

On page 1, line 1, of the Introduced bill, delete " crimes, misconduct, or conflicts of interest" and insert " improper governmental conduct and crime"

On the Introduced bill, delete everything after the enacting clause and insert:

Section 1. That a NEW SECTION be added to chapter 3-6C:

Terms used in this Act mean:

- (1) "Adverse employment action," constructive or actual discharge, suspension from employment, demotion, transfer, decrease in compensation or benefits, imposition of an unfavorable work schedule, or any other similar reprisal or retaliatory action;
- (2) "Conflict of interest," conduct defined or described in §§ 5-18A-17 to 5-18A-17.6, inclusive, 42-7A-27, and 42-7A-28;
- (3) "Crime," a criminal act attempted or committed by misusing a state employee's access, duty, responsibility, or position as a state employee, which constitutes a felony under state law;
- (4) "Good faith report," a report made, without malice, by a reporter, which the reporter has reasonable cause to believe is accurate and true;
- (5) "Improper governmental conduct," any conduct or omission that results in:
 - (a) A conflict of interest prohibited by state law;
 - (b) Fraud; or
 - (c) Theft of moneys or property belonging to or derived from federal, state, or local government sources, constituting a felony;
- (6) "Reporter," a state employee who witnesses or has evidence of improper governmental conduct or a crime, and who makes a good faith report of the improper governmental conduct or the crime, to a supervisor or other appropriate authority;
- (7) "State agency," any agency, board, bureau, commission, committee, department, division, or office of this state; and
- (8) "State employee," a full-time, part-time, seasonal, or temporary employee of any state agency.

Section 2. That a NEW SECTION be added to chapter 3-6C:

A reporter who makes a good faith report of improper governmental conduct or crime, or submits records in support of the good faith report, is immune from any liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed, and has the same immunity for participation in any judicial proceeding resulting from the good faith report. The immunity does not extend to a state employee who participated in the reported improper governmental conduct or crime.

Section 3. That a NEW SECTION be added to chapter 3-6C:

No state agency may take adverse employment action against a reporter because the reporter:

- (1) Made a good faith report of improper governmental conduct or a crime to an appropriate authority;
- (2) Filed a complaint;
- (3) Instituted or caused to be instituted a proceeding;

- (4) Requested or participated in an audit;
- (5) Testified, or will testify, in a proceeding; or
- (6) Exercised any other right or obligation imposed by this chapter or any law of this state.

The provisions of this section do not apply to a state employee who made a report knowing the report was false or who made a report in a reckless disregard for the truth.

Section 4. That a NEW SECTION be added to chapter 3-6C:

To be eligible for protections under sections 2 and 3 of this Act, a reporter who discloses information about improper governmental conduct or a crime must do so in good faith and upon a reasonable belief that the information disclosed is accurate and true. A disclosure that is made with a reckless disregard for the truth or that the state employee knows or should know is false or malicious is not a good faith report.

Section 5. That a NEW SECTION be added to chapter 3-6C:

A reporter may bring a civil action for a violation of section 2 of this Act in the circuit court of Hughes County against the reporter's supervisor, in the supervisor's official capacity, or the state agency by which the reporter is employed.

The court may order any of the following remedies:

- (1) An injunction to restrain continued violation of Section 2 of this Act;
- (2) Reinstatement of the reporter to the same position or, if the position is filled, to an equivalent position;
- (3) Back pay;
- (4) Full reinstatement of fringe benefits and seniority rights; and
- (5) If appropriate and in the interests of justice, an award of attorney's fees and costs.

An action may not be brought pursuant to this section more than two years after the violation of section 2 of this Act occurred.

A reporter bringing an action under this section may not be required to exhaust existing internal procedures or other administrative remedies.

Nothing in this section may be construed to exclude a reporter's remedy pursuant to § 3-6D-22.

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