A BILL FOR AN ACT

CONCERNING A WORKER'S RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE FOR CONDUCT RELATED TO A PRINCIPAL'S ACTIONS DURING A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.

Bill Summary

(Note: This summary applies to this bill as introduced and does not reflect any amendments that may be subsequently adopted. If this bill passes third reading in the house of introduction, a bill summary that applies to the reengrossed version of this bill will be available at http://leg.colorado.gov.)

The bill prohibits a principal, which includes an employer, certain labor contractors, public employers, and entities that rely on independent contractors for a specified percentage of their workforce, from discriminating, retaliating, or taking adverse action against any worker who:

Shading denotes HOUSE amendment Double underlining denotes SENATE amendment Capital letters or bold & italic numbers indicate new material to be added to existing statute. Dashes through the words indicate deletions from existing statute.
 Raises any concern about workplace health and safety practices or hazards related to a public health emergency to the principal, the principal's agent, other workers, a government agency, or the public if the workplace health and safety practices fail to meet guidelines established by a federal, state, or local public health agency with jurisdiction over the workplace; or

Voluntarily wears at the worker's workplace the worker's own personal protective equipment, such as a mask, faceguard, or gloves.

A person may seek relief for a violation of the bill by:

Filing a complaint with the division of labor standards and statistics in the department of labor and employment;

Bringing an action in district court, after exhausting administrative remedies; or

Bringing a whistleblower action in the name of the state in district court, after exhausting administrative remedies.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Colorado:

SECTION 1. In Colorado Revised Statutes, add article 14.4 to title 8 as follows:

ARTICLE 14.4

Worker Rights Related to a Public Health Emergency

8-14.4-101. Definitions. As used in this article 14.4, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "DEPARTMENT" means the department of labor and employment.

(2) "DIVISION" means the division of labor standards and statistics in the department.

(3) (a) "PRINCIPAL" has the same meaning as "EMPLOYER" as set forth in the federal "FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT OF 1938", 29 U.S.C. SEC. 203 (d).

(b) "PRINCIPAL" includes:

(I) A FOREIGN LABOR CONTRACTOR AND A MIGRATORY FIELD
LABOR CONTRACTOR OR CREW LEADER;

(II) THE STATE OF COLORADO, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND
POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS OF THE STATE AS DEFINED IN SECTION 1-7.5-103
(6); AND

(III) AN ENTITY THAT RELIES ON INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS FOR
SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT OR MORE OF THE ENTITY'S WORKFORCE IN THE
STATE.

(4) "PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY" MEANS:
(a) A PUBLIC HEALTH ORDER ISSUED BY A STATE OR LOCAL PUBLIC
HEALTH AGENCY; OR
(b) A DISASTER EMERGENCY DECLARED BY THE GOVERNOR BASED
ON A PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN.

(5) "WORKER" MEANS ANY INDIVIDUAL, INCLUDING A MIGRATORY
LABORER, PERFORMING LABOR OR SERVICES FOR THE BENEFIT OF A
PRINCIPAL. FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE 14.4, RELEVANT FACTORS
IN DETERMINING WHETHER AN INDIVIDUAL IS A WORKER INCLUDE THE
DEGREE OF CONTROL THE PRINCIPAL MAY OR DOES EXERCISE OVER THE
INDIVIDUAL AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL PERFORMS WORK
THAT IS THE PRIMARY WORK OF THE PRINCIPAL; EXCEPT THAT AN
INDIVIDUAL PRIMARILY FREE FROM CONTROL AND DIRECTION IN THE
PERFORMANCE OF THE SERVICE, BOTH UNDER THE INDIVIDUAL'S CONTRACT
FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF SERVICE AND IN FACT, AND WHO IS
CUSTOMARILY ENGAGED IN AN INDEPENDENT TRADE, OCCUPATION,
PROFESSION, OR BUSINESS RELATED TO THE SERVICE PERFORMED IS NOT A
"WORKER" UNLESS THE INDIVIDUAL WORKS FOR A PRINCIPAL THAT RELIES
ON INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS FOR SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT OR MORE OF
ITS WORKFORCE.
8-14.4-102. Prohibition against discrimination based on claims related to a public health emergency. (1) A principal shall not discriminate, take adverse action, or retaliate against any worker who, in good faith, raises any reasonable concern about workplace violations of government health or safety rules, or about an otherwise significant workplace threat to health or safety, related to a public health emergency to the principal, the principal’s agent, other workers, a government agency, or the public if the workplace health and safety practices fail to meet guidelines established by a federal, state, or local public health agency with jurisdiction over the workplace.

(2) (a) A principal shall not require or attempt to require a worker to sign a contract or other agreement that would limit or prevent the worker from disclosing information about workplace health and safety practices or hazards related to a public health emergency or to otherwise abide by a workplace policy that would limit or prevent such disclosures.

(b) A contract or agreement that violates subsection (2)(a) of this section is void and unenforceable as contrary to the public policy of this state. A principal’s attempt to impose such a contract or agreement is an adverse action in violation of this article 14.4.

(3) A principal shall not discriminate, take adverse action, or retaliate against a worker who voluntarily wears at the worker’s workplace the worker’s own personal protective equipment, such as a mask, faceguard, or gloves, if the personal protective equipment:
(a) Provides a higher level of protection than the equipment provided by the principal;

(b) Is recommended by a federal, state, or local public health agency with jurisdiction over the worker's workplace;

And

(c) Does not render the worker incapable of performing the worker's job.

(4) A principal shall not discriminate, take adverse action, or retaliate against a worker for opposing any practice the worker reasonably believes is unlawful under this Article 14.4 or for making a charge, testifying, assisting, or participating in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing as to any matter the worker reasonably believes to be unlawful under this Article 14.4.

(5) (a) This section does not apply to a worker who discloses information:

   (I) That the worker knows to be false; or

   (II) With reckless disregard for the truth or falsity of the information.

(b) The principal must establish by clear and convincing evidence that the worker has made false assertions about workplace safety, with knowledge or reckless disregard of their falsity, for the exclusion specified in this subsection (5) to apply.

(6) Nothing in this section authorizes a worker to share individual health information that is otherwise prohibited from disclosure under state or federal law.
8-14.4-103. Principal post notice of rights - rules. (1) A principal shall post notice of a worker's rights under this article 14.4 in a conspicuous location on the principal's premises. (2) The division shall promulgate rules to establish the form of the notice required in subsection (1) of this section.

8-14.4-104. Relief for aggrieved person. (1) A person may seek relief for a violation of this article 14.4 by: (a) Filing a complaint with the division pursuant to section 8-14.4-105; (b) bringing an action in district court pursuant to section 8-14.4-106; or (c) bringing an action in the name of the state in district court pursuant to section 8-14.4-107. (2) A person shall exhaust administrative remedies pursuant to section 8-14.4-105 prior to bringing an action in court.

8-14.4-105. Enforcement by the division - rules. (1) (a) An aggrieved individual may file a complaint against a principal with the division as specified in this subsection (1). (b) Until the date the division makes a complaint form publicly available: (I) An aggrieved individual may file a complaint of a violation of this article 14.4 with the division in any form, by mail or electronic mail; (II) The division may later require the aggrieved individual to complete the division's complaint form; and (III) The filing date is the date of the claimant's original
FILING, EVEN IF THE DIVISION LATER REQUESTS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMPLETION OF THE DIVISION'S COMPLAINT FORM.

(c) AFTER THE DIVISION MAKES A COMPLAINT FORM PUBLICLY AVAILABLE, AN AGGRIEVED INDIVIDUAL MAY FILE A COMPLAINT ONLY BY COMPLETING THE REQUIRED FORM.

(2) THE DIVISION SHALL EITHER:

(a) INVESTIGATE ALLEGED PRINCIPAL VIOLATIONS OF, OR INTERFERENCE WITH RIGHTS OR RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER, THIS ARTICLE 14.4 AND COMPLAINTS FILED WITH THE DIVISION BY AGGRIEVED INDIVIDUALS; OR

(b) AUTHORIZE AN AGGRIEVED INDIVIDUAL TO PROCEED WITH AN ACTION IN DISTRICT COURT AS PROVIDED IN SECTIONS 8-14.4-106 AND 8-14.4-107. A PERSON WHO RECEIVES AUTHORIZATION PURSUANT TO THIS SUBSECTION (2)(b) IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE EXHAUSTED ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES.

(3) IN AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED PRINCIPAL RETALIATION OR INTERFERENCE WITH WORKER RIGHTS, IF AN INVESTIGATION YIELDS A DETERMINATION THAT:

(a) A VIOLATION HAS OCCURRED, THE DIVISION MAY IMPOSE FINES PURSUANT TO SECTION 8-1-140 (2);

(b) RIGHTS OF MULTIPLE WORKERS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED, THE VIOLATION AS TO EACH WORKER IS A SEPARATE VIOLATION FOR PURPOSES OF FINES, PENALTIES, OR OTHER REMEDIES; AND

(c) A WORKER WAS FIRED, VOLUNTARILY LEFT EMPLOYMENT, OR EXPERIENCED A REDUCTION IN RATE OF PAY DUE TO A PRINCIPAL'S VIOLATION, THE DETERMINATION MAY INCLUDE AN ORDER TO:

(I) REINSTATE OR REHIRE THE WORKER AND PAY THE WORKER'S
BACK PAY UNTIL REINSTatement OR REHIRING; OR

   (II) PAY THE WORKER FRONT PAY FOR A REASONABLE PERIOD

       AFTER THE ORDER, IF REINSTatement OR REHIRING IS DETERMINED NOT

       TO BE FEASIBLE.

   (4) DETERMINATIONS MADE BY THE DIVISION UNDER THIS SECTION

       ARE APPEALABLE PURSUANT TO SECTION 8-4-111.5 AND RULES

       PROMULGATED BY THE DEPARTMENT REGARDING APPEALS AND STRATEGIC

       ENFORCEMENT.

8-14.4-106. Relief authorized. (1) AN AGGRVEED INDIVIDUAL

       WHO HAS EXHAUSTED ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES PURSUANT TO SECTION

       8-14.4-105 MAY COMMENCE AN ACTION IN DISTRICT COURT AGAINST A

       PRINCIPAL FOR A VIOLATION OF THIS ARTICLE 14.4.

       (2) A COURT MAY ORDER AFFIRMATIVE RELIEF THAT THE COURT

       DETERMINES TO BE APPROPRIATE, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING RELIEF,

       AGAINST A RESPONDENT WHO IS FOUND TO HAVE ENGAGED IN A

       DISCRIMINATORY, ADVERSE, OR RETALIATORY EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE

       PROHIBITED BY THIS ARTICLE 14.4:

       (a) REINSTatement OR REHIRING OF A WORKER, WITH OR

           WITHOUT BACK PAY;

       (b) THE GREATER OF EITHER:

           (I) TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS; OR

           (II) ANY LOST PAY RESULTING FROM THE VIOLATION, INCLUDING

                   BACK PAY FOR A REINSTATED OR REHIRED WORKER AND FRONT PAY FOR

                   A WORKER WHO IS NOT REINSTATED OR REHIRED; AND

       (c) ANY OTHER EQUITABLE RELIEF THE COURT DEEMS

           APPROPRIATE.

       (3) (a) IN ADDITION TO THE RELIEF AVAILABLE PURSUANT TO
SUBSECTION (2) OF THIS SECTION, IN A CIVIL ACTION BROUGHT BY A
PLAINTIFF UNDER THIS ARTICLE 14.4 AGAINST A DEFENDANT WHO IS
FOUND TO HAVE ENGAGED IN AN INTENTIONAL DISCRIMINATORY,
ADVERSE, OR RETALIATORY EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE, THE PLAINTIFF MAY
RECOVER COMPENSATORY AND PUNITIVE DAMAGES AS SPECIFIED IN THIS
SUBSECTION (3).

(b) A PLAINTIFF MAY RECOVER PUNITIVE DAMAGES AGAINST A
DEFENDANT IF THE PLAINTIFF DEMONSTRATES BY CLEAR AND CONVINCING
EVIDENCE THAT THE DEFENDANT ENGAGED IN A DISCRIMINATORY,
ADVERSE, OR RETALIATORY EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE WITH MALICE OR
RECKLESS INDIFFERENCE TO THE RIGHTS OF THE PLAINTIFF. HOWEVER, IF
THE DEFENDANT DEMONSTRATES GOOD-FAITH EFFORTS TO COMPLY WITH
THIS ARTICLE 14.4 AND TO PREVENT DISCRIMINATORY, ADVERSE, AND
RETAILIATORY EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES IN THE WORKPLACE, THE COURT
SHALL NOT AWARD PUNITIVE DAMAGES AGAINST THE DEFENDANT.

(c) A PLAINTIFF MAY RECOVER COMPENSATORY DAMAGES
AGAINST A DEFENDANT FOR OTHER PECUNIARY LOSSES, EMOTIONAL PAIN
AND SUFFERING, INCONVENIENCE, MENTAL ANGUISH, LOSS OF ENJOYMENT
OF LIFE, AND OTHER NONPECUNIARY LOSSES.

(d) IN DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF DAMAGES TO
AWARD A PLAINTIFF WHO HAS BEEN THE VICTIM OF AN INTENTIONAL
DISCRIMINATORY, ADVERSE, OR RETALIATORY EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE,
THE COURT SHALL CONSIDER THE SIZE AND ASSETS OF THE DEFENDANT
AND THE EGREGIOUSNESS OF THE DISCRIMINATORY, ADVERSE, OR
RETAILIATORY EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE.

(e) COMPENSATORY OR PUNITIVE DAMAGES AWARDED PURSUANT
TO THIS SUBSECTION (3) ARE IN ADDITION TO, AND DO NOT INCLUDE,
FRONT PAY, BACK PAY, INTEREST ON BACK PAY, OR ANY OTHER TYPE OF RELIEF AWARDED PURSUANT TO SUBSECTION (2) OF THIS SECTION.

(4) IF A PLAINTIFF IN A CIVIL ACTION FILED UNDER THIS ARTICLE 14.4 SEeks COMPENSATORY OR PUNITIVE DAMAGES PURSUANT TO SUBSECTION (3) OF THIS SECTION, ANY PARTY TO THE CIVIL ACTION MAY DEMAND A TRIAL BY JURY.

8-14.4-107. Whistleblower enforcement - qui tam - definition.

(1) As used in this section, "whistleblower" means a worker with knowledge of an alleged violation of this article 14.4, or the worker's representative.

(2) (a) A whistleBLOWER who has exhausted the administrative remedies pursuant to section 8-14.4-105 may bring a civil action against a principal for a violation of this article 14.4 on behalf of the state in district court pursuant to this section.

(b) At the time that the action is filed, the whistleblower shall give written notice to the division of the specific provisions of this article 14.4 alleged to have been violated.

(c) If the court finds that a violation has occurred, the court may enter a judgment against the principal of not less than one hundred dollars and not more than one thousand dollars for each violation.

(3) The proceeds of any judgment entered pursuant to this section shall be distributed as follows:

(a) Seventy-five percent to the division for enforcement of this article 14.4; and

(b) Twenty-five percent to the whistleblower.
THE RIGHT TO BRING AN ACTION UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL NOT BE IMPAIRED BY ANY PRIVATE CONTRACT. AN ACTION UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL BE TRIED PROMPTLY, WITHOUT REGARD TO CONCURRENT ADJUDICATION OF PRIVATE CLAIMS.

8-14.4-108. Rulemaking. The division may promulgate rules necessary to implement this article 14.4.

SECTION 2. Safety clause. The general assembly hereby finds, determines, and declares that this act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety.