. 12-191 on first and second readings, May 5, 1998 and June 2, 1998, respectively. Following the signature of the Mayor on June 23, 1998, pursuant to Section 404(e) of "the Act", and was assigned Act No. 12-398 and published in the August 7, 1998, edition of the D.C. Register (Vol. 45 page 5147) and transmitted to Congress on July 21, 1998 for a 30-day review, in accordance with Section 602(c)(1) of the Act.

The Council of the District of Columbia hereby gives notice that the 30-day Congressional Review Period has expired, and therefore, cites this enactment as D.C. Law 12-160, effective October 7, 1998.

LINDA W. CROPP Chairman of the Council

Dates Counted During the 30-day Congressional Review Period:

July

21,22,23,24,27,28,29,30,31

Sept.

8,9,10,11,14,15,16,17,18,21,22,23,24,25,28,29,30

Oct.

1,2,5,6

AN ACT

D.C. ACT 12-398

Codification District of Columbia Code 1999 Supp.

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

JUNE 23, 1998

To amend the District of Columbia Government Comprehensive Merit Personnel Act of 1978 to increase protection for District government employees who report waste, fraud, abuse of authority, violations of law, or threat to public health or safety, and to impose an enforceable obligation on District government supervisors to report violations of law when circumstances require, and to afford the same whistleblower protections to employees of District instrumentalities and employees of contractors who perform work on District contracts.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this act may be cited as the "Whistleblower Reinforcement Act of 1998".

TITLE I - WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION FOR CERTAIN DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

- Sec. 101. This title may be cited as the "Whistleblower Protection Amendment Act of 1998".
- Sec. 102. The District of Columbia Government Comprehensive Merit Personnel Act of 1978, effective March 3, 1979 (D.C. Law 2-139; D.C. Code § 1-601.1 *et seq.*), is amended as follows:
 - (a) Title II (D.C. Code §§ 1-602.1 et seq.) is amended as follows:
 - (1) Section 201 (D.C. Code § 1-602.1) is amended as follows:

Section 1-602.1

- (A) Subsection (a) is amended by striking the word "Unless" and inserting the phrase "Except as provided in subsection (c) of this section unless" in its place.
 - (B) A new subsection (c) is added to read as follows:
- "(c) The provisions of title 15-A shall apply to employees of all District agencies, including, but not limited to employees of subordinate agencies, independent agencies, the District of Columbia Board of Education, the Board of Trustees of the University of the District of Columbia, the District of Columbia Housing Authority, and the Metropolitan Police

Department.".

(2) Section 202 (D.C. Code § 1-602.2) is amended by adding a new paragraph
(6) to read as follows:

Sections 1-616.1-1-616.3

- "(6) Notwithstanding any other provision of District law, title 15-A shall apply to all District employees.".
 - (b) Sections 1501 through 1503 (D.C. Code §§ 1-616.1 1-616.3) are repealed.
 - (c) A new title 15-A is added to read as follows:

"TITLE 15-A WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

"Sec. 1551. Findings and declaration of purpose.

New Subchapter XVI-A, Chapter 6, Title 1

"The Council finds and declares that the public interest is served when employees of the District government are free to report waste, fraud, abuse of authority, violations of law, or threats to public health or safety without fear of retaliation or reprisal. Accordingly, the Council declares as its policy to:

New Section 1-616.11

- "(1) Enhance the rights of District employees to challenge the actions or failures of their agencies and to express their views without fear of retaliation through appropriate channels within the agency, complete and frank responses to Council inquiries, free access to law enforcement officials, oversight agencies of both the executive and legislative branches of government, and appropriate communication with the public;
- "(2) Ensure that acts of the Council enacted to protect individual citizens are properly enforced;
- "(3) Provide new rights and remedies to guarantee and ensure that public offices are truly public trusts;
- "(4) Hold public employees personally accountable for failure to enforce the laws and for negligence in the performance of their public duties;
- "(5) Ensure that rights of employees to expose corruption, dishonesty, incompetence, or administrative failure are protected;
- "(6) Guarantee the rights of employees to contact and communicate with the Council and be protected in that exercise;
- "(7) Protect employees from reprisal or retaliation for the performance of their duties; and
 - "(8) Motivate employees to do their duties justly and efficiently.

"Sec. 1552. Definitions.

"(a) For purposes of this title, the term:

New Section 1-616.12

- "(1) "Contract" means any contract for goods or services between the District government and another entity but excludes any collective bargaining agreement.
- "(2) "Contributing factor" means any factor which, alone or in connection with other factors, tends to affect in any way the outcome of the decision.
 - "(3) "Employee" means any person who is a former or current District employee,

or an applicant for employment by the District government, including but not limited to employees of subordinate agencies, independent agencies, the District of Columbia Board of Education, the Board of Trustees of the University of the District of Columbia, the District of Columbia Housing Authority, and the Metropolitan Police Department, but excluding employees of the Council of the District of Columbia.

- "(4) "Illegal order" means a directive to violate or to assist in violating a federal, state or local law, rule or regulation.
- "(5) "Prohibited personnel action" includes but is not limited to: recommended, threatened, or actual termination, demotion, suspension, or reprimand; involuntary transfer, reassignment, or detail; referral for psychiatric or psychological counseling; failure to promote or hire or take other favorable personnel action; or retaliating in any other manner against an employee because that employee makes a protected disclosure or refuses to comply with an illegal order, as those terms are defined in this section.
- "(6) "Protected disclosure" means any disclosure of information, not specifically prohibited by statute, by an employee to a supervisor or a public body that the employee reasonably believes evidences:
 - "(A) Gross mismanagement;
 - "(B) Gross misuse or waste of public resources or funds;
- "(C) Abuse of authority in connection with the administration of a public program or the execution of a public contract;
- "(D) A violation of a federal, state, or local law, rule, or regulation, or of a term of a contract between the District government and a District government contractor which is not of a merely sechnical or minimal nature; or
 - "(E) A substantial and specific danger to the public health and safety.
 - "(7) "Public body" means:
- "(A) The United States Congress, the Council, any state legislature, the District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General, the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, or any member or employee of one of these bodies;
- "(B) The federal, District of Columbia, or any state or local judiciary, any member or employee of these judicial branches, or any grand or petit jury;
- "(C) Any federal, District of Columbia, state, or local regulatory, administrative, or public agency or authority or instrumentality of one of these agencies or authorities:
- "(D) Any federal, District of Columbia, state, or local law enforcement agency, prosecutorial office, or police or peace officer;
- "(E) Any federal, District of Columbia, state, or local department of an executive branch of government; or

- "(F) Any division, board, bureau, office, committee, commission or independent agency of any of the public bodies described in subparagraphs (A) through (E) of this paragraph.
- "(8) "Supervisor" means an individual employed by the District government who meets the definition of a "supervisor" in section 1701(d) or who has the authority to effectively recommend or take remedial or corrective action for the violation of a law, rule, regulation or contract term, or the misuse of government resources that an employee may allege or report pursuant to this section, including without limitation an agency head, department director, or manager.
- "(9) "Whistleblower" means an employee who makes or is perceived to have made a protected disclosure as that term is defined in this section.

"Sec. 1553. Prohibitions.

"A supervisor shall not threaten to take or take a prohibited personnel action or otherwise retaliate against an employee because of the employee's protected disclosure or because of an employee's refusal to comply with an illegal order.

"Sec. 1554. Enforcement.

- "(a) An employee aggrieved by a violation of section 1553 may bring a civil action before a court or a jury in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia seeking relief and damages, including but not limited to injunction, reinstatement to the same position held before the prohibited personnel action or to an equivalent position, and reinstatement of the employee's seniority rights, restoration of lost benefits, back pay and interest on back pay, compensatory damages, and reasonable costs and attorney fees. A civil action shall be filed within 1-year after a violation occurs or within 1-year after the employee first becomes aware of the violation. A civil action brought pursuant to this section shall comply with the notice requirements of section 12-309.
- "(b) In a civil action or administrative proceeding, once it has been demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence that an activity proscribed by section 1553 was a contributing factor in the alleged prohibited personnel action against an employee, the burden of proof shall be on the employing District agency to prove by clear and convincing evidence that the alleged action would have occurred for legitimate, independent reasons even if the employee had not engaged in activities protected by this section.
- "(c) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a violation of section 1553 constitutes a complete affirmative defense for a whistleblower to a prohibited personnel action in an administrative review, challenge, or adjudication of that action.
- "(d) An employee who prevails in a civil action at the trial level, shall be granted the equitable relief provided in the decision effective upon the date of the decision, absent a stay.

"Sec. 1555. Disciplinary actions; fine.

"(a) As part of the relief ordered in an administrative, arbitration or judicial proceeding,

New Section

New Section 1-616.14

New Section 1-616.15

any supervisor, including any manager, department director, or other District official, who is found to have violated section 1553 shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action including dismissal.

- "(b) As part of the relief ordered in a judicial proceeding, any supervisor who is found to have violated section 1553 shall be subject to a civil fine not to exceed \$1000.
 - "Sec. 1556. Election of remedies.
- "(a) The institution of a civil action pursuant to section 1554 shall preclude an employee New Section from pursuing any administrative remedy for the same cause of action from the Office of Employee Appeals or from an arbitrator pursuant to a negotiated grievance and arbitration procedure or an employment contract.

1-616.16

- "(b) No civil action shall be brought pursuant to section 1554 if the aggrieved employee has had a final determination on the same cause of action from the Office of Employee Appeals or from an arbitrator pursuant to a negotiated grievance and arbitration procedure or an employment contract.
- "(c) Except as provided in subsections (a) and (b) of this section, nothing in this act shall diminish the rights and remedies of an employee pursuant to any other federal or District law.
 - "Sec. 1557. Posting of notice.

"The District shall conspicuously display notices of employee protections and obligations under this act in each personnel office and in other public places, and shall use all other appropriate means to keep all employees informed, including but not limited to the inclusion of annual notices of employee protections and obligations under this act with employee tax reporting documents.

New Section 1-616.17

"Sec. 1558. Employee responsibilities.

"Employees shall have the following rights and responsibilities:

New Section 1-616.18

- "(1) The right to freely express their opinions on all public issues, including those related to the duties they are assigned to perform: Provided, however, that any agency may promulgate reasonable rules and regulations requiring that any such opinions be clearly disassociated from that agency's policy;
- "(2) The right to disclose information unlawfully suppressed, information concerning illegal or unethical conduct which threatens or which is likely to threaten public health or safety or which involves the unlawful appropriation or use of public funds, and information which would tend to impeach the testimony of employees of the District government before committees of the Council or the responses of employees to inquiries from members of the Council concerning the implementation of programs, information which would involve expenditure of public funds, and the protection of the constitutional rights of citizens and the rights of government employees under this act and under any other laws, rules, or regulations for

the protection of the rights of employees: Provided, however, that nothing in this section shall be construed to permit the disclosure of the contents of personnel files, personal medical reports, or any other information in a manner to invade the individual privacy of an employee or citizen of the United States except as otherwise provided in this act;

- "(3) The right to communicate freely and openly with members of the Council and to respond fully and with candor to inquiries from committees of the Council, and from members of the Council: Provided, however, that nothing in this section shall be construed to permit the invasion of the individual privacy of other employees or of citizens of the United States;
- "(4) The right to assemble in public places for the free discussion of matters of interest to themselves and to the public and the right to notify, on their own time, fellow employees and the public of these meetings;
- "(5) The right to humane, dignified, and reasonable conditions of employment, which allow for personal growth and self-fulfillment, and for the unhindered discharge of job responsibilities;
- "(6) The right to individual privacy: Provided, however, that nothing in this section shall limit in any manner an employee's access to his or her own personnel file, medical report file, or any other file or document concerning his or her status or performance within his or her agency, except as otherwise provided in title XXXI;
- "(7) Each employee of the District government shall make all protected disclosures concerning any violation of law, rule, or regulation, contract, misuse of government resources or other disclosure enumerated in section 1552(a)(6), as soon as the employee becomes aware of the violation or misuse of resources.
- "(8) Each supervisor employed by the District government shall make all protected disclosures involving any violation of law, rule, regulation or contract pursuant to section 1552(a)(6)(D) as soon as the supervisor becomes aware of the violation.
- "(9) The failure of a supervisor to make protected disclosures pursuant to section 1552(a)(6)(D) shall be a basis for disciplinary action including dismissal.
- "(10) Upon receipt of an adjudicative finding that a protected activity was a contributing factor in an alleged prohibited personnel action, the appropriate agency head shall immediately institute disciplinary action against the offending supervisor.
- "(11) Disciplinary action taken pursuant to this section shall follow the procedures of section 1601, where applicable."

"Sec. 1559. Applicability.

New Section 1-616.19

This title shall apply to actions taken after enactment of the Whistleblower Reinforcement 1-616.19 Emergency Amendment Act of 1998.".

TITLE II - WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION FOR OTHER EMPLOYEES

New Subchapter V, Chapter 11, Title 1

Sec. 201. This title may be cited as the "Employees of District Contractors and Instrumentality Whistleblower Protection Act of 1998".

Note, New Section 1-1177.1

Sec. 202. Definitions.

New Section 1-1177.1

For purposes of this title, the term:

- (1) "Contract" means any contract for goods or services between the District government and another entity but excludes any collective bargaining agreement.
- (2) "Contributing factor" means any factor which, alone or in connection with other factors, tends to affect in any way the outcome of the decision.
 - (3) "Employee" means:
- (A) Any person who is a former or current employee of or an applicant for employment by an instrumentality of the District government not covered by the District of Columbia Government Comprehensive Merit Personnel Act of 1978, effective March 3, 1979 (D.C. Law 2-139; D.C. Code § 1-601.1 et seq.); or
- (B) Any person who is a former or current employee of any entity that has a contract with the District government to supply goods or services and who is engaged in performing such contract.
- (4) "Illegal order" means a directive to violate or to assist in violating a federal, state, or local law, rule, or regulation.
- (5) "Instrumentality" means a quasi-governmental entity that operates in part with District funds, including, but not limited to, the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority, established by section 202(a) of the Water and Sewer Authority Establishment and Department of Public Works Reorganization Act of 1996, effective April 18, 1996 (D.C. Law 11-111; D.C. Code § 43-1672(a)); the Health and Hospitals Public Benefits Corporation, established by section 202(a) of the Health and Hospitals Public Benefit Corporation Act of 1996, effective April 9, 1997 (D.C. Law 11-212; D.C. Code § 32-261.1 et seq.); the Public Service Commission, established by paragraph 97(a) of section 8 of An Act Making appropriations to provide for the expenses of the government of the District of Columbia for the fiscal year ending June thirtieth nineteen hundred and fourteen, and for other purposes, approved March 4, 1913 (37 Stat. 995; D.C. Code § 43-401); the Washington Convention Center Authority established by section 202 of the Washington Convention Center Authority Act of 1994, effective September 28, 1994 (D.C. Law 10-188; D.C. Code § 9-805); the Committee to Promote the District of Columbia; the National Capital Revitalization Corporation, established by section 3 of the National Capital Revitalization Corporation Act of 1998, signed by the Mayor May 5, 1998 (D.C. Act 12-355; ___DCR___); and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit

Authority, established by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Compact, approved September 15, 1960 (D.C. Code § 1-2431 et seq.).

- (6) "Prohibited personnel action" includes but is not limited to: recommended, threatened, or actual termination, demotion, suspension, or reprimand; involuntary transfer, reassignment or detail; referral for psychiatric or psychological counseling; failure to hire or promote or take other favorable personnel action; or in any other manner retaliating against an employee because that employee has made a protected disclosure or refuses to comply with an illegal order, as those terms are defined in this section.
- (7) "Protected disclosure" means any disclosure of information, not specifically prohibited by statute, by an employee to a supervisor or to a public body that the employee reasonably believes evidences:
- (A) Gross mismanagement in connection with the administration of a public program or the execution of a public contract;
 - (B) Gross misuse or waste of public resources or funds;
- (C) Abuse of authority in connection with the administration of a public program or the execution of a public contract;
- (D) A violation of a federal, state, or local law, rule, or regulation, or of a term of a contract between the District government and a District government contractor which is not of a merely technical or minimal nature; or
 - (E) A substantial and specific danger to the public health and safety.
 - (8) "Public body" means:
- (A) The United States Congress, the Council, any state legislature, the District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General, the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, or any member or employee of one of these bodies;
- (B) The federal, the District of Columbia, or any state or local judiciary, any member or employee of these judicial branches, or any grand or petit jury;
- (C) Any federal, District of Columbia, state, or local regulatory, administrative, or public agency or authority or instrumentality of one of these agencies or authorities;
- (D) Any federal, District of Columbia, state, or local law enforcement agency, prosecutorial office, or police or peace officer;
- (E) Any federal, District of Columbia, state, or local department of an executive branch of government; or
- (F) Any division, board, bureau, office, committee, commission or independent agency of any of the public bodies described in subparagraphs (A) through (E) of this paragraph.
 - (9) "Supervisor" means any individual employed by a District instrumentality or

by a District government contractor who has authority to do the following:

- (A) To hire, transfer, suspend, lay off, recall, promote, discharge, assign, reward, or discipline other employees, or responsibility to direct them, or to evaluate their performance, or to adjust their grievances, or effectively to recommend such action, if in connection with the foregoing the exercise of authority is not of a merely routine or clerical nature, but requires the use of independent judgment; or
- "(B) To effectively recommend or to take remedial or corrective action for the violation of a law, rule, regulation or contract term that an employee may allege or report pursuant to this act.
- (10) "Whistleblower" means an employee who makes or is perceived to have made a protected disclosure as that term is defined in this section.

Sec. 203. Prohibitions.

New Section 1-1177.2

A supervisor shall not threaten to take or take a prohibited personnel action or otherwise retaliate against an employee because of the employee's protected disclosure or because of an employee's refusal to comply with an illegal order.

Sec. 204. Enforcement.

New Section

- (a) An employee aggrieved by a violation of section 203 may bring a civil action before a court or a jury in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia seeking relief and damages, including but not limited to injunction, reinstatement to the same position held before the prohibited personnel action or to an equivalent position, and reinstatement of the employee's seniority rights, restoration of lost benefits, back pay and interest on back pay, compensatory damages, reasonable costs, and attorney fees. A civil action shall be filed within 1 year after a violation occurs or within 1 year after the employee first becomes aware of the violation.
- (b) In a civil action or administrative proceeding, once it has been demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence that an activity proscribed by section 203 was a contributing factor in the alleged prohibited personnel action against an employee, the burden of proof shall be on the employing District instrumentality or contractor to prove by clear and convincing evidence that the alleged action would have occurred for legitimate, independent reasons even if the employee had not engaged in activities protected by this section.
- (c) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a violation of section 203 constitutes a complete affirmative defense for a whistleblower to a prohibited personnel action in an administrative review, challenge, or adjudication of that action.
- (d) An employee who prevails in a civil action at the trial level shall be granted the equitable relief provided in the decision effective upon the date of the decision, absent a stay.

Sec. 205. Disciplinary action; fine.

New Section 1-1177.4

- (a) As part of the relief ordered in an administrative, arbitral or judicial proceeding, any supervisor who is found to have violated section 203 shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.
- (b) As part of the relief ordered in a judicial proceeding, any supervisor who is found to have violated section 203 shall be subject to a civil fine not to exceed \$1000.

Sec. 206. Election of remedies.

New Section 1-1177.5

- (a) The institution of a civil action pursuant to section 204(a) shall preclude an employee from pursuing any administrative remedy for the same cause of action from an arbitrator pursuant to a negotiated grievance and arbitration procedure or an employment contract.
- (b) No civil action shall be brought, pursuant to section 204(a) if the aggrieved employee has had a final determination on the same cause of action from an arbitrator pursuant to a negotiated grievance and arbitration procedure or an employment contract.

Sec. 207. Posting of notice.

New Section 1-1177.6

District instrumentalities shall conspicuously display notices of employee protections and obligations under this title in each personnel office and in other public places, and shall use all other appropriate means to keep all employees informed, including but not limited to the inclusion of annual notices of employee protections and obligations under this title with employee tax reporting documents. District government contractors shall inform all employees engaged in performing District government contracts of their rights under this title.

Sec. 208. Applicability.

New Section

- (a) This title shall apply to actions taken after enactment of the Whistleblower Reinforcement Emergency Amendment Act of 1998.
- (b) This title shall apply to employees of the WMATA when the Commonwealth of Virginia and the State of Maryland enact similar provisions for WMATA whistleblowers.

TITLE III - FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Sec. 301. Based on the fiscal impact statement prepared by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, dated May 5, 1998, Bill 12-191 could likely have a positive, perhaps significant, fiscal impact on the District. Although it would result in slightly higher administrative costs due to a higher whistleblower caseload, and Corporation Counsel believes liability costs would approximate \$250,000 per year (if the District is not liable for punitive damages) or \$500,000 per year (if the District is liable for punitive damages), Bill 12-191 could also result in significant cost savings from the uncovering of waste, fraud, and abuse.

The bill is not expected to have an impact on revenues outside the context of cost savings.

TITLE IV - EFFECTIVE DATE

Sec. 401. This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), approval by the Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority as provided in section 203(a) of the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Act of 1995, approved April 17, 1995 (109 Statis 116; D.C. Code § 47-392.3(a)), a 30-day period of Congressional review as provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Code § 1-233(c)(1)), and publication in the District of Columbia Register.

Chairman

Council of the District of Columbia

District of Columbia

APPROVED: June 23, 1998



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

COUNCIL PERIOD TWELVE

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Secretary to the Council

Date