

Hawaii Qui Tam Actions or Recovery of False Claims to the State

and

Qui Tam Actions or Recovery of False Claims to the Counties

Hawaii Qui Tam Actions or Recovery of False Claims to the State

As amended by Laws 2019, chapter 68.

HRS § 661-21 et seq.

§ 661-21. Actions for false claims to the State; qui tam actions.

(a) Notwithstanding section 661-7 to the contrary, any person who:

(1) Knowingly presents, or causes to be presented, a false or-fraudulent claim for payment or approval;

(2) Knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement material to a false or fraudulent claim;

(3) Has possession, custody, or control of property or money used, or to be used, by the State and, intending to defraud the State or to wilfully conceal the property, delivers, or causes to be delivered, less property than the amount for which the person receives a certificate or receipt;

(4) Is authorized to make or deliver a document certifying receipt of property used, or to be used by the State and, intending to defraud the State, makes or delivers the receipt without completely knowing that the information on the receipt is true;

(5) Knowingly buys, or receives as a pledge of an obligation or debt, public property from any officer or employee of the State who is not lawfully authorized to sell or pledge the property;

(6) Knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement material to an obligation to pay or transmit money or property to the State, or knowingly conceals, or knowingly and improperly avoids or decreases an obligation to pay or transmit money or property to the State;

(7) Is a beneficiary of an inadvertent submission of a false claim to the State, who subsequently discovers the falsity of the claim, and fails to disclose the false claim to the State within a reasonable time after discovery of the false claim; or

(8) Conspires to commit any of the conduct described in this subsection,

shall be liable to the State for a civil penalty of not less than \$11,463 and not more than \$22,927, plus three times the amount of damages that the State sustains due to the act of that person; provided that for 2020 and annually thereafter, the minimum and maximum penalty amounts shall be the same as the minimum and maximum civil monetary penalty amounts authorized for the federal False Claims Act, title 31 United States Code section 3729, adjusted for cost-of-living adjustments and for the same effective dates, as adopted by the United States Department of Justice by federal rule in title 28 Code of Federal Regulations part 85, pursuant to the federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, P.L. 101-410, title 31 United States Code section 3717.

(b) If the court finds that a person who has violated subsection (a):

(1) Furnished officials of the State responsible for investigating false claims violations with all information known to the person about the violation within thirty days after the date on which the defendant first obtained the information;

(2) Fully cooperated with any state investigation of the violation; and

(3) At the time the person furnished the State with the information about the violation, no criminal prosecution, civil action, or administrative action had commenced under this title with respect to the violation, and the person did not have actual knowledge of the existence of an investigation into the violation;

the court may assess not less than two times the amount of damages that the State sustains because of the act of the person. A person violating subsection (a) shall also be liable to the State for the costs and attorneys' fees of a civil action brought to recover the penalty or damages.

(c) Liability under this section shall be joint and several for any act committed by two or more persons.

(d) This section shall not apply to any controversy involving an amount of less than \$ 500 in value. For purposes of this subsection, "controversy" means the aggregate of any one or more false claims submitted by the same person in violation of this part. Proof of specific intent to defraud is not required.

(e) For purposes of this section:

"Claim" means any request or demand, whether under a contract or otherwise, for money or property, and whether or not the State has title to the money or property, that is presented to an officer, employee, or agent of the State or is made to a contractor, grantee, or other recipient, if the money or property is to be spent or used on the State's behalf or to advance a state program or interest, and if the State provides or has provided any portion of the money or property that is requested or demanded or will reimburse the contractor, grantee, or other recipient for any portion of the money or property that is requested or demanded. "Claim" shall not include requests or demands for money or property that the State has paid to an individual as compensation for employment or as an income subsidy with no restrictions on that individual's use of the money or property.

"Knowing" and "knowingly" means that a person, with respect to information:

(1) Has actual knowledge of the information;

(2) Acts in deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the information; or

(3) Acts in reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the information;

and no proof of specific intent to defraud is required.

"Material" means having the tendency to influence or capability to influence the payment or receipt of money or property.

"Obligation" means an established duty, whether or not fixed, arising from an express or implied contractual, grantor-grantee, or licensor-licensee relationship, from a fee-based or similar relationship, from statute, regulation, or administrative rule, or from the retention of any overpayment.

§ 661-22. Civil actions for false claims.

The attorney general shall investigate any violation under section 661-21. If the attorney general finds that a person has violated or is violating section 661-21, the attorney general may bring a civil action under this section.

§ 661-23. Evidentiary determination; burden of proof.

A determination that a person has violated the provisions of this part shall be based on a preponderance of the evidence.

§ 661-24. Statute of limitations.

An action for false claims to the State pursuant to this part shall be brought within six years after the false claim is discovered or by exercise of reasonable diligence should have been discovered and, in any event, no more than ten years after the date on which the violation of section 661-21 is committed.

§ 661-25. Action by private persons.

(a) A person may bring a civil action for a violation of section 661-21 for the person and for the State. The action shall be brought in the name of the State. The action may be dismissed only with the written consent of the court, taking into account the best interests of the parties involved and the public purposes behind this part.

(b) A copy of the complaint and written disclosure of substantially all material evidence and information the person possesses shall be served on the State in accordance with the Hawaii Rules of Civil Procedure. The complaint shall be filed in camera, shall remain under seal for at least sixty days, and shall not be served on the defendant until the court so orders. The State may elect to intervene and proceed with the action within sixty days after it receives both the complaint and the material evidence and information.

(c) The State may, for good cause shown, move the court for extensions of the time during which the complaint remains under seal under subsection (b). Any such motions may be supported by affidavits or other submissions in camera. The defendant shall not be required to respond to any complaint filed under this section until twenty days after the complaint is unsealed and served upon the defendant in accordance with the Hawaii Rules of Civil Procedure.

(d) Before the expiration of the sixty-day period or any extension obtained, the State shall:

(1) Proceed with the action, in which case the action shall be conducted by the State and the seal shall be lifted; or

(2) Notify the court that it declines to take over the action, in which case the person bringing the action shall have the right to conduct the action and the seal shall be lifted.

(e) When a person brings an action under this section, no person other than the State may intervene or bring a related action based on the facts underlying the pending action.

§ 661-26. Rights of parties to qui tam actions.

(a) If the State proceeds with an action under section 661-25, the State shall have the primary responsibility for prosecuting the action and shall not be bound by an act of the person bringing the action. The person shall have the right to continue as a party to the action, subject to the following limitations:

(1) The State may dismiss the action notwithstanding the objections of the person initiating the action if the court determines, after a hearing on the motion, that dismissal should be allowed;

(2) The State may settle the action with the defendant notwithstanding the objections of the person initiating the action if the court determines, after a hearing, that the proposed settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable. Upon a showing of good cause, the hearing may be held in camera;

(3) The court, upon a showing by the State that unrestricted participation during the course of the litigation by the person initiating the action would interfere with or unduly delay the State's prosecution of the case, or would be repetitious, irrelevant, or for purposes of harassment, may, in its discretion impose limitations on the person's participation by:

- (A)** Limiting the number of witnesses the person may call;
- (B)** Limiting the length of the testimony of the witnesses;
- (C)** Limiting the person's cross-examination of witnesses; or
- (D)** Otherwise limiting the participation by the person in the litigation.

(b) The defendant, by motion upon the court, may show that unrestricted participation during the course of the litigation by the person initiating the action would be for purposes of harassment or would cause the defendant undue burden or unnecessary expense. At the court's discretion, the court may limit the participation by the person in the litigation.

(c) If the State elects not to proceed with the action, the person who initiated that action shall have the right to conduct the action. If the State so requests, it shall be served with copies of all pleadings filed in the action and shall be supplied with copies of all deposition transcripts at the State's expense. When a person proceeds with the action, the court without limiting the status and rights of the person initiating the action, may nevertheless permit the State to intervene at a later date upon showing of good cause.

(d) Whether or not the State proceeds with the action, upon motion and a showing by the State that certain actions of discovery by the person initiating the action would interfere with the State's investigation or prosecution of a criminal or civil matter arising out of the same facts, the court may stay the discovery for a period of not more than sixty days. The court may extend the sixty-day period upon a motion and showing by the State that the State has pursued the investigation or prosecution of the criminal or civil matter with reasonable diligence and the proposed discovery would interfere with the ongoing investigation or prosecution of the criminal or civil matter.

(e) Notwithstanding section 661-25, the State may elect to pursue its claim through any alternate remedy available to the State, including any administrative proceedings to determine civil monetary penalties. If any alternate remedy is pursued in another proceeding, the person initiating the action shall have the same rights in the proceedings as the person would have had if the action had continued under this section. Any finding of fact or conclusion of law made in the other proceeding that becomes final shall be conclusive on all parties to an action under this section.

(f) Whether or not the State elects to proceed with the action, the parties to the action shall receive court approval of any settlements reached.

§ 661-27. Awards to qui tam plaintiffs.

(a) If the State proceeds with an action brought by a person under section 661-25, the person shall receive at least fifteen per cent but not more than twenty-five per cent of the proceeds of the action or settlement of the claim, depending upon the extent to which the person substantially contributed to the prosecution of the action. Where the action is one that the court finds to be based primarily on disclosures of specific information, other than information provided by the person bringing the action, relating to allegations or transactions in a criminal, civil, or administrative hearing, in a legislative or administrative report, hearing, audit, or investigation, or from the news media, the court may award sums as it considers appropriate, but in no case more than ten per cent of the proceeds, taking into account the significance of the information and the role of the person bringing the action in advancing the case to litigation. Any payment to a person under this subsection shall be made from the proceeds. The person shall also receive an amount for reasonable expenses that the court finds to have been necessarily incurred, plus reasonable attorneys' fees and costs. All expenses, fees, and costs shall be awarded against the defendant.

(b) If the State proceeds with an action brought under section 661-21, the State may file its own complaint or amend the complaint of a person who has brought an action under section 661-21 to clarify or add detail to the claims in which the State is intervening and to add any additional claims with respect to which the State contends it is entitled to relief. For statute of limitations purposes, any such state pleading shall relate back to the filing date of the complaint of the person who originally brought the action, to the extent that the claim of the State arises out of the conduct, transactions, or occurrences set forth, or attempted to be set forth, in the prior complaint of that person.

(c) If the State does not proceed with an action under this section, the person bringing the action or settling the claim shall receive an amount that the court decides is reasonable for collecting the civil penalty and damages. The amount shall be not less than twenty-five per cent and not more than thirty per cent of the proceeds of the action or settlement and shall be paid out of the proceeds. The person shall also receive an amount for reasonable expenses that the court finds to have been necessarily incurred, plus reasonable attorneys' fees and costs. All expenses, fees, and costs shall be awarded against the defendant.

(d) Whether or not the State proceeds with the action, if the court finds that the action was brought by a person who planned and initiated the violation of section 661-21 upon which the action was brought, then the court may, to the extent the court considers appropriate, reduce the share of the proceeds of the action that the person would otherwise receive under subsection (a), taking into account the role of that person in advancing the case to litigation and any relevant circumstances pertaining to the violation. If the person bringing the action is convicted of criminal conduct arising from the person's role in the violation of section 661-21, that person shall be dismissed from the civil action and shall not receive any share of the proceeds of the action. The dismissal shall not prejudice the right of the State to continue the action.

(e) If the State does not proceed with the action and the person bringing the action conducts the action, the court may award to the defendant its reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses if the defendant prevails in the action and the court finds that the claim of the person bringing the action was frivolous, vexatious, or brought primarily for purposes of harassment.

(f) In no event may a person bring an action under section 661-25:

(1) Against a member of the state senate or state house of representatives, a member of the judiciary, or an elected official in the executive branch of the State, if the action is based on evidence or information known to the State. For purposes of this section, evidence or information known only to the person or persons against whom an action is brought shall not be considered to be known to the State; or

(2) That is based upon allegations or transactions that are the subject of a civil suit or an administrative civil money penalty proceeding in which the State is already a party.

§ 661-28. Repealed.

L 2012, c 294, § 8.

§ 661-29. Fees and costs of litigation.

The State shall not be liable for expenses or fees, including attorney fees, that a person incurs in bringing an action under this part and shall not elect to pay those expenses or fees.

§ 661-30. Relief from retaliatory actions.

(a) Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, any employee, contractor, or agent shall be entitled to all relief necessary to make that employee, contractor, or agent whole, if that employee, contractor, or agent is discharged, demoted, suspended, threatened, harassed, or in any other manner discriminated against in the terms and conditions of employment, contract, or agency relationship because of lawful acts done by the employee, contractor, agent, or associated others in furtherance of an action under section 661-25 or other efforts to stop or address any conduct described in section 661-21(a).

(b) Relief under subsection (a) shall include reinstatement with the same seniority status that the employee, contractor, or agent would have had but for the discrimination, two times the amount of back pay, interest on the back pay, and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the discrimination, including litigation costs and reasonable attorney's fees. An action for relief from retaliatory actions under subsection (a) may be brought in the appropriate court of this State for the relief provided in this part.

(c) An action for relief from retaliatory actions under subsection (a) shall be brought within three years of the retaliatory conduct upon which the action is based.

§ 661-31. Certain actions barred.

(a) In no event may a person bring an action under this part that is based upon allegations or transactions which are the subject of a civil suit or an administrative civil money penalty proceeding in which the State is already a party.

(b) The court shall dismiss an action or claim under this part, unless opposed by the State, if the allegations or transactions alleged in the action or claim are substantially the same as those publicly disclosed:

- (1)** In a state criminal, civil, or administrative hearing in which the State or its agent is a party;
- (2)** In a state legislative or other state report, hearing, audit, or investigation; or
- (3)** By the news media,

unless the action is brought by the attorney general or the person bringing the action is an original source of the information.

(c) For purposes of this section, "original source" means an individual who:

(1) Prior to public disclosure under subsection (b), has voluntarily disclosed to the State the information on which the allegations or transactions in a claim are based; or

(2) Has knowledge that is independent of and materially adds to the publicly disclosed allegations or transactions, and who has voluntarily provided the information to the State before filing an action under this part.

Hawaii Qui Tam Actions or Recovery of False Claims to the Counties

As amended by Laws 2012, chapter 294.

HRS § 46-171 et seq.

§ 46-171. Actions for false claims to the counties; qui tam actions.

(a) Any person who:

(1) Knowingly presents, or causes to be presented, a false or fraudulent claim for payment or approval;

(2) Knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement material to a false or fraudulent claim;

(3) Has possession, custody, or control of property or money used, or to be used, by a county and, intending to defraud a county or to wilfully conceal the property, delivers, or causes to be delivered, less property than the amount for which the person receives a certificate or receipt;

(4) Is authorized to make or deliver a document certifying receipt of property used, or to be used by a county and, intending to defraud a county, makes or delivers the receipt without completely knowing that the information on the receipt is true;

(5) Buys, or receives as a pledge of an obligation or debt, public property from any officer or employee of a county that the person knows is not lawfully authorized to sell or pledge the property;

(6) Knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement material to an obligation to pay or transmit money or property to a county, or knowingly conceals, or knowingly and improperly avoids or decreases an obligation to pay or transmit money or property to a county;

(7) Is a beneficiary of an inadvertent submission of a false claim to a county, who subsequently discovers the falsity of the claim, and fails to disclose the false claim to the county within a reasonable time after discovery of the false claim; or

(8) Conspires to commit any of the conduct described in this subsection,

shall be liable to the county for a civil penalty of not less than \$ 5,500 and not more than \$ 11,000, plus three times the amount of damages that the county sustains due to the act of that person.

(b) If the court finds that a person who has violated subsection (a):

(1) Furnished officials of the county responsible for investigating false claims violations with all information known to the person about the violation within thirty days after the date on which the defendant first obtained the information;

(2) Fully cooperated with any county investigation of the violation; and

(3) At the time the person furnished the county with the information about the violation, no criminal prosecution, civil action, or administrative action had commenced under this title with respect to the violation, and the person did not have actual knowledge of the existence of an investigation into the violation;

the court may assess not less than two times the amount of damages that the county sustains because of the act of the person. A person violating subsection (a), shall also be liable to the county for the costs and attorneys' fees of a civil action brought to recover the penalty or damages.

(c) Liability under this section shall be joint and several for any act committed by two or more persons.

(d) This section shall not apply to any controversy involving an amount of less than \$ 500 in value. For purposes of this subsection, "controversy" means the aggregate of any one or more false claims submitted by the same person in violation of this part. Proof of specific intent to defraud is not required.

(e) For purposes of this section:

"Claim" means any request or demand, whether under a contract or otherwise, for money or property, and whether or not a county has title to the money or property, that is presented to an officer, employee, or agent of the county or is made to a contractor, grantee, or other recipient, if the money or property is to be spent or used on the county's behalf or to advance a county program or interest, and if the county provides or has provided any portion of the money or property that is requested or demanded or will reimburse the contractor, grantee, or other recipient for any portion of the money or property that is requested or demanded. "Claim" shall not include requests or demands for money or property that a county has paid to an individual as compensation for employment or as an income subsidy with no restrictions on that individual's use of the money or property.

"Knowing" and "knowingly" means that a person, with respect to information:

- (1) Has actual knowledge of the information;
- (2) Acts in deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the information; or
- (3) Acts in reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the information;

and no proof of specific intent to defraud is required.

"Material" means having the tendency to influence or capability to influence the payment or receipt of money or property.

"Obligation" means an established duty, whether or not fixed, arising from an express or implied contractual, grantor-grantee, or licensor-licensee relationship, from a fee-based or similar relationship, from statute, regulation, or administrative rule, or from the retention of any overpayment.

§ 46-172. Civil actions for false claims.

The county corporation counsel or county attorney shall investigate any violation under section 46-171. If the corporation counsel or county attorney finds that a person has violated or is violating section 46-171, the corporation counsel or county attorney may bring a civil action under this section.

§ 46-173. Evidentiary determination; burden of proof.

A determination that a person has violated this part shall be based on a preponderance of the evidence.

§ 46-174. Statute of limitations.

An action for false claims to a county pursuant to this part shall be brought within six years after the false claim is discovered or by exercise of reasonable diligence should have been discovered and, in any event, no more than ten years after the date on which the violation of section 46-171 is committed.

§ 46-175. Action by private persons.

(a) A person may bring a civil action for a violation of section 46-171 for the person and for a county. The action shall be brought in the name of the county. The action may be dismissed only with the written consent of the court, taking into account the best interests of the parties involved and the public purposes behind this part.

(b) A copy of the complaint and written disclosure of substantially all material evidence and information the person possesses shall be served on the county in accordance with the Hawaii rules of civil procedure. The complaint:

- (1)** Shall be filed in camera;
- (2)** Shall remain under seal for at least sixty days; and
- (3)** Shall not be served on the defendant until the court so orders.

The county may elect to intervene and proceed with the action within sixty days after it receives both the complaint and the material evidence and information.

(c) The county, for good cause shown, may move the court for extensions of the time during which the complaint remains under seal under subsection (b). Any such motions may be supported by affidavits or other submissions in camera. The defendant shall not be required to respond to any complaint filed under this section until twenty days after the complaint is unsealed and served upon the defendant in accordance with the Hawaii rules of civil procedure.

(d) Before the expiration of the sixty-day period or any extension obtained, the county shall:

(1) Proceed with the action, in which case the action shall be conducted by the county and the seal shall be lifted; or

(2) Notify the court that it declines to take over the action, in which case the person bringing the action shall have the right to conduct the action and the seal shall be lifted.

(e) When a person brings an action under this section, no person other than the county may intervene or bring a related action based on the facts underlying the pending action.

§ 46-176. Rights of parties to qui tam actions.

(a) If a county proceeds with an action under section 46-175, the county shall have the primary responsibility for prosecuting the action and shall not be bound by an act of the person bringing the action. The person shall have the right to continue as a party to the action, subject to the following limitations:

(1) The county may dismiss the action notwithstanding the objections of the person initiating the action if the court determines, after a hearing on the motion, that dismissal should be allowed;

(2) The county may settle the action with the defendant notwithstanding the objections of the person initiating the action if the court determines, after a hearing, that the proposed settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable. Upon a showing of good cause, the hearing may be held in camera;

(3) The court, upon a showing by the county that unrestricted participation during the course of the litigation by the person initiating the action would interfere with or unduly delay the county's prosecution of the case, or would be repetitious, irrelevant, or for purposes of harassment, may, in its discretion, impose limitations on the person's participation by:

(A) Limiting the number of witnesses the person may call;

(B) Limiting the length of the testimony of the witnesses;

(C) Limiting the person's cross-examination of witnesses; or

(D) Otherwise limiting the participation by the person in the litigation.

(b) The defendant, by motion upon the court, may show that unrestricted participation during the course of the litigation by the person initiating the action would be for purposes of harassment or would cause the defendant undue burden or unnecessary expense. At the court's discretion, the court may limit the participation by the person in the litigation.

(c) If the county elects not to proceed with the action, the person who initiated that action shall have the right to conduct the action. If the county so requests, it shall be served with copies of all pleadings filed in the action and shall be supplied with copies of all deposition transcripts at the county's expense. When a person proceeds with the action, the court, without limiting the status and rights of the person initiating the action, may nevertheless permit the county to intervene at a later date upon showing of good cause.

(d) Regardless of whether the county proceeds with the action, upon motion and a showing by the county that certain actions of discovery by the person initiating the action would interfere with the county's investigation or prosecution of a criminal or civil matter arising out of the same facts, the court may stay the discovery for a period of not more than sixty days. The court may extend the sixty-day period upon a motion and showing by the county that the county has pursued the investigation or prosecution of the criminal or civil matter with reasonable diligence and the proposed discovery would interfere with the ongoing investigation or prosecution of the criminal or civil matter.

(e) Notwithstanding section 46-175, the county may elect to pursue its claim through any alternate remedy available to the county, including any administrative proceedings to determine civil monetary penalties. If any alternate remedy is pursued in another proceeding, the person initiating the action shall have the same rights in the proceedings as the person would have had if the action had continued under this section. Any finding of fact or conclusion of law made in the other proceeding that becomes final shall be conclusive on all parties to an action under this section.

(f) Regardless of whether the county elects to proceed with the action, the parties to the action shall receive court approval of any settlements reached.

§ 46-177. Awards to qui tam plaintiffs.

(a) If a county proceeds with an action brought by a person under section 46-175, the person shall receive at least fifteen per cent but not more than twenty-five per cent of the proceeds of the action or settlement of the claim, depending upon the extent to which the person substantially contributed to the prosecution of the action. Where the action is one that the court finds to be based primarily on disclosures of specific information, other than information provided by the person bringing the action, relating to allegations or transactions in a criminal, civil, or administrative hearing, in a legislative or administrative report, hearing, audit, or investigation, or from the news media, the court may award sums as it considers appropriate, but in no case more than ten per cent of the proceeds, taking into account the significance of the information and the role of the person bringing the action in advancing the case to litigation. Any payment to a person under this subsection shall be made from the proceeds. The person shall also receive an amount for reasonable expenses that the court finds to have been necessarily incurred, plus reasonable attorneys' fees and costs. All expenses, fees, and costs shall be awarded against the defendant.

(b) If a county proceeds with an action brought under section 46-171, the county may file its own complaint or amend the complaint of a person who has brought an action under section 46-171 to clarify or add detail to the claims in which the county is intervening and to add any additional claims with respect to which the county contends it is entitled to relief. For statute of limitations purposes, any such pleading shall relate back to the filing date of the complaint of the person who originally brought the action, to the extent that the claim of the county arises out of the conduct, transactions, or occurrences set forth, or attempted to be set forth, in the prior complaint of that person.

(c) If the county does not proceed with an action under this section, the person bringing the action or settling the claim shall receive an amount that the court decides is reasonable for collecting the civil penalty and damages. The amount shall be not less than twenty-five per cent and not more than thirty per cent of the proceeds of the action or settlement and shall be paid out of the proceeds. The person shall also receive an amount for reasonable expenses that the court finds to have been necessarily incurred, plus reasonable attorneys' fees and costs. All expenses, fees, and costs shall be awarded against the defendant.

(d) Regardless of whether the county proceeds with the action, if the court finds that the action was brought by a person who planned and initiated the violation of section 46-171 upon which the action was brought, then the court, to the extent the court considers appropriate, may reduce the share of the proceeds of the action that the person would otherwise receive under subsection (a), taking into account the role of that person in advancing the case to litigation and any relevant circumstances pertaining to the violation. If the person bringing the action is convicted of criminal conduct arising from the person's role in the violation of section 46-171, that person shall be dismissed from the civil action and shall not receive any share of the proceeds of the action. The dismissal shall not prejudice the right of the county to continue the action.

(e) If the county does not proceed with the action and the person bringing the action conducts the action, the court may award to the defendant its reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses if the defendant prevails in the action and the court finds that the claim of the person bringing the action was frivolous, vexatious, or brought primarily for purposes of harassment.

(f) In no event may a person bring an action under section 46-175:

(1) Against any elected official of the county, if the action is based on evidence or information known to the county. For purposes of this section, evidence or information known only to the person or persons against whom an action is brought shall not be considered to be known to the county; or

(2) That is based upon allegations or transactions that are the subject of a civil suit or an administrative civil money penalty proceeding in which the county is already a party.

§ 46-178. Repealed.

L 2012, c 294, § 4.

§ 46-179. Fees and costs of litigation.

A county shall not be liable for expenses or fees, including attorney fees, that a person incurs in bringing an action under this part and shall not elect to pay those expenses or fees.

§ 46-180. Relief from retaliatory actions.

(a) Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, any employee, contractor, or agent shall be entitled to all relief necessary to make that employee, contractor, or agent whole, if that employee, contractor, or agent is discharged, demoted, suspended, threatened, harassed, or in any other manner discriminated against in the terms and conditions of employment, contract, or agency relationship because of lawful acts done by the employee, contractor, agent, or associated others in furtherance of an action under section 46-175 or other efforts to stop or address any conduct described in section 46-171(a).

(b) Relief under subsection (a) shall include reinstatement with the same seniority status that the employee, contractor, or agent would have had but for the discrimination, two times the amount of back pay, interest on the back pay, and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the discrimination, including litigation costs and reasonable attorney's fees. An action for relief from retaliatory actions under subsection (a) may be brought in the appropriate court of this State for the relief provided in this part.

(c) An action for relief from retaliatory actions under subsection (a) shall be brought within three years of the retaliatory conduct upon which the action is based.

§ 46-181. Certain actions barred.

(a) In no event may a person bring an action under this part that is based upon allegations or transactions which are the subject of a civil suit or an administrative civil money penalty proceeding in which a county is already a party.

(b) The court shall dismiss an action or claim under this part, unless opposed by a county, if the allegations or transactions alleged in the action or claim are substantially the same as those publicly disclosed:

- (1)** In a criminal, civil, or administrative hearing in which a county or its agent is a party;
- (2)** In a county council or other county report, hearing, audit, or investigation; or
- (3)** By the news media,

unless the action is brought by the county attorney or the person bringing the action is an original source of the information.

(c) For purposes of this section, "original source" means an individual who:

(1) Prior to public disclosure under subsection (b), has voluntarily disclosed to a county the information on which the allegations or transactions in a claim are based; or

(2) Has knowledge that is independent of and materially adds to the publicly disclosed allegations or transactions, and who has voluntarily provided the information to a county before filing an action under this part.