

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

~~{deleted text}~~ shows text that was in HB0173S02 but was deleted in HB0173S03.

inserted text shows text that was not in HB0173S02 but was inserted into HB0173S03.

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Representative Kera Birkeland proposes the following substitute bill:

~~{GOVERNMENT ATTORNEY FEES AMENDMENTS}~~CITIZEN

EMPOWERMENT TASK FORCE

2023 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Kera Birkeland

Senate Sponsor: ~~{_____}~~Daniel McCay

LONG TITLE

General Description:

This bill ~~{allows a private party and a political subdivision to recover attorney fees in certain civil actions involving a governmental entity}~~creates the Citizen Empowerment Task Force.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

▶ ~~{defines terms;~~

→ ~~requires a court to award reasonable attorney fees to a private party who prevails in certain civil actions involving a governmental entity;~~

→ ~~requires a court to award reasonable attorney fees to a political subdivision that~~

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

- ~~prevails in certain civil actions involving a private party;~~
- ~~prohibits a court from awarding attorney fees to a private party in certain civil actions involving certain governmental entities;~~
- ~~prohibits a court from awarding attorney fees to a private organization in certain circumstances; and~~
- ~~makes technical and conforming changes;~~ creates the Citizen Empowerment Task Force to study ways of removing barriers for a citizen to exercise the citizen's due process rights in relation to noncriminal administrative or court action taken against the citizen by a government entity;
 - ▶ describes the membership of the task force;
 - ▶ addresses compensation for serving on the task force;
 - ▶ requires the task force to make a report and provide recommendations; and
 - ▶ repeals the task force on December 31, 2023.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

None

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

~~{63G-7-301}~~ 63I-2-236, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapters ~~{388}~~ 97, 141, 363, {428} 437, and 458

ENACTS:

~~{78B-5-826.5}~~ 36-29-401, Utah Code Annotated 1953

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:

Section 1. Section ~~{63G-7-301}~~ **is amended to read:**

~~63G-7-301. Waivers of immunity.~~

~~(1) (a) Immunity from suit of each governmental entity is waived as to any contractual obligation.~~

~~(b) Actions arising out of contractual rights or obligations are not subject to the requirements of Section 63G-7-401, 63G-7-402, 63G-7-403, or 63G-7-601.~~

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

~~—— (c) The Division of Water Resources is not liable for failure to deliver water from a reservoir or associated facility authorized by Title 73, Chapter 26, Bear River Development Act, if the failure to deliver the contractual amount of water is due to drought, other natural condition, or safety condition that causes a deficiency in the amount of available water.~~

~~—— (2) Immunity from suit of each governmental entity is waived:~~

~~—— (a) as to any action brought to recover, obtain possession of, or quiet title to real or personal property;~~

~~—— (b) as to any action brought to foreclose mortgages or other liens on real or personal property, to determine any adverse claim on real or personal property, or to obtain an adjudication about any mortgage or other lien that the governmental entity may have or claim on real or personal property;~~

~~—— (c) as to any action based on the negligent destruction, damage, or loss of goods, merchandise, or other property while it is in the possession of any governmental entity or employee, if the property was seized for the purpose of forfeiture under any provision of state law;~~

~~—— (d) subject to Section 63G-7-302, as to any action brought under the authority of Utah Constitution, Article I, Section 22, for the recovery of compensation from the governmental entity when the governmental entity has taken or damaged private property for public uses without just compensation;~~

~~—— (e) as to any claim for attorney fees or costs under Sections 63G-2-405 and 63G-2-802;~~

~~—— (f) for actual damages under Title 67, Chapter 21, Utah Protection of Public Employees Act;~~

~~—— (g) as to any action brought to obtain relief from a land use regulation that imposes a substantial burden on the free exercise of religion under Title 63L, Chapter 5, Utah Religious Land Use Act;~~

~~—— (h) except as provided in Subsection 63G-7-201(3), as to any injury caused by:~~

~~—— (i) a defective, unsafe, or dangerous condition of any highway, road, street, alley, crosswalk, sidewalk, culvert, tunnel, bridge, viaduct, or other structure located on them;~~

~~or~~

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

- ~~—— (ii) any defective or dangerous condition of a public building, structure, dam, reservoir, or other public improvement;~~
- ~~—— (i) subject to Subsections 63G-7-101(4) and 63G-7-201(4), as to any injury proximately caused by a negligent act or omission of an employee committed within the scope of employment;~~
- ~~—— (j) notwithstanding Subsection 63G-7-101(4), as to a claim for an injury resulting from a sexual battery, as provided in Section 76-9-702.1, committed:~~
- ~~—— (i) against a student of a public elementary or secondary school, including a charter school; and~~
- ~~—— (ii) by an employee of a public elementary or secondary school or charter school who:~~
 - ~~—— (A) at the time of the sexual battery, held a position of special trust, as defined in Section 76-5-404.1, with respect to the student;~~
 - ~~—— (B) is criminally charged in connection with the sexual battery; and~~
 - ~~—— (C) the public elementary or secondary school or charter school knew or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known, at the time of the employee's hiring, to be a sex offender, as defined in Section 77-41-102, required to register under Title 77, Chapter 41, Sex and Kidnap Offender Registry, whose status as a sex offender would have been revealed in a background check under Section 53G-11-402; [and]~~
- ~~—— (k) as to a claim to recover attorney fees under Section 78B-5-826.5; and~~
- ~~—— [(k)] (l) as to any action brought under Section 78B-6-2303.~~
- ~~—— (3) (a) 36-29-401 is enacted to read:~~

Part 4. Citizen Empowerment Task Force

36-29-401. Citizen Empowerment Task Force -- Creation -- Purpose --

Membership -- Compensation -- Staff -- Reporting.

(1) As used in this section, "task force" means the Citizen Empowerment Task Force created in Subsection (3)2)1).

(i) "Code of conduct" means a code of conduct that:

(A) is not less stringent than a model code of conduct, created by the State Board of Education, establishing a professional standard of care for preventing the conduct}2) There is created the Citizen Empowerment Task Force to study ways of removing barriers for a citizen

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

to exercise the citizen's due process rights in relation to noncriminal administrative or court action taken against the citizen by a government entity.

(3) The task force comprises five members, as follows:

(a) three members of the House of Representatives, appointed by the speaker of the House or Representatives, no more than two of whom may be from the same political party;

(b) one member of the Senate, appointed by the president of the Senate; and

(c) the attorney general, or a designee of the attorney general.

(4) (a) The speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint one of the members described in Subsection (3)(a);~~(i)(D);~~

~~_____ (B) is adopted by the applicable local education governing body;~~

~~_____ (C) regulates behavior of a school employee toward a student; and~~

~~_____ (D) includes a prohibition against any sexual conduct between an employee and a student and against the employee and student sharing any sexually explicit or lewd communication, image, or photograph;~~

~~_____ (ii) "Local education agency" means:~~

~~_____ (A) a school district;~~

~~_____ (B) a charter school; or~~

~~_____ (C) the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind;~~

~~_____ (iii) "Local education governing board" means:~~

~~_____ (A) for a school district, the local school board;~~

~~_____ (B) for a charter school, the charter school governing board; or~~

~~_____ (C) for the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, the state board;~~

~~_____ (iv) "Public school" means a public elementary or secondary school;~~

~~_____ (v) "Sexual abuse" means the offense;~~ as the chair of the task force.

(b) A vacancy in a position on the task force described in Subsection {76-5-404.1(2).

~~_____ (vi) "Sexual battery" means the offense described in Section 76-9-702.1, considering the term "child" in that section to include an individual under age 18;~~

~~_____ (b) Notwithstanding Subsection 63G-7-101(4), immunity from suit is waived as to a claim against a local education agency for an injury resulting from a sexual battery or sexual abuse committed against a student of a public school by a paid employee of the public school who is criminally charged in connection with the sexual battery or sexual abuse, unless:~~

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

~~(i) at the time of the sexual battery or sexual abuse, the public school was subject to a code of conduct; and~~

~~(ii) before the sexual battery or sexual abuse occurred, the public school had:~~

~~(A) provided training on the code of conduct to the employee; and~~

~~(B) required the employee to sign a statement acknowledging that the employee has read and understands the code of conduct.~~

~~(4) (a) As used in this Subsection (4):~~

~~(i) "Higher education institution" means an institution included within the state system of higher education under Section 53B-1-102.~~

~~(ii) "Policy governing behavior" means a policy adopted by a higher education institution or the Utah Board of Higher Education that:~~

~~(A) establishes a professional standard of care for preventing the conduct; (3)(a) or (b) shall be filled by the appointing authority for the vacant position.~~

(c) Three members of the task force constitute a quorum of the task force.

(d) The action of a majority of a quorum present constitutes the action of the task force.

(5) Salaries and expenses of the members of the task force who are legislators shall be paid in accordance with:

(a) Section 36-2-2; and

(b) Legislative Joint Rules, Title 5, Chapter 3, Legislator Compensation.

(6) A member of the task force who is not a legislator may not receive compensation or benefits for the member's service, but may receive per diem and travel expenses in accordance with:

(a) Section 63A-3-106;

(b) Section 63A-3-107; and

(c) rules made by the Division of Finance under Section 63A-3-106 and Section 63A-3-107.

(7) The Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel shall provide staff support to the task force.

(8) The task force shall study:

(a) the types of noncriminal administrative and court actions that are most often brought against citizens by an entity of the state or a political subdivision of the state;

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

(b) barriers to a citizen's ability to exercise the citizen's due process rights to defend against an action described in ~~{Subsections (4)(a)(ii)(C) and (D):~~

~~—— (B) regulates behavior of a special trust employee toward a subordinate student;~~

~~—— (C) includes a prohibition against any sexual conduct between a special trust employee and a subordinate student; and~~

~~—— (D) includes a prohibition against a special trust employee and subordinate student sharing any sexually explicit or lewd communication, image, or photograph.~~

~~—— (iii) "Sexual battery" means the offense described in Section 76-9-702.1.~~

~~—— (iv) "Special trust employee" means an employee of a higher education institution who is in a position of special trust, as defined in Section 76-5-404.1, with a higher education student.~~

~~—— (v) "Subordinate student" means a student:~~

~~—— (A) of a higher education institution; and~~

~~—— (B) whose educational opportunities could be adversely impacted by a special trust employee.~~

~~—— (b) Notwithstanding Subsection 63G-7-101(4), immunity from suit is waived as to a claim for an injury resulting from a sexual battery committed against a subordinate student by a special trust employee, unless:~~

~~—— (i) the institution proves that the special trust employee's behavior that otherwise would constitute a sexual battery was:~~

~~—— (A) with a subordinate student who was at least 18 years old at the time of the behavior; and~~

~~—— (B) with the student's consent; or~~

~~—— (ii) (A) at the time of the sexual battery, the higher education institution was subject to a policy governing behavior; and~~

~~—— (B) before the sexual battery occurred, the higher education institution had taken steps to implement and enforce the policy governing behavior.}~~ Subsection (8)(a), including barriers

caused by:

(i) an imbalance between the power and resources of the government entity and the power and resources of the citizen;

(ii) financial barriers;

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

(iii) time constraints;

(iv) differences in knowledge and experience; and

(v) other barriers; and

(c) methods of reducing the barriers described in Subsection (8)(b), including:

(i) providing education, advice, and other assistance to a citizen seeking to challenge

government action;

(ii) disincentives for government overreach, including:

(A) the potential award of attorney fees in favor of a prevailing citizen;

(B) disciplinary action against a government official, when warranted; and

(C) other disincentives;

(iii) providing less-expensive alternatives to court action;

(iv) providing less-expensive access to the courts; and

(v) other methods.

(9) In studying the items described in Subsection (8), the task force shall consider:

(a) approaches currently used in other states; and

(b) new and innovative approaches.

(10) The task force shall, at or before the 2023 November interim meeting of the

Government Operations Interim Committee, report to the committee on:

(a) the results of the study described in Subsection (8); and

(b) recommendations on actions that should be taken, or legislation that should be

considered, to remove barriers for a citizen to exercise the citizen's due process rights in relation to noncriminal administrative or court action taken against the citizen by a government entity.

Section 2. Section **63I-2-236** is amended to read:

63I-2-236. Repeal dates: Title 36.

(1) Section 36-12-8.2 is repealed July 1, 2023.

(2) Section 36-29-107.5 is repealed on November 30, 2023.

(3) Section 36-29-109 is repealed on November 30, 2027.

(4) Section 36-29-110 is repealed on November 30, 2024.

(5) Section 36-29-111 is repealed April 30, 2023.

(6) The following sections regarding the State Flag Task Force are repealed on January

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

1, 2024:

(a) Section 36-29-201;

(b) Section 36-29-202; and

(c) Section 36-29-203.

(7) Title 36, Chapter 29, Part 3, Mental Illness Psychotherapy Drug Task Force, is repealed December 31, 2023.

~~{Section 2. Section 78B-5-826.5 is enacted to read:~~

~~78B-5-826.5. Attorney fees -- Definitions -- Award against governmental entity.~~

~~(1) As used in this section:~~

~~(a) "Associational standing" means that an association, organization, or similar representational entity has standing to sue because at least one of its individual members has standing to sue and the participation of the individual member in the lawsuit is not necessary to the resolution of the lawsuit.~~

~~(b) "Attorney fees" means attorney fees reasonably incurred in a qualified civil action on behalf of a prevailing party or a prevailing political subdivision.~~

~~(c) (i) "Governmental entity" means the state and its political subdivisions.~~

~~(ii) "Governmental entity" does not include:~~

~~(A) a law enforcement agency; or~~

~~(B) the Department of Public Safety created in Section 53-1-103.~~

~~(d) "Judgment" means a final ruling or judgment, including any supporting opinion, that determines the rights of the parties and concerning which all appellate remedies have been exhausted or the time for appeal has expired.~~

~~(e) "Political subdivision" means the same as that term is defined in Section 63G-7-102.~~

~~(f) "Prevailing party" means a private party that receives, in a qualified civil action, a judgment:~~

~~(i) dismissing the governmental entity's claim for monetary or equitable relief against the private party;~~

~~(ii) reversing or vacating the decision, fine, fee, order, or decree imposed by the governmental entity against the private party; or~~

~~(iii) that substantially, materially, and favorably modifies a decision, fine, fee, order, or~~

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

~~decree imposed by the governmental entity against the private party:~~

~~—— (g) "Prevailing political subdivision" means a political subdivision that receives, in a qualified civil action:~~

~~—— (i) a favorable judgment on the political subdivision's claim for monetary or equitable relief against the private party;~~

~~—— (ii) a judgment affirming the decision, fine, fee, order, or decree imposed by the political subdivision against the private party; or~~

~~—— (iii) a judgment that does not substantially and materially modify, in the private party's favor, the decision, fine, fee, order, or decree imposed by the political subdivision against the private party.~~

~~—— (h) "Private party" means a person that is not a governmental entity;~~

~~—— (i) "Qualified civil action" means a judicial proceeding, other than an action sounding in tort, in which:~~

~~—— (i) a governmental entity seeks monetary or equitable relief against a private party at common law or pursuant to a state or local law;~~

~~—— (ii) a private party seeks equitable relief against a governmental entity to compel the governmental entity to act in accordance with a state or local law; or~~

~~—— (iii) a private party seeks judicial review of an agency or administrative action.~~

~~—— (2) Except as provided in Subsection (3), in a qualified civil action, a court shall award attorney fees:~~

~~—— (a) to the prevailing party; or~~

~~—— (b) if the qualified civil action was brought by or against a political subdivision, to the prevailing political subdivision.~~

~~—— (3) Subsection (2) does not apply to a prevailing party:~~

~~—— (a) if the court finds that:~~

~~—— (i) the matter could have been resolved via a reasonable settlement; and~~

~~—— (ii) the private party failed to make a timely, reasonable settlement offer;~~

~~—— (b) if the private party files a qualified civil action and the private party's standing to sue is based on the doctrine of associational standing, regardless of whether the private party is the prevailing party;~~

~~—— (c) for an action brought by the Office of State Debt Collection under Title 63A.~~

HB0173S03 compared with HB0173S02

~~Chapter 3, Part 5, Office of State Debt Collection, seeking the collection of an accounts receivable or a criminal accounts receivable;~~

~~—— (d) for an action for judicial review of a decision of the Career Service Review Office under Title 67, Chapter 19a, Grievance Procedures;~~

~~—— (e) for an action for judicial review of a decision or order of a school board under Title 53G, Chapter 11, Part 5, School District and Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Employee Requirements; or~~

~~—— (f) for an action for judicial review brought under Title 63G, Chapter 2, Part 4, Appeals, or Part 7, Applicability to Political Subdivisions, the Judiciary, and the Legislature, as applicable, of a decision or order of:~~

~~—— (i) a chief administrative officer;~~

~~—— (ii) a local appeals board;~~

~~—— (iii) the State Records Committee; or~~

~~—— (iv) an administrative unit of the judicial branch.~~

~~—— (4) A claim for attorney fees under this section is not subject to Title 63G, Chapter 7, Part 4, Notice of Claim Against a Governmental Entity or a Government Employee.~~

~~—— (5) Subsection (2) supersedes any other provision of law that prohibits an award of attorney fees to a private party or a political subdivision, or makes permissive an award of attorney fees to a private party or a political subdivision, in an action that would otherwise constitute a qualified civil action under this section.~~

~~‡(8) Title 36, Chapter 29, Part 4, Citizen Empowerment Task Force, is repealed December 31, 2023.~~