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AB-2667 Civil rights: Unruh Civil Rights Act: waivers. (2015-2016)

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AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MAY 19, 2016

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 15, 2016

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2015–2016 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

NO. 2667

Introduced by Assembly Member Thurmond

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Bonta, Mark Stone, and Weber)

February 19, 2016

An act to amend Section 51 of the Civil Code, relating to civil rights.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2667, as amended, Thurmond. Civil rights: Unruh Civil Rights Act: waivers.

The Unruh Civil Rights Act provides that all persons within the jurisdiction of this state are entitled to full and equal accommodations in all business establishments regardless of their sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status.

This bill would require a waiver of a legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of the Unruh Civil Rights Act, including the right to file and pursue a civil action or complaint with, or otherwise notify, the Attorney General or any other public prosecutor, or law enforcement agency, the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, or any other governmental entity, to be knowing and voluntary, in writing, and expressly not made as a condition of entering into a contract for goods or services or as a condition of providing or receiving goods and services. The bill, among other things, would require a person who seeks to enforce a waiver of any legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of the act to have the burden of proving that the waiver was knowing and voluntary and not made as a condition of the contract or of providing or receiving the goods or services. The bill would provide that, with certain exceptions, it applies to any agreement to waive a legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of the act, including an agreement to accept private arbitration, entered into, altered, modified, renewed, or extended on or after January 1, 2017. *The bill would provide that nothing in these provisions shall prohibit a person from knowingly and voluntarily entering into binding arbitration.*

The bill also would make findings and declarations.

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

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

SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that it is the policy of the State of California to ensure that all persons have the full benefit of the rights, penalties, remedies, forums, and procedures established by the Unruh Civil Rights Act and that individuals shall not be deprived of those rights, penalties, remedies, forums, or procedures through the use of involuntary or coerced waivers.

(b) It is the purpose of this act to ensure that a contract to waive any of the rights, penalties, remedies, forums, or procedures under the Unruh Civil Rights Act, including any provision that has the effect of limiting the full application or enforcement of any right, remedy, forum, or procedure available under the Unruh Civil Rights Act, is a matter of voluntary consent, not coercion.

SEC. 2. Section 51 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

51. (a) This section shall be known, and may be cited, as the Unruh Civil Rights Act.

(b) All persons within the jurisdiction of this state are free and equal, and no matter what their sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments of every kind whatsoever.

(c) This section shall not be construed to confer any right or privilege on a person that is conditioned or limited by law or that is applicable alike to persons of every sex, color, race, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status, or to persons regardless of their genetic information.

(d) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require any construction, alteration, repair, structural or otherwise, or modification of any sort whatsoever, beyond that construction, alteration, repair, or modification that is otherwise required by other provisions of law, to any new or existing establishment, facility, building, improvement, or any other structure, nor shall anything in this section be construed to augment, restrict, or alter in any way the authority of the State Architect to require construction, alteration, repair, or modifications that the State Architect otherwise possesses pursuant to other laws.

(e) For purposes of this section:

(1) "Disability" means any mental or physical disability as defined in Sections 12926 and 12926.1 of the Government Code.

(2) (A) "Genetic information" means, with respect to any individual, information about any of the following:

(i) The individual's genetic tests.

(ii) The genetic tests of family members of the individual.

(iii) The manifestation of a disease or disorder in family members of the individual.

(B) "Genetic information" includes any request for, or receipt of, genetic services, or participation in clinical research that includes genetic services, by an individual or any family member of the individual.

(C) "Genetic information" does not include information about the sex or age of any individual.

(3) "Medical condition" has the same meaning as defined in subdivision (i) of Section 12926 of the Government Code.

(4) "Religion" includes all aspects of religious belief, observance, and practice.

(5) "Sex" includes, but is not limited to, pregnancy, childbirth, or medical conditions related to pregnancy or childbirth. "Sex" also includes, but is not limited to, a person's gender. "Gender" means sex, and includes a person's gender identity and gender expression. "Gender expression" means a person's gender-related appearance and behavior whether or not stereotypically associated with the person's assigned sex at birth.

(6) "Sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status" includes a perception that the person has any particular characteristic or characteristics within the listed categories or that the person is associated with a person who has, or is perceived to have, any particular characteristic or characteristics within the listed categories.

(7) "Sexual orientation" has the same meaning as defined in subdivision (s) of Section 12926 of the Government Code.

(f) A violation of the right of any individual under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336) shall also constitute a violation of this section.

(g) Verification of immigration status and any discrimination based upon verified immigration status, where required by federal law, shall not constitute a violation of this section.

(h) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require the provision of services or documents in a language other than English, beyond that which is otherwise required by other provisions of federal, state, or local law, including Section 1632.

(i) (1) A person shall not require another person to waive any legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of this section, as a condition of entering into a contract for goods or services, including the right to file and pursue a civil action or complaint with, or otherwise notify, the Attorney General or any other public prosecutor, or law enforcement agency, the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, or any court or other governmental entity.

(2) A person shall not refuse to enter into a contract with, or refuse to provide goods or services to, another person on the basis that the other person refuses to waive any legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of this section, including the right to file and pursue a civil action or complaint with, or otherwise notify, the Attorney General or any other public prosecutor, or law enforcement agency, the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, or any other governmental entity.

(3) Any waiver of any legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of this section, including the right to file and pursue a civil action or complaint with, or otherwise notify, the Attorney General or any other public prosecutor, or law enforcement agency, the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, or any other governmental entity shall be knowing and voluntary, and in writing, and expressly not made as a condition of entering into a contract for goods or services or as a condition of providing or receiving goods and services. This paragraph shall not affect any legal right, penalty, forum, or procedure for which state or federal law prohibits waiver.

(4) Any waiver of any legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of this section that is required as a condition of entering into a contract for goods or services shall be deemed involuntary, unconscionable, against public policy, and unenforceable. Nothing in this subdivision shall affect the enforceability or validity of any other provision of the contract.

(5) Any person who seeks to enforce a waiver of any legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of this section shall have the burden of proving that the waiver was knowing and voluntary and not made as a condition of the contract or of providing or receiving the goods or services.

(6) This subdivision shall apply to any agreement to waive any legal right, penalty, remedy, forum, or procedure for a violation of this section, including an agreement to accept private arbitration, entered into, altered, modified, renewed, or extended on or after January 1, 2017.

(7) In addition to injunctive relief and any other remedies available, a court may award a plaintiff enforcing his or her rights under this section reasonable attorney's fees.

(8) The provisions of this subdivision are severable. If any provision of this section or its application is held invalid, that invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications that can be given effect without the invalid provision or application.

(j) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a person from knowingly and voluntarily entering into binding arbitration.