

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2022 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 4394

BY DELEGATES HOTT, ESPINOSA, SUMMERS AND

HOUSEHOLDER

[Introduced January 25, 2022; Referred to the
Committee on Banking and Insurance then the
Judiciary]

1 A BILL to repeal §23-2-6a of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended; and to amend and
 2 reenact §23-2-6 and §23-2-8 of said code; and to amend and reenact §23-4-2 of said
 3 code, all relating to workers' compensation; clarifying language regarding an employers'
 4 exemption from liability; clarifying language regarding liability of employers who do not
 5 maintain mandatory workers' compensation coverage; clarifying language regarding
 6 employers' liability when an employees' injury is self-inflicted or the result of intoxication;
 7 and providing that the employee may recover when the injury or death was caused by an
 8 employer's deliberate intention.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

**ARTICLE 2. EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES SUBJECT TO CHAPTER;
 EXTRATERRITORIAL COVERAGE.**

§23-2-6. Exemption of ~~contributing~~ employers from liability.

1 (a) Any employer subject to this chapter who ~~subscribes and pays into the workers'~~
 2 ~~compensation fund the premiums provided by this chapter~~ maintains mandatory workers'
 3 ~~compensation insurance coverage for the protection of their employees or who has received~~
 4 ~~permission by the insurance commissioner to self-insure their workers' compensation risk~~
 5 ~~pursuant to §23-2-9 of this code and maintains such status~~ or who elects to make direct payments
 6 ~~of compensation as provided in this section~~ is not liable to respond in damages at common law
 7 ~~or by statute for the injury or death of any employee, however occurring, after so subscribing or~~
 8 ~~electing, and during any period in which the employer is not in default in the payment of the~~
 9 ~~premiums or direct payments~~ maintains mandatory workers' compensation insurance coverage
 10 ~~or its approved self-insured status~~ and has complied fully with all other provisions of this chapter.
 11 ~~Continuation in the service of the employer shall be considered a waiver by the employee and by~~
 12 ~~the parents of any minor employee of the right of action as aforesaid, which the employee or his~~
 13 ~~or her parents would otherwise have: Provided, That in case of employers not required by this~~

14 ~~chapter to subscribe and pay premiums into the workers' compensation fund, the injured~~
 15 ~~employee has remained in the employer's service with notice that his or her employer has elected~~
 16 ~~to pay into the workers' compensation fund the premiums provided by this chapter, or has elected~~
 17 ~~to make direct payments as aforesaid.~~

18 (b) The rights and remedies granted to an employee subject to the provisions of this
 19 chapter, on account of injury or death, shall be exclusive of all other rights and remedies, whether
 20 provided at common law or otherwise and including, but not limited to, compensatory and punitive
 21 damages, of the employee, his or her legal representative, dependents, next of kin, or anyone
 22 otherwise entitled to recover damages from the employer, or any principal, officer, director,
 23 manager, agent, stockholder, partner, representative or employee acting in his or her capacity as
 24 an employer, or prime contractor of the employer or in furtherance of the employer's business, on
 25 account of the injury or death, and the negligent acts of a co-employee shall not be imputed to
 26 the employer. No role, capacity, or persona of any employer, principal, officer, director, or
 27 stockholder other than that existing in the role of employer of the employee shall be relevant for
 28 consideration for purposes of this chapter, and the remedies and rights provided by this chapter
 29 shall in fact be exclusive regardless of the multiple roles, capacities, or personas the employer
 30 may be deemed to have.

§23-2-6a. Exemption from liability of officers, managers, agents, representatives or employees of contributing employers.

1 [Repealed].

§23-2-8. Liability of employer electing not to pay or defaulting in payment of premiums; certain common-law defenses prohibited; exceptions.

1 All employers required by this chapter to ~~subscribe to and pay premiums into the workers'~~
 2 ~~compensation fund~~ maintain mandatory workers' compensation insurance coverage, whether
 3 through a private carrier or an approved self-insurance program, except the State of West Virginia,
 4 the governmental agencies or departments created by it, and municipalities and political

5 subdivisions of the state, and who do not ~~subscribe to and pay premiums into the workers'~~
6 ~~compensation fund~~ maintain such coverage as required by this chapter and have not elected to
7 pay individually and directly or from benefit funds compensation and expenses to injured
8 employees or fatally injured employees' dependents under the provisions of §23-2-9 of this code,
9 or having so ~~subscribed or elected~~ provided for such mandatory coverage, shall be in default in
10 the payment of same, or not having otherwise fully complied with the provisions of section five or
11 section nine of this article, shall be liable to their employees (within the meaning of this article) for
12 all damages suffered by reason of personal injuries sustained in the course of employment
13 caused by the wrongful act, neglect or default of the employer or any of the employer's officers,
14 agents or employees while acting within the scope of their employment and in the course of their
15 employment and also to the personal representatives of such employees where death results
16 from such personal injuries, and in any action by any such employee or personal representative
17 thereof, such defendant shall not avail himself of the following common-law defenses: The
18 defense of the fellow-servant rule; the defense of the assumption of risk; or the defense of
19 contributory negligence; and further shall not avail himself of any defense that the negligence in
20 question was that of someone whose duties are prescribed by statute: *Provided*, That such
21 provision depriving a defendant employer of certain common-law defenses under the
22 circumstances therein set forth shall not apply to an action brought against a county court, Board
23 of Education, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state or against any employer not
24 required to cover his employees under the provisions of this chapter.

**§23-4-2. Disbursement where injury is self-inflicted. ~~or intentionally caused by employer;~~
~~legislative declarations and findings; "deliberate intention" defined~~**

1 (a) Notwithstanding anything contained in this chapter, no employee or dependent of any
2 employee is entitled to receive any sum under the provisions of this chapter on account of any
3 personal injury to or death to any employee caused by a self-inflicted injury or the intoxication of
4 the employee. Upon the occurrence of an injury which the employee asserts, or which reasonably

5 appears to have, occurred in the course of and resulting from the employee's employment, the
6 employer may require the employee to undergo a blood test for the purpose of determining the
7 existence or nonexistence of evidence of intoxication: Provided, That the employer must have a
8 reasonable and good faith objective suspicion of the employee's intoxication and may only test
9 for the purpose of determining whether the person is intoxicated. If any blood test for intoxication
10 is given following an accident, at the request of the employer or otherwise, and if any of the
11 following are true, the employee is deemed intoxicated and the intoxication is the proximate cause
12 of the injury:

13 (1) If a blood test is administered within two hours of the accident and evidence that there
14 was, at that time, more than five hundredths of one percent, by weight, of alcohol in the
15 employee's blood; or

16 (2) If there was, at the time of the blood test, evidence of either on or off the job use of a
17 nonprescribed controlled substance as defined in the West Virginia Uniform Controlled
18 Substances Act, West Virginia Code §60A-2-201, et seq., Schedules I, II, III, IV and V.

19 (b) For the purpose of this chapter, the ~~commission~~ insurance commissioner may
20 cooperate with the Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training and the State Division of Labor
21 in promoting general safety programs and in formulating rules to govern hazardous employments.

22 ~~(c) If injury results to any employee from the deliberate intention of his or her employer to~~
23 ~~produce the injury or death, the employee, or, if the employee has been found to be incompetent,~~
24 ~~his or her conservator or guardian, may recover under this chapter and bring a cause of action~~
25 ~~against the employer, as if this chapter had not been enacted, for any excess of damages over~~
26 ~~the amount received or receivable in a claim for benefits under this chapter. If death results to any~~
27 ~~employee from the deliberate intention of his or her employer to produce the injury or death, the~~
28 ~~representative of the estate may recover under this chapter and bring a cause of action, pursuant~~
29 ~~to §55-7-6 of this code, against the employer, as if this chapter had not been enacted, for any~~
30 ~~excess of damages over the amount received or receivable in a claim for benefits under this~~

31 ~~chapter. To recover under this section, the employee, the employee's representative or~~
32 ~~dependent, as defined under this chapter, must, unless good cause is shown, have filed a claim~~
33 ~~for benefits under this chapter.~~

34 ~~(d)(1) It is declared that enactment of this chapter and the establishment of the workers'~~
35 ~~compensation system in this chapter was and is intended to remove from the common law tort~~
36 ~~system all disputes between or among employers and employees regarding the compensation to~~
37 ~~be received for injury or death to an employee except as expressly provided in this chapter and~~
38 ~~to establish a system which compensates even though the injury or death of an employee may~~
39 ~~be caused by his or her own fault or the fault of a co-employee; that the immunity established in~~
40 ~~sections six and six-a, article two of this chapter is an essential aspect of this workers'~~
41 ~~compensation system; that the intent of the Legislature in providing immunity from common~~
42 ~~lawsuit was and is to protect those immunized from litigation outside the workers' compensation~~
43 ~~system except as expressly provided in this chapter; that, in enacting the immunity provisions of~~
44 ~~this chapter, the Legislature intended to create a legislative standard for loss of that immunity of~~
45 ~~more narrow application and containing more specific mandatory elements than the common law~~
46 ~~tort system concept and standard of willful, wanton and reckless misconduct; and that it was and~~
47 ~~is the legislative intent to promote prompt judicial resolution of the question of whether a suit~~
48 ~~prosecuted under the asserted authority of this section is or is not prohibited by the immunity~~
49 ~~granted under this chapter.~~

50 ~~(2) The immunity from suit provided under this section and under sections six and six-a,~~
51 ~~article two of this chapter may be lost only if the employer or person against whom liability is~~
52 ~~asserted acted with "deliberate intention". This requirement may be satisfied only if:~~

53 ~~(A) It is proved that the employer or person against whom liability is asserted acted with a~~
54 ~~consciously, subjectively and deliberately formed intention to produce the specific result of injury~~
55 ~~or death to an employee. This standard requires a showing of an actual, specific intent and may~~
56 ~~not be satisfied by allegation or proof of: (i) Conduct which produces a result that was not~~

57 ~~specifically intended; (ii) conduct which constitutes negligence, no matter how gross or~~
58 ~~aggravated; or (iii) willful, wanton or reckless misconduct; or~~

59 ~~(B) The trier of fact determines, either through specific findings of fact made by the court~~
60 ~~in a trial without a jury, or through special interrogatories to the jury in a jury trial, that all of the~~
61 ~~following facts are proven:~~

62 ~~(i) That a specific unsafe working condition existed in the workplace which presented a~~
63 ~~high degree of risk and a strong probability of serious injury or death;~~

64 ~~(ii) That the employer, prior to the injury, had actual knowledge of the existence of the~~
65 ~~specific unsafe working condition and of the high degree of risk and the strong probability of~~
66 ~~serious injury or death presented by the specific unsafe working condition.~~

67 ~~(I) In every case actual knowledge must specifically be proven by the employee or other~~
68 ~~person(s) seeking to recover under this section, and shall not be deemed or presumed: Provided,~~
69 ~~That actual knowledge may be shown by evidence of intentional and deliberate failure to conduct~~
70 ~~an inspection, audit or assessment required by state or federal statute or regulation and such~~
71 ~~inspection, audit or assessment is specifically intended to identify each alleged specific unsafe~~
72 ~~working condition.~~

73 ~~(II) Actual knowledge is not established by proof of what an employee's immediate~~
74 ~~supervisor or management personnel should have known had they exercised reasonable care or~~
75 ~~been more diligent.~~

76 ~~(III) Any proof of the immediate supervisor or management personnel's knowledge of prior~~
77 ~~accidents, near misses, safety complaints or citations from regulatory agencies must be proven~~
78 ~~by documentary or other credible evidence.~~

79 ~~(iii) That the specific unsafe working condition was a violation of a state or federal safety~~
80 ~~statute, rule or regulation, whether cited or not, or of a commonly accepted and well-known safety~~
81 ~~standard within the industry or business of the employer.~~

82 ~~(I) If the specific unsafe working condition relates to a violation of a commonly accepted~~

~~83 and well-known safety standard within the industry or business of the employer, that safety
84 standard must be a consensus written rule or standard promulgated by the industry or business
85 of the employer, such as an organization comprised of industry members: Provided, That the
86 National Fire Protection Association Codes and Standards or any other industry standards for
87 Volunteer Fire Departments shall not be cited as an industry standard for Volunteer Fire
88 Departments, Municipal Fire Departments and Emergency Medical Response Personnel as an
89 unsafe working condition as long as the Volunteer Fire Departments, Municipal Fire Departments
90 and the Emergency Medical Response Personnel have followed the Rules that have been
91 promulgated by the Fire Commission.~~

~~92 (II) If the specific unsafe working condition relates to a violation of a state or federal safety
93 statute, rule or regulation that statute, rule or regulation:~~

~~94 (a) Must be specifically applicable to the work and working condition involved as
95 contrasted with a statute, rule, regulation or standard generally requiring safe workplaces,
96 equipment or working conditions;~~

~~97 (b) Must be intended to address the specific hazard(s) presented by the alleged specific
98 unsafe working condition; and,~~

~~99 (c) The applicability of any such state or federal safety statute, rule or regulation is a matter
100 of law for judicial determination.~~

~~101 (iv) That notwithstanding the existence of the facts set forth in subparagraphs (i) through
102 (iii), inclusive, of this paragraph, the person or persons alleged to have actual knowledge under
103 subparagraph (ii) nevertheless intentionally thereafter exposed an employee to the specific
104 unsafe working condition; and~~

~~105 (v) That the employee exposed suffered serious compensable injury or compensable
106 death as defined in section one, article four, chapter twenty-three as a direct and proximate result
107 of the specific unsafe working condition. For the purposes of this section, serious compensable
108 injury may only be established by one of the following four methods:~~

- 109 ~~(I) It is shown that the injury, independent of any preexisting impairment:~~
- 110 ~~(a) Results in a permanent physical or combination of physical and psychological injury~~
- 111 ~~rated at a total whole person impairment level of at least thirteen percent (13%) as a final award~~
- 112 ~~in the employee's workers' compensation claim; and~~
- 113 ~~(b) Is a personal injury which causes permanent serious disfigurement, causes permanent~~
- 114 ~~loss or significant impairment of function of any bodily organ or system, or results in objectively~~
- 115 ~~verifiable bilateral or multi-level dermatomal radiculopathy; and is not a physical injury that has no~~
- 116 ~~objective medical evidence to support a diagnosis; or~~
- 117 ~~(II) Written certification by a licensed physician that the employee is suffering from an~~
- 118 ~~injury or condition that is caused by the alleged unsafe working condition and is likely to result in~~
- 119 ~~death within eighteen (18) months or less from the date of the filing of the complaint. The certifying~~
- 120 ~~physician must be engaged or qualified in a medical field in which the employee has been treated,~~
- 121 ~~or have training and/or experience in diagnosing or treating injuries or conditions similar to those~~
- 122 ~~of the employee and must disclose all evidence upon which the written certification is based,~~
- 123 ~~including, but not limited to, all radiographic, pathologic or other diagnostic test results that were~~
- 124 ~~reviewed.~~
- 125 ~~(III) If the employee suffers from an injury for which no impairment rating may be~~
- 126 ~~determined pursuant to the rule or regulation then in effect which governs impairment evaluations~~
- 127 ~~pursuant to this chapter, serious compensable injury may be established if the injury meets the~~
- 128 ~~definition in subclause (I)(b).~~
- 129 ~~(IV) If the employee suffers from an occupational pneumoconiosis, the employee must~~
- 130 ~~submit written certification by a board certified pulmonologist that the employee is suffering from~~
- 131 ~~complicated pneumoconiosis or pulmonary massive fibrosis and that the occupational~~
- 132 ~~pneumoconiosis has resulted in pulmonary impairment as measured by the standards or methods~~
- 133 ~~utilized by the West Virginia Occupational Pneumoconiosis Board of at least fifteen percent (15%)~~
- 134 ~~as confirmed by valid and reproducible ventilatory testing. The certifying pulmonologist must~~

135 ~~disclose all evidence upon which the written certification is based, including, but not limited to, all~~
136 ~~radiographic, pathologic or other diagnostic test results that were reviewed: Provided, That any~~
137 ~~cause of action based upon this clause must be filed within one year of the date the employee~~
138 ~~meets the requirements of the same.~~

139 ~~(C) In cases alleging liability under the provisions of paragraph (B) of this subdivision:~~

140 ~~(i) The employee, the employee's guardian or conservator, or the representative of the~~
141 ~~employee's estate shall serve with the complaint a verified statement from a person with~~
142 ~~knowledge and expertise of the workplace safety statutes, rules, regulations and consensus~~
143 ~~industry safety standards specifically applicable to the industry and workplace involved in the~~
144 ~~employee's injury, setting forth opinions and information on:~~

145 ~~(I) The person's knowledge and expertise of the applicable workplace safety statutes,~~
146 ~~rules, regulations and/or written consensus industry safety standards;~~

147 ~~(II) The specific unsafe working condition(s) that were the cause of the injury that is the~~
148 ~~basis of the complaint; and~~

149 ~~(III) The specific statutes, rules, regulations or written consensus industry safety standards~~
150 ~~violated by the employer that are directly related to the specific unsafe working conditions:~~
151 ~~Provided, however, That this verified statement shall not be admissible at the trial of the action~~
152 ~~and the Court, pursuant to the Rules of Evidence, common law and subclause two-c,~~
153 ~~subparagraph (iii), paragraph (B), subdivision (2), subsection (d), section two, article four, chapter~~
154 ~~twenty-three of this code, retains responsibility to determine and interpret the applicable law and~~
155 ~~admissibility of expert opinions.~~

156 ~~(ii) No punitive or exemplary damages shall be awarded to the employee or other plaintiff;~~

157 ~~(iii) Notwithstanding any other provision of law or rule to the contrary, and consistent with~~
158 ~~the legislative findings of intent to promote prompt judicial resolution of issues of immunity from~~
159 ~~litigation under this chapter, the employer may request and the court shall give due consideration~~
160 ~~to the bifurcation of discovery in any action brought under the provisions of subparagraphs (i)~~

161 through (v), of paragraph (B) such that the discovery related to liability issues be completed before
162 discovery related to damage issues. The court shall dismiss the action upon motion for summary
163 judgment if it finds pursuant to rule 56 of the rules of civil procedure that one or more of the facts
164 required to be proved by the provisions of subparagraphs (i) through (v), inclusive, paragraph (B)
165 of this subdivision do not exist, and the court shall dismiss the action upon a timely motion for a
166 directed verdict against the plaintiff if after considering all the evidence and every inference
167 legitimately and reasonably raised thereby most favorably to the plaintiff, the court determines
168 that there is not sufficient evidence to find each and every one of the facts required to be proven
169 by the provisions of subparagraphs (i) through (v), inclusive, paragraph (B) of this subdivision;
170 and

171 (iv) The provisions of this paragraph and of each subparagraph thereof are severable from
172 the provisions of each other subparagraph, subsection, section, article or chapter of this code so
173 that if any provision of a subparagraph of this paragraph is held void, the remaining provisions of
174 this act and this code remain valid.

175 (e) Any cause of action brought pursuant to this section shall be brought either in the circuit
176 court of the county in which the alleged injury occurred or the circuit court of the county of the
177 employer's principal place of business. With respect to causes of action arising under this chapter,
178 the venue provisions of this section shall be exclusive of and shall supersede the venue provisions
179 of any other West Virginia statute or rule.

180 (f) The reenactment of this section in the regular session of the Legislature during the year
181 2015 does not in any way affect the right of any person to bring an action with respect to or upon
182 any cause of action which arose or accrued prior to the effective date of the reenactment.

183 (g) The amendments to this section enacted during the 2015 session of the Legislature
184 shall apply to all injuries occurring on or after July 1, 2015.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to reaffirm and enhance the workers' compensation
excusive remedy rule or doctrine.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.