

Assembly Bill No. 1403

CHAPTER 409

An act to amend Sections 222.5, 662.5, and 1033.5 of the Code of Civil Procedure, relating to civil actions.

[Approved by Governor October 2, 2011. Filed with
Secretary of State October 2, 2011.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1403, Committee on Judiciary. Civil actions.

(1) Existing law requires a trial judge to examine prospective jurors, and, upon completion of the judge's examination, grants counsel for each party the right to examine, by oral and direct questioning, any prospective juror in order to enable counsel to intelligently exercise peremptory challenges and challenges for cause. Existing law requires the scope of examination conducted by counsel to be within the reasonable limits prescribed by the trial judge and prohibits the imposition of unreasonable or arbitrary time limits on the examination.

This bill would specify that this prohibition applies to all cases. The bill would provide that the trial judge should allow a brief opening statement by counsel for each party prior to the commencement of the oral questioning phase of the voir dire process. The bill would prohibit the trial judge from establishing a blanket policy of a time limit for voir dire, and would provide that the parties should be given reasonable time to evaluate the responses to any written questionnaires, if used, before oral questioning commences. The bill also would provide that the judge in civil trials should provide the parties with both the alphabetical list and the list of prospective jurors in the order in which they will be called.

(2) Existing law authorizes the trial court, in its discretion, in any civil action where after trial by jury an order granting a new trial limited to the issue of damages would be proper, to make a conditional order granting a new trial. If the ground for granting a new trial is inadequate damages, the order granting the new trial may be subject to the condition that the motion for a new trial is denied if the party against whom the verdict has been rendered consents to an increased verdict, as specified. If the ground for granting a new trial is excessive damages, the order granting the new trial may be subject to the condition that the motion for a new trial is denied if the party in whose favor the verdict has been rendered consents to a reduction of the verdict, as specified.

This bill would provide that the deadline for acceptance or rejection of the addition or reduction of damages is 30 days from the date the conditional order is served by the clerk of the court, if a deadline is not set forth in the conditional order. The bill would provide that failure to respond to the order

shall be deemed a rejection of the addition or reduction of damages, and a new trial limited to the issue of damages shall be granted automatically. The bill would require a party filing and serving an acceptance of a conditionally ordered addition or reduction of damages to concurrently serve and submit to the court a proposed amended judgment reflecting the modified judgment amount, as well as any other uncontested judgment awards. The bill would also make technical changes.

(3) Existing law provides that the prevailing party, as defined, is generally entitled to recover specified costs in an action or proceeding and lists the items that are recoverable costs.

This bill would add court interpreter fees to those costs that may be recovered, when the court has authorized a court interpreter for an indigent person, as specified.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 222.5 of the Code of Civil Procedure is amended to read:

222.5. To select a fair and impartial jury in civil jury trials, the trial judge shall examine the prospective jurors. Upon completion of the judge's initial examination, counsel for each party shall have the right to examine, by oral and direct questioning, any of the prospective jurors in order to enable counsel to intelligently exercise both peremptory challenges and challenges for cause. During any examination conducted by counsel for the parties, the trial judge should permit liberal and probing examination calculated to discover bias or prejudice with regard to the circumstances of the particular case. The fact that a topic has been included in the judge's examination should not preclude additional nonrepetitive or nonduplicative questioning in the same area by counsel.

The trial judge should allow a brief opening statement by counsel for each party prior to the commencement of the oral questioning phase of the voir dire process.

The scope of the examination conducted by counsel shall be within reasonable limits prescribed by the trial judge in the judge's sound discretion. In exercising his or her sound discretion as to the form and subject matter of voir dire questions, the trial judge should consider, among other criteria, any unique or complex elements, legal or factual, in the case and the individual responses or conduct of jurors which may evince attitudes inconsistent with suitability to serve as a fair and impartial juror in the particular case. Specific unreasonable or arbitrary time limits shall not be imposed in any case. The trial judge shall not establish a blanket policy of a time limit for voir dire.

The trial judge should permit counsel to conduct voir dire examination without requiring prior submission of the questions unless a particular counsel engages in improper questioning. For purposes of this section, an "improper question" is any question that, as its dominant purpose, attempts

to precondition the prospective jurors to a particular result, indoctrinate the jury, or question the prospective jurors concerning the pleadings or the applicable law. A court shall not arbitrarily or unreasonably refuse to submit reasonable written questionnaires, the contents of which are determined by the court in its sound discretion, when requested by counsel. If a questionnaire is utilized, the parties should be given reasonable time to evaluate the responses to the questionnaires before oral questioning commences. To help facilitate the jury selection process, the judge in civil trials should provide the parties with both the alphabetical list and the list of prospective jurors in the order in which they will be called.

In civil cases, the court may, upon stipulation by counsel for all the parties appearing in the action, permit counsel to examine the prospective jurors outside a judge's presence.

SEC. 2. Section 662.5 of the Code of Civil Procedure is amended to read:

662.5. (a) In any civil action where after trial by jury an order granting a new trial limited to the issue of damages would be proper, the trial court may in its discretion:

(1) If the ground for granting a new trial is inadequate damages, issue a conditional order granting the new trial unless the party against whom the verdict has been rendered consents to the addition of damages in an amount the court in its independent judgment determines from the evidence to be fair and reasonable.

(2) If the ground for granting a new trial is excessive damages, issue a conditional order granting the new trial unless the party in whose favor the verdict has been rendered consents to the reduction of so much thereof as the court in its independent judgment determines from the evidence to be fair and reasonable.

(b) If a deadline for acceptance or rejection of the addition or reduction of damages is not set forth in the conditional order, the deadline is 30 days from the date the conditional order is served by the clerk of the court. Failure to respond to the order in accordance with this section shall be deemed a rejection of the addition or reduction of damages and a new trial limited to the issue of damages shall be granted automatically.

(c) A party filing and serving an acceptance of a conditionally ordered addition or reduction of damages shall concurrently serve and submit to the court a proposed amended judgment reflecting the modified judgment amount, as well as any other uncontested judgment awards.

SEC. 3. Section 1033.5 of the Code of Civil Procedure is amended to read:

1033.5. (a) The following items are allowable as costs under Section 1032:

- (1) Filing, motion, and jury fees.
- (2) Juror food and lodging while they are kept together during trial and after the jury retires for deliberation.
- (3) Taking, video recording, and transcribing necessary depositions including an original and one copy of those taken by the claimant and one

copy of depositions taken by the party against whom costs are allowed, and travel expenses to attend depositions.

(4) Service of process by a public officer, registered process server, or other means, as follows:

(A) When service is by a public officer, the recoverable cost is the fee authorized by law at the time of service.

(B) If service is by a process server registered pursuant to Chapter 16 (commencing with Section 22350) of Division 8 of the Business and Professions Code, the recoverable cost is the amount actually incurred in effecting service, including, but not limited to, a stakeout or other means employed in locating the person to be served, unless those charges are successfully challenged by a party to the action.

(C) When service is by publication, the recoverable cost is the sum actually incurred in effecting service.

(D) When service is by a means other than that set forth in subparagraph (A), (B), or (C), the recoverable cost is the lesser of the sum actually incurred, or the amount allowed to a public officer in this state for that service, except that the court may allow the sum actually incurred in effecting service upon application pursuant to paragraph (4) of subdivision (c).

(5) Expenses of attachment including keeper's fees.

(6) Premiums on necessary surety bonds.

(7) Ordinary witness fees pursuant to Section 68093 of the Government Code.

(8) Fees of expert witnesses ordered by the court.

(9) Transcripts of court proceedings ordered by the court.

(10) Attorney's fees, when authorized by any of the following:

(A) Contract.

(B) Statute.

(C) Law.

(11) Court reporter fees as established by statute.

(12) Court interpreter fees for a qualified court interpreter authorized by the court for an indigent person represented by a qualified legal services project, as defined by Section 6213 of the Business and Professions Code.

(13) Models and blowups of exhibits and photocopies of exhibits may be allowed if they were reasonably helpful to aid the trier of fact.

(14) Any other item that is required to be awarded to the prevailing party pursuant to statute as an incident to prevailing in the action at trial or on appeal.

(b) The following items are not allowable as costs, except when expressly authorized by law:

(1) Fees of experts not ordered by the court.

(2) Investigation expenses in preparing the case for trial.

(3) Postage, telephone, and photocopying charges, except for exhibits.

(4) Costs in investigation of jurors or in preparation for voir dire.

(5) Transcripts of court proceedings not ordered by the court.

(c) Any award of costs shall be subject to the following:

(1) Costs are allowable if incurred, whether or not paid.

(2) Allowable costs shall be reasonably necessary to the conduct of the litigation rather than merely convenient or beneficial to its preparation.

(3) Allowable costs shall be reasonable in amount.

(4) Items not mentioned in this section and items assessed upon application may be allowed or denied in the court's discretion.

(5) When any statute of this state refers to the award of "costs and attorney's fees," attorney's fees are an item and component of the costs to be awarded and are allowable as costs pursuant to subparagraph (B) of paragraph (10) of subdivision (a). Any claim not based upon the court's established schedule of attorney's fees for actions on a contract shall bear the burden of proof. Attorney's fees allowable as costs pursuant to subparagraph (B) of paragraph (10) of subdivision (a) may be fixed as follows: (A) upon a noticed motion, (B) at the time a statement of decision is rendered, (C) upon application supported by affidavit made concurrently with a claim for other costs, or (D) upon entry of default judgment. Attorney's fees allowable as costs pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (10) of subdivision (a) shall be fixed either upon a noticed motion or upon entry of a default judgment, unless otherwise provided by stipulation of the parties.

Attorney's fees awarded pursuant to Section 1717 of the Civil Code are allowable costs under Section 1032 of this code as authorized by subparagraph (A) of paragraph (10) of subdivision (a).