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AB-1244 Workers' compensation. (2015-2016)

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Assembly Bill No. 1244

CHAPTER 852

An act to amend Section 4906 of, and to add Section 139.21 to, the Labor Code, and to amend Section 14123 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to workers' compensation.

[Approved by Governor September 30, 2016. Filed with Secretary of State September 30, 2016.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1244, Gray. Workers' compensation.

Under existing law, the Director of Health Care Services is authorized, for purposes of administering the Medi-Cal program, to suspend a provider of service from further participation under the program for specified reasons, including conviction of any felony or any misdemeanor involving fraud, abuse of the Medi-Cal program or any patient, or otherwise substantially related to the qualifications, functions, or duties of a provider of service. Existing law requires the director, upon receipt of written notification from the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services that a physician or other individual practitioner has been suspended from participation in the Medicare or Medicaid programs, to promptly suspend the practitioner from participation in the Medi-Cal program.

Existing law establishes a workers' compensation system, administered by the Administrative Director of the Division of Workers' Compensation, that generally requires employers to secure the payment of workers' compensation for injuries incurred by their employees that arise out of, or in the course of, employment. Existing law requires an employer to provide all medical services reasonably required to cure or relieve the injured worker from the effects of the injury.

Existing law authorizes an insurer, employer, or entity that provides physician network services to establish or modify a medical provider network for the provision of medical treatment to injured employees and requires the administrative director to contract with individual physicians or an independent medical review organization to perform medical provider network independent medical reviews.

This bill would require the administrative director to promptly suspend any physician, practitioner, or provider from participating in the workers' compensation system if as a physician, practitioner, or provider the individual or entity meets specified criteria, including if that individual has been convicted of any felony or misdemeanor involving fraud or abuse of the Medi-Cal program, Medicare program, or workers' compensation system, if that individual's license, certificate, or approval to provide health care has been surrendered or revoked, or if that individual or entity has been suspended, due to fraud or abuse, from participation in the Medicare or Medicaid programs. The bill would require the administrative director to adopt regulations for suspending a physician, practitioner, or provider from participating in the workers' compensation system pursuant to these provisions, as specified, and would require the administrative director to furnish to the physician, practitioner, or provider written notice of the right to a hearing regarding the suspension and the procedure to follow to request that hearing. The bill would also require the administrative director to promptly notify the appropriate state licensing, certifying, or registering authority of a physician's, practitioner's, or provider's suspension and to update the division's databases of qualified medical evaluators and medical provider networks. The

bill would require the administrative director to notify the chief judge of the division of a suspension under these provisions, as specified, and post a notice on the department's Internet Web site. The bill would enact special lien proceedings for the adjudication of any liens of a physician, practitioner, or provider who has been suspended pursuant to these provisions because he or she has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor that meets specified criteria.

The bill would also require the Director of Health Care Services to notify the administrative director of a suspension of a physician from participation in the Medi-Cal program imposed pursuant to the provisions described above authorizing the director to suspend a provider of service from participation.

Existing law establishes the Workers' Compensation Appeals Board to exercise all judicial powers vested in it, as specified, including workers' compensation proceedings for the recovery of compensation, or concerning any right or liability arising out of or incidental to the recovery of compensation. Existing law vests the appeals board with full power, authority, and jurisdiction to try and determine finally those matters, subject only to the review by the courts, as specified. Existing law authorizes the appeals board to determine, and allow as liens against any sum to be paid as compensation, as specified, a reasonable attorney's fee for legal services and disbursements in connection with those legal services. Existing law provides that a charge, claim, or agreement for those legal services or disbursements is not enforceable, valid, or binding in excess of a reasonable amount.

Existing law also requires an attorney to furnish to the employee a written disclosure form describing the procedures available to the injured employee or his or her dependents and specified information regarding attorney's fees. Existing law requires that a copy of the disclosure form be signed by the employee and the attorney and sent to the employer, or insurer or 3rd-party administrator, if either is known, by the attorney within 15 days of the employee's and attorney's execution of the form. Existing law also requires the employee, the insurer, the employer, and the attorneys for each party to sign and file with the board a statement, signed under penalty of perjury, attesting that the signatories have not violated specified laws prohibiting conflicts of interest.

Existing law authorizes the appeals board, a workers' compensation judge, or any party to the action or proceeding, as specified, to cause the deposition of witnesses in any investigation or hearing before the appeals board, and provides that the deponent is entitled to receive specified benefits, such as reasonable expenses of transportation, meals, and lodging, as specified.

This bill would prohibit payment for legal services or disbursements in connection with those legal services, or expenses relating to the deposition of witnesses, incurred under the provisions described above, as specified, prior to the filing of the disclosure form with the appeals board and the sending of that form to the employer, or to the insurer or 3rd-party administrator, if either is known, by the attorney. The bill would require the disclosure form described above to contain a paragraph setting forth the exact location of the district office of the appeals board at which the employee's case will be filed and to include a specified statement. The bill would impose other requirements regarding the signing and content of the form, including that the form be signed under penalty of perjury by the attorney representing the employee, and would require the form to be filed with the appeals board.

The bill would also require an attorney who subsequently assumes the representation of the employee in the same action or proceeding to complete and sign under penalty of perjury a disclosure form that meets the above-described requirements and the statement attesting that the signatories have not violated specified laws prohibiting conflicts of interest. The bill would require the attorney to file the form and statement with the appeals board, and send them to the employer, or insurer or 3rd-party administrator, if either is known, within 15 days of the employee's and attorney's execution of the form and statement.

By expanding the scope of the crime of perjury under these provisions, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 139.21 is added to the Labor Code, immediately following Section 139.2, to read:

139.21. (a) (1) The administrative director shall promptly suspend, pursuant to subdivision (b), any physician, practitioner, or provider from participating in the workers' compensation system as a physician, practitioner, or provider if the individual or entity meets any of the following criteria:

(A) The individual has been convicted of any felony or misdemeanor and that crime comes within any of the following descriptions:

(i) It involves fraud or abuse of the Medi-Cal program, Medicare program, or workers' compensation system, or fraud or abuse of any patient.

(ii) It relates to the conduct of the individual's medical practice as it pertains to patient care.

(iii) It is a financial crime that relates to the Medi-Cal program, Medicare program, or workers' compensation system.

(iv) It is otherwise substantially related to the qualifications, functions, or duties of a provider of services.

(B) The individual or entity has been suspended, due to fraud or abuse, from the federal Medicare or Medicaid programs.

(C) The individual's license, certificate, or approval to provide health care has been surrendered or revoked.

(2) The administrative director shall exercise due diligence to identify physicians, practitioners, or providers who have been suspended as described in subdivision (a) by accessing the quarterly updates to the list of suspended and ineligible providers maintained by the State Department of Health Care Services for the Medi-Cal program at <https://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/SandILanding.asp>.

(b) (1) The administrative director shall adopt regulations for suspending a physician, practitioner, or provider from participating in the workers' compensation system, subject to the notice and hearing requirements in paragraph (2).

(2) The administrative director shall furnish to the physician, practitioner, or provider written notice of the right to a hearing regarding the suspension and the procedure to follow to request a hearing. The notice shall state that the administrative director is required to suspend the physician, practitioner, or provider pursuant to subdivision (a) after 30 days from the date the notice is mailed unless the physician, practitioner, or provider requests a hearing and, in that hearing, the physician, practitioner, or provider provides proof that paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) is not applicable. The physician, practitioner, or provider may request a hearing within 10 days from the date the notice is sent by the administrative director. The request for the hearing shall stay the suspension. The hearing shall be held within 30 days of the receipt of the request. Upon the completion of the hearing, if the administrative director finds that paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) is applicable, the administrative director shall immediately suspend the physician, practitioner, or provider.

(3) The administrative director shall have power and jurisdiction to do all things necessary or convenient to conduct the hearings provided for in paragraph (2). The hearings and investigations may be conducted by any designated hearing officer appointed by the administrative director. Any authorized person conducting that hearing or investigation may administer oaths, subpoena and require the attendance of witnesses and the production of books or papers, and cause the depositions of witnesses residing within or without the state to be taken in the manner prescribed by law for like depositions in civil cases in the superior court of this state under Title 4 (commencing with Section 2016.010) of Part 4 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

(c) The administrative director shall promptly notify the physician's, practitioner's, or provider's state licensing, certifying, or registering authority of a suspension imposed pursuant to this section and shall update the division's qualified medical evaluator and medical provider network databases, as appropriate.

(d) Upon suspension of a physician, practitioner, or provider pursuant to this section, the administrative director shall give notice of the suspension to the chief judge of the division, and the chief judge shall promptly thereafter provide written notification of the suspension to district offices and all workers' compensation judges. The method of notification to all district offices and to all workers' compensation judges shall be in a manner determined by the chief judge in his or her discretion. The administrative director shall also post notification of the suspension on the department's Internet Web site.

(e) The following procedures shall apply for the adjudication of any liens of a physician, practitioner, or provider suspended pursuant to subparagraph (A) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a), including any liens filed by or on behalf of the physician, practitioner, or provider or any clinic, group or corporation in which the suspended physician, practitioner, or provider has an ownership interest.

(1) If the disposition of the criminal proceeding provides for or requires, whether by plea agreement or by judgment, dismissal of liens and forfeiture of sums claimed therein, as specified in the criminal disposition, all of those liens shall be deemed dismissed with prejudice by operation of law as of the effective date of the final disposition in the criminal proceeding, and orders notifying of those dismissals may and shall be entered by workers' compensation judges.

(2) If the disposition of the criminal proceeding fails to specify the disposition to be made of lien filings in the workers' compensation system as set forth in paragraph (1), all liens pending in any workers' compensation case in any district office within the state shall be consolidated and adjudicated in a special lien proceeding as described in subdivisions (f) to (i), inclusive.

(f) After notice of suspension, pursuant to subdivision (d), and if subdivision (e) applies, the administrative director shall appoint a special lien proceeding attorney, who shall be an attorney employed by the division or by the department. The special lien proceeding attorney shall, based on the information that is available, identify liens subject to disposition pursuant to subdivision (e), and workers' compensation cases in which those liens are pending, and shall notify the chief judge regarding those liens. Based on this information, the chief judge shall identify a district office for a consolidated special lien proceeding to adjudicate those liens, and shall appoint a workers' compensation judge to preside over that proceeding.

(g) It shall be a presumption affecting the burden of proof that all liens to be adjudicated in the special lien proceeding, and all underlying bills for service and claims for compensation asserted therein, arise from the conduct subjecting the physician, practitioner, or provider to suspension, and that payment is not due and should not be made on those liens because they arise from, or are connected to, criminal, fraudulent, or abusive conduct or activity. A lien claimant shall not have the right to payment unless he or she rebuts that presumption by a preponderance of the evidence.

(h) The special lien proceedings shall be governed by the same laws, regulations, and procedures that govern all other matters before the appeals board. The administrative director shall promulgate regulations for the implementation of this section.

(i) If it is determined in a special lien proceeding that a lien does not arise from the conduct subjecting a physician, practitioner, or provider to suspension, the workers' compensation judge shall have the discretion to adjudicate the lien or transfer the lien back to the district office having venue over the case in which the lien was filed.

(j) At any time following suspension, a physician, practitioner, or provider lien claimant may elect to withdraw or to dismiss his or her lien with prejudice, which shall constitute a final disposition of the claim for compensation asserted therein.

(k) The provisions of this section shall not affect, amend, alter, or in any way apply to the provisions of Section 139.2.

SEC. 2. Section 4906 of the Labor Code is amended to read:

4906. (a) A charge, claim, or agreement for the legal services or disbursements mentioned in subdivision (a) of Section 4903, or for the expense mentioned in subdivision (b) of Section 4903, is not enforceable, valid, or binding in excess of a reasonable amount. The appeals board may determine what constitutes a reasonable amount, but payment pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 4903 or Section 5710 shall not be allowed for any services or expenses incurred prior to the filing of the disclosure form described in subdivision (e) with the appeals board and the sending of that form to the employer, or to the insurer or third-party administrator, if either is known, by the attorney.

(b) An attorney or agent shall not demand or accept any fee from an employee or dependent of an employee for the purpose of representing the employee or dependent of an employee in any proceeding of the division, appeals board, or any appellate procedure related thereto until the amount of the fee has been approved or set by the appeals board.

(c) Any fee agreement shall be submitted to the appeals board for approval within 10 days after the agreement is made.

(d) In establishing a reasonable attorney's fee, consideration shall be given to the responsibility assumed by the attorney, the care exercised in representing the applicant, the time involved, and the results obtained.

(e) At the initial consultation, an attorney shall furnish the employee a written disclosure form promulgated by the administrative director which shall clearly and prominently describe the procedures available to the injured employee or his or her dependents. The disclosure form shall describe this section, the range of attorney's fees customarily approved by the appeals board, and the attorney's fees provisions of Section 4064 and the extent to which an employee may receive compensation without incurring attorney's fees. The disclosure form shall include the telephone number of the administrative director together with the statement that the employee may receive answers at that number to questions concerning entitlement to compensation or the procedures to follow to receive compensation. A copy of the disclosure form shall be signed by the employee and the attorney and filed with the appeals board and sent to the employer, or insurer or third-party administrator, if either is known, by the attorney within 15 days of the employee's and attorney's execution thereof.

(f) The disclosure form set forth in subdivision (e) shall contain, prominently stated, the following statement:

"Any person who makes or causes to be made any knowingly false or fraudulent material statement or representation for the purpose of obtaining or denying workers' compensation benefits or payments is guilty of a felony."

(g) (1) The disclosure form described in subdivision (e) shall also contain a paragraph setting forth the exact location of the district office of the appeals board at which the employee's case will be filed. This paragraph shall also contain, prominently displayed, the following statement:

"The employee has been advised of the district office at which his or her case will be filed and that he or she may be required to attend conferences or hearings at this location at his or her own expense."

(2) The disclosure form may not be signed by the employee until he or she has been advised of the location at which his or her case will be filed, has met with or personally spoken with an attorney licensed by the State Bar of California who is regularly employed by the firm by which the employee will be represented, and has been advised of his or her rights as set forth in subdivision (e) and the provisions of paragraph (1). The name of this individual shall be clearly and legibly set forth on the disclosure form.

(3) The disclosure form shall include the actual date the disclosure form was signed by both the employee and the attorney and shall be signed under penalty of perjury by the attorney representing the employee, or an attorney licensed by the State Bar of California who is regularly employed by his or her firm. A copy of the disclosure form containing all of the required information shall be given to the employee when he or she signs the disclosure form.

(h) In addition to the disclosure form, the employee, the insurer, the employer, and the attorneys for each party shall sign under penalty of perjury and file with the board a statement, with the complete application or answer, and in addition to the disclosure required pursuant to subdivision (g), that they have not violated Section 139.3 and that they have not offered, delivered, received, or accepted any rebate, refund, commission, preference, patronage dividend, discount, or other consideration, whether in the form of money or otherwise, as compensation or inducement for any referred examination or evaluation.

(i) An attorney who subsequently assumes the representation of the employee in the same action or proceeding shall complete a disclosure form that meets all of the requirements of this section and the statement required by subdivision (h). Both the form and the statement shall be signed under penalty of perjury by the attorney or an attorney licensed by the State Bar of California who is regularly employed by his or her firm. Both the disclosure form and the statement shall be filed with the appeals board and sent to the employer, or insurer or third-party administrator, if either is known, by the attorney within 15 days of the employee's and attorney's execution of the form and statement. Payment pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 4903 or Section 5710 shall not be allowed for any services or expenses incurred prior to the filing of the disclosure form described in subdivision (e) with the appeals board and the sending of that form to the employer, or to the insurer or third-party administrator, if either is known, by the attorney.

SEC. 3. Section 14123 of the Welfare and Institutions Code is amended to read:

14123. Participation in the Medi-Cal program by a provider of service is subject to suspension in order to protect the health of the recipients and the funds appropriated to carry out this chapter.

(a) (1) The director may suspend a provider of service from further participation under the Medi-Cal program for violation of any provision of this chapter or Chapter 8 (commencing with Section 14200) or any rule or regulation promulgated by the director pursuant to those chapters. The suspension may be for an indefinite or specified period of time and with or without conditions, or may be imposed with the operation of the suspension stayed or probation granted. The director shall suspend a provider of service for conviction of any felony or any misdemeanor involving fraud, abuse of the Medi-Cal program or any patient, or otherwise substantially related to the qualifications, functions, or duties of a provider of service.

(2) If the provider of service is a clinic, group, corporation, or other association, conviction of any officer, director, or shareholder with a 10 percent or greater interest in that organization, of a crime described in paragraph (1) shall result in the suspension of that organization and the individual convicted if the director believes that suspension would be in the best interest of the Medi-Cal program. If the provider of service is a political subdivision of the state or other government agency, the conviction of the person in charge of the facility of a crime described in paragraph (1) may result in the suspension of that facility. The record of conviction or a certified copy thereof, certified by the clerk of the court or by the judge in whose court the conviction is had, shall be conclusive evidence of the fact that the conviction occurred. A plea or verdict of guilty, or a conviction following a plea of nolo contendere is deemed to be a conviction within the meaning of this section.

(3) After conviction, but before the time for appeal has elapsed or the judgment of conviction has been affirmed on appeal, the director, if he or she believes that suspension would be in the best interests of the Medi-Cal program, may order the suspension of a provider of service. When the time for appeal has elapsed, or the judgment of conviction has been affirmed on appeal or when an order granting probation is made suspending the imposition of sentence irrespective of any subsequent order under Section 1203.4 of the Penal Code allowing a person to withdraw his or her plea of guilty and to enter a plea of not guilty, or setting aside the verdict of guilty, or dismissing the accusation, information, or indictment, the director shall order the suspension of a provider of service. The suspension shall not take effect earlier than the date of the director's order. Suspension following a conviction is not subject to the proceedings required in subdivision (c). However, the director may grant

an informal hearing at the request of the provider of service to determine in the director's sole discretion if the circumstances surrounding the conviction justify rescinding or otherwise modifying the suspension provided for in this subdivision.

(4) If the provider of service appeals the conviction and the conviction is reversed, the provider may apply for reinstatement to the Medi-Cal program after the conviction is reversed. Notwithstanding Section 14124.6, the application for reinstatement shall not be subject to the one-year waiting period for the filing of a reinstatement petition pursuant to Section 11522 of the Government Code.

(b) Whenever the director receives written notification from the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services that a physician or other individual practitioner has been suspended from participation in the Medicare or Medicaid programs, the director shall promptly suspend the practitioner from participation in the Medi-Cal program and notify the Administrative Director of the Division of Workers' Compensation of the suspension, in accordance with paragraph (2) of subdivision (e). This automatic suspension is not subject to the proceedings required in subdivision (c). No payment from state or federal funds may be made for any item or service rendered by the practitioner during the period of suspension.

(c) The proceedings for suspension shall be conducted pursuant to Section 100171 of the Health and Safety Code. The director may temporarily suspend any provider of service prior to any hearing when in his or her opinion that action is necessary to protect the public welfare or the interests of the Medi-Cal program. The director shall notify the provider of service of the temporary suspension and the effective date thereof and at the same time serve the provider with an accusation. The accusation and all proceedings thereafter shall be in accordance with Section 100171 of the Health and Safety Code. Upon receipt of a notice of defense by the provider, the director shall set the matter for hearing within 30 days after receipt of the notice. The temporary suspension shall remain in effect until such time as the hearing is completed and the director has made a final determination on the merits. The temporary suspension shall, however, be deemed vacated if the director fails to make a final determination on the merits within 60 days after the original hearing has been completed. This subdivision does not apply where the suspension of a provider is based upon the conviction of any crime involving fraud, abuse of the Medi-Cal program, or suspension from the federal Medicare program. In those instances, suspension shall be automatic.

(d) (1) The suspension by the director of any provider of service shall preclude the provider from submitting claims for payment, either personally or through claims submitted by any clinic, group, corporation, or other association to the Medi-Cal program for any services or supplies the provider has provided under the program, except for services or supplies provided prior to the suspension. No clinic, group, corporation, or other association which is a provider of service shall submit claims for payment to the Medi-Cal program for any services or supplies provided by a person within the organization who has been suspended or revoked by the director, except for services or supplies provided prior to the suspension.

(2) If the provisions of this chapter, Chapter 8 (commencing with Section 14200), or the regulations promulgated by the director are violated by a provider of service that is a clinic, group, corporation, or other association, the director may suspend the organization and any individual person within the organization who is responsible for the violation.

(e) (1) Notice of the suspension shall be sent by the director to the provider's state licensing, certifying, or registering authority, along with the evidence upon which the suspension was based.

(2) At the same time notice is provided pursuant to paragraph (1), the director shall provide written notification of the suspension to the Administrative Director of the Division of Workers' Compensation, for purposes of Section 139.21 of the Labor Code.

(f) In addition to the bases for suspension contained in subdivisions (a) and (b), the director may suspend a provider of service from further participation under the Medi-Cal dental program for the provision of services that are below or less than the standard of acceptable quality, as established by the California Dental Association Guidelines for the Assessment of Clinical Quality and Professional Performance, Copyright 1995, Third Edition, as periodically amended. The suspension shall be subject to the requirements contained in subdivisions (a) to (e), inclusive.

SEC. 4. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.