

Assembly Bill No. 2719

CHAPTER 98

An act to amend Sections 52 and 52.1 of the Civil Code, relating to civil rights.

[Approved by Governor July 6, 2000. Filed with
Secretary of State July 7, 2000.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2719, Wesson. Civil rights: causes of action: enforcement.

(1) Existing law provides that whoever denies another person the right to be free from any violence, or intimidation by threat of violence, committed against their persons or property because of their race, color, or religion, among other things, or aids, incites, or conspires in that denial, is liable for each and every offense for the actual damages suffered by any person denied that right. In addition, a civil penalty of \$25,000, among other amounts, may be awarded to persons so denied their rights.

This bill would further specify that the civil penalty may be awarded in any action brought by the person denied the right, or by the Attorney General, a district attorney, or city attorney.

(2) Existing law provides that if a person or persons, whether or not acting under color of law, interferes by threats, intimidation, or coercion, or attempts to interfere by threats, intimidation, or coercion, with the exercise or enjoyment by any individual or individuals of rights secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or of the rights secured by the Constitution or laws of this state, a civil action may be brought by the Attorney General, a district attorney, or city attorney for injunctive and other appropriate equitable relief, in order to protect the peaceable exercise or enjoyment of the right or rights secured. Existing law also provides that an individual so aggrieved may institute a civil action for damages in his or her own behalf. Existing law further states that an action brought pursuant to this provision is independent of any other remedy or procedure that may be available to an aggrieved person under any other provision of law.

This bill would specify, instead, that such an action is independent of any other action, remedy, or procedure that may be available to an aggrieved person under any other provision of law, including, but not limited to, an action, remedy, or procedure described in (1) for which a civil penalty may be awarded.

(3) The bill would also declare the intent of the Legislature in this regard.

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

SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature hereby finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Section 52.1 of the Civil Code guarantees the exercise or enjoyment by any individual or individuals of rights secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or of the rights secured by the Constitution or laws of this state without regard to his or her membership in a protected class identified by its race, color, religion, or sex, among other things.

(2) The decision in *Boccatto v. City of Hermosa Beach* (1994) 29 Cal.App.4th 1797 misconstrued Section 52.1 of the Civil Code to require that an individual who brings an action, or on whose behalf an action is brought, pursuant to that section, be a member of one of those specified protected classes.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this act to clarify that an action brought pursuant to Section 52.1 of the Civil Code does not require the individual whose rights are secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or of the rights secured by the Constitution or laws of California to be a member of a protected class identified by its race, color, religion, or sex, among other things.

SEC. 2. Section 52 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

52. (a) Whoever denies, aids or incites a denial, or makes any discrimination or distinction contrary to Section 51 or 51.5, is liable for each and every offense for the actual damages, and any amount that may be determined by a jury, or a court sitting without a jury, up to a maximum of three times the amount of actual damage but in no case less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000), and any attorney's fees that may be determined by the court in addition thereto, suffered by any person denied the rights provided in Section 51 or 51.5.

(b) Whoever denies the right provided by Section 51.7 or 51.9, or aids, incites, or conspires in that denial, is liable for each and every offense for the actual damages suffered by any person denied that right and, in addition, the following:

(1) An amount to be determined by a jury, or a court sitting without a jury, for exemplary damages.

(2) A civil penalty of twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) to be awarded to the person denied the right provided by Section 51.7 in any action brought by the person denied the right, or by the Attorney General, a district attorney, or a city attorney.

(3) Attorney's fees as may be determined by the court.

(c) Whenever there is reasonable cause to believe that any person or group of persons is engaged in conduct of resistance to the full enjoyment of any of the rights described in this section, and that conduct is of that nature and is intended to deny the full exercise of those rights, the Attorney General, any district attorney or city



attorney, or any person aggrieved by the conduct may bring a civil action in the appropriate court by filing with it a complaint. The complaint shall contain the following:

(1) The signature of the officer, or, in his or her absence, the individual acting on behalf of the officer, or the signature of the person aggrieved.

(2) The facts pertaining to the conduct.

(3) A request for preventive relief, including an application for a permanent or temporary injunction, restraining order, or other order against the person or persons responsible for the conduct, as the complainant deems necessary to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights described in this section.

(d) Whenever an action has been commenced in any court seeking relief from the denial of equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on account of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or disability, the Attorney General or any district attorney or city attorney for or in the name of the people of the State of California may intervene in the action upon timely application if the Attorney General or any district attorney or city attorney certifies that the case is of general public importance. In that action, the people of the State of California shall be entitled to the same relief as if it had instituted the action.

(e) Actions brought pursuant to this section are independent of any other actions, remedies, or procedures that may be available to an aggrieved party pursuant to any other law.

(f) Any person claiming to be aggrieved by an alleged unlawful practice in violation of Section 51 or 51.7 may also file a verified complaint with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing pursuant to Section 12948 of the Government Code.

(g) This section does not 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 does this section 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.

(h) For the purposes of this section, "actual damages" means special and general damages. This subdivision is declaratory of existing law.

SEC. 3. Section 52.1 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

52.1. (a) If a person or persons, whether or not acting under color of law, interferes by threats, intimidation, or coercion, or attempts to interfere by threats, intimidation, or coercion, with the exercise or enjoyment by any individual or individuals of rights secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or of the



rights secured by the Constitution or laws of this state, the Attorney General, or any district attorney or city attorney may bring a civil action for injunctive and other appropriate equitable relief in the name of the people of the State of California, in order to protect the peaceable exercise or enjoyment of the right or rights secured.

(b) Any individual whose exercise or enjoyment of rights secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or of rights secured by the Constitution or laws of this state, has been interfered with, or attempted to be interfered with, as described in subdivision (a), may institute and prosecute in his or her own name and on his or her own behalf a civil action for damages, including, but not limited to, damages under Section 52, injunctive relief, and other appropriate equitable relief to protect the peaceable exercise or enjoyment of the right or rights secured.

(c) An action brought pursuant to subdivision (a) or (b) may be filed either in the superior court for the county in which the conduct complained of occurred or in the superior court for the county in which a person whose conduct complained of resides or has his or her place of business. An action brought by the Attorney General pursuant to subdivision (a) also may be filed in the superior court for any county wherein the Attorney General has an office, and in such a case, the jurisdiction of the court shall extend throughout the state.

(d) If a court issues a temporary restraining order or a preliminary or permanent injunction in an action brought pursuant to subdivision (a) or (b), ordering a defendant to refrain from conduct or activities, the order issued shall include the following statement: VIOLATION OF THIS ORDER IS A CRIME PUNISHABLE UNDER SECTION 422.9 OF THE PENAL CODE.

(e) The court shall order the plaintiff or the attorney for the plaintiff to deliver, or the county clerk to mail, two copies of any order, extension, modification, or termination thereof granted pursuant to this section, by the close of the business day on which the order, extension, modification, or termination was granted, to each local law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the residence of the plaintiff and any other locations where the court determines that acts of violence against the plaintiff are likely to occur. Those local law enforcement agencies shall be designated by the plaintiff or the attorney for the plaintiff. Each appropriate law enforcement agency receiving any order, extension, or modification of any order issued pursuant to this section shall serve forthwith one copy thereof upon the defendant. Each appropriate law enforcement agency shall provide to any law enforcement officer responding to the scene of reported violence, information as to the existence of, terms, and current status of, any order issued pursuant to this section.

(f) A court shall not have jurisdiction to issue an order or injunction under this section, if that order or injunction would be prohibited under Section 527.3 of the Code of Civil Procedure.



(g) An action brought pursuant to this section is independent of any other action, remedy, or procedure that may be available to an aggrieved individual under any other provision of law, including, but not limited to, an action, remedy, or procedure brought pursuant to Section 51.7.

(h) In addition to any damages, injunction, or other equitable relief awarded in an action brought pursuant to subdivision (b), the court may award the petitioner or plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees.

(i) A violation of an order described in subdivision (d) may be punished either by prosecution under Section 422.9 of the Penal Code, or by a proceeding for contempt brought pursuant to Title 5 (commencing with Section 1209) of Part 3 of the Code of Civil Procedure. However, in any such proceeding pursuant to the Code of Civil Procedure, if it be determined that the person proceeded against is guilty of the contempt charged, in addition to any other relief, a fine may be imposed not exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1,000), or the person may be ordered imprisoned in a county jail not exceeding six months, or the court may order both the imprisonment and fine.

(j) Speech alone is not sufficient to support an action brought pursuant to subdivision (a) or (b), except upon a showing that the speech itself threatens violence against a specific person or group of persons; and the person or group of persons against whom the threat is directed reasonably fears that, because of the speech, violence will be committed against them or their property and that the person threatening violence had the apparent ability to carry out the threat.

(k) No order issued in any proceeding brought pursuant to subdivision (a) or (b) shall restrict the content of any person's speech. An order restricting the time, place, or manner of any person's speech shall do so only to the extent reasonably necessary to protect the peaceable exercise or enjoyment of constitutional or statutory rights, consistent with the constitutional rights of the person sought to be enjoined.

