

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2016 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 2956

2015 Carryover

(BY DELEGATES SOBONYA, BORDER, MILLER, D. EVANS,
ROWAN, KESSINGER AND ARVON)

[Introduced January 13, 2016; referred to the
Committee on the Judiciary.]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section,
 2 designated §2-1-3, relating to the preservation of rights guaranteed by the West Virginia
 3 Constitution and the United States Constitution when deciding the comity of a legal
 4 decision in a foreign country, the choice of law used for contractual interpretations and
 5 choice of forum; exempting businesses; making legislative findings; stating public policy;
 6 defining a term; and providing a severability provision.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

1 That the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, be amended by adding thereto a new
 2 section, designated §2-1-3, to read as follows:

ARTICLE 1. COMMON LAW.

§2-1-3. Choice of Law.

1 (a) The Legislature finds that:
 2 (1) It fully recognizes the right of its citizens to contract freely under the laws of this state;
 3 (2) It also recognizes that this right may be reasonably and rationally circumscribed
 4 pursuant to the state's interest to protect and promote rights and privileges granted to its citizens
 5 under the Constitutions of the United States or the State of West Virginia.

6 (b) As used in this section, "foreign law, legal code or system" means any law, legal code
 7 or system of a jurisdiction outside of any state or territory of the United States including, but not
 8 limited to, international organizations and tribunals, and applied by that jurisdiction's courts,
 9 administrative bodies or other formal or informal tribunals.

10 (c) It is the public policy of this state that the primary factor which a court, administrative
 11 agency, arbitrator, mediator or other entity or person acting under the authority of state law shall
 12 consider in granting comity to a decision rendered under any foreign law, legal code or system
 13 against a natural person in this state is whether the decision rendered either violated or would

14 violate any right of the natural person in this state guaranteed by the Constitution of the State of
15 West Virginia or the United States Constitution or any statute or decision under those
16 Constitutions.

17 (d) If a contract, arbitration agreement or other agreement provides for the choice of a
18 foreign law, legal code or system to govern its interpretation or the resolution of any claim or
19 dispute and if the enforcement or interpretation of the contract, arbitration agreement or other
20 agreement applying that choice of law provision either resulted or would result in a violation of
21 any right guaranteed by the Constitution of the State of West Virginia or the United States
22 Constitution, then it is the public policy of this state that the primary factor in interpretation,
23 enforcement or application of the contract, arbitration agreement or other agreement shall be
24 preservation of the constitutional rights of the natural person in this state against whom
25 enforcement is sought, unless otherwise directed by state statute. Nothing in this section limits
26 the right of a natural person of this state to voluntarily restrict or limit their own constitutional rights
27 by contract or specific waiver consistent with constitutional principles. The language of any such
28 contract or other waiver shall be strictly construed in favor of preserving the constitutional rights
29 of the natural person in this state.

30 (e) If any contract, arbitration agreement or other agreement provides for the choice of
31 venue or forum outside any state or territory of the United States and if the enforcement or
32 interpretation of the contract, arbitration agreement or other agreement applying that choice of
33 venue or forum provision either resulted or would result in a violation of any right of a natural
34 person in this state guaranteed by the Constitution of the State of West Virginia or the United
35 States Constitution, then it is the public policy of this state that, in interpreting or construing the
36 contract or arbitration agreement or other agreement, the primary factor to be considered is
37 whether it can be interpreted or construed to preserve the constitutional rights of the natural

38 person in this state against whom enforcement is sought. If a natural person of this state, subject
39 to personal jurisdiction in this state, seeks to maintain litigation, arbitration, agency or similarly
40 binding proceedings in this state and if the courts of this state find that granting a claim of forum
41 nonconveniens or a related claim violates or would likely violate the constitutional rights of the
42 nonclaimant in the foreign forum with respect to the matter in dispute, then it is the public policy
43 of this state that the claim shall be denied.

44 (f) Without prejudice to any other legal right, this section does not apply to a corporation,
45 partnership or other form of business association.

46 (g) The public policies expressed in this section apply only to actual or foreseeable
47 violations of the constitutional rights of a natural person in this state from a foreign law, legal code
48 or system.

49 (h) If any provision of this section or the application thereof to any person or circumstance
50 is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of the section which
51 can be given effect without the invalid provision or application. To that end, the provisions of this
52 section are declared to be severable.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to preserve the rights of individuals guaranteed by the West Virginia Constitution and the United States Constitution when deciding the comity of a legal decision in a foreign country, the choice of law used for contractual interpretations and choice of forum. The bill exempts businesses. The bill also makes legislative findings, states public policy, defines a term and provides a severability provision.

This section is new; therefore, it has been completely underscored.