

### Massachusetts False Claims Act

#### **§ 5A. False claims; definitions**

(a) For the purposes of this section, the following words shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meaning:-

"Claim", any request or demand, whether pursuant to a contract or otherwise, for money or property which is made to an officer, employee, agent or other representative of the commonwealth, political subdivision thereof or to a contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or other person if the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof provides any portion of the money or property which is requested or demanded, or if the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof will reimburse directly or indirectly such contractor, subcontractor, grantee, or other person for any portion of the money or property which is requested or demanded.

"False claims law", pursuant to sections 5B to 5O, inclusive.

"False claims action", an action filed by the office of the attorney general or a relator pursuant to this section.

"Knowing and knowingly", possessing actual knowledge of relevant information, acting with deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the information or acting in reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the information and no proof of specific intent to defraud is required.

"Original source", an individual who has direct and independent knowledge of the information on which the allegations are based and has voluntarily provided the information to the attorney general, without public disclosure, before filing an action under this section which is based on such information.

"Person", any natural person, corporation, partnership, association, trust or other business or legal entity.

"Political subdivision", any city, town, county or other governmental entity authorized or created by state law, including public corporations and authorities.

"Relator", an individual who brings an action under paragraph (2) of section 5C.

#### **§ 5B. False claims; liability**

Any person who:

- (1) knowingly presents, or causes to be presented, a false or fraudulent claim for payment or approval;
- (2) knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement to obtain payment or approval of a claim by the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof;
- (3) conspires to defraud the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof through the allowance or payment of a fraudulent claim;
- (4) has possession, custody, or control of property or money used, or to be used, by the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof and knowingly delivers, or causes to be delivered to the commonwealth, less property than the amount for which the person receives a certificate or receipt with the intent to willfully conceal the property;

(5) is authorized to make or deliver a document certifying receipt of property used, or to be used, by the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof and with the intent of defrauding the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof, makes or delivers the receipt without completely knowing that the information on the receipt is true;

(6) buys, or receives as a pledge of an obligation or debt, public property from an officer or employee of the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof, knowing that said officer or employee may not lawfully sell or pledge the property;

(7) enters into an agreement, contract or understanding with one or more officials of the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof knowing the information contained therein is false;

(8) knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement to conceal, avoid, or decrease an obligation to pay or to transmit money or property to the commonwealth or political subdivision thereof; or

(9) is a beneficiary of an inadvertent submission of a false claim to the commonwealth or political subdivision thereof, subsequently discovers the falsity of the claim, and fails to disclose the false claim to the commonwealth or political subdivision within a reasonable time after discovery of the false claim shall be liable to the commonwealth or political subdivision for a civil penalty of not less than \$5,000 and not more than \$10,000 per violation, plus three times the amount of damages, including consequential damages, that the commonwealth or political subdivision sustains because of the act of that person. A person violating sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, shall also be liable to the commonwealth or any political subdivision for the expenses of the civil action brought to recover any such penalty or damages, including without limitation reasonable attorney's fees, reasonable expert's fees and the costs of investigation, as set forth below. Costs recoverable under said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, shall also include the costs of any review or investigation undertaken by the attorney general, or by the state auditor or the inspector general in cooperation with the attorney general.

(10) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs (1) to (9), inclusive, if the court finds that:

(i) the person committing the violation of said paragraphs (1) to (9) furnished an official of the office of the attorney general responsible for investigating false claims law violations with all the information known to such person about the violation within 30 days after the date on which the person first obtained the information;

(ii) such person fully cooperated with any commonwealth investigation of such violation; and

(iii) at the time such person furnished the commonwealth with the information about the violation, no civil action or administrative action had commenced under sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, or no criminal prosecution had commenced with respect to such violation, and such person did not have actual knowledge of the existence of an investigation into such violation, the court may reduce the assessment of damages to the amount of damages, including consequential damages, that the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof sustains because of the act of a person.

(11) A corporation, partnership or other person is liable to the commonwealth under sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, for the acts of its agent where the agent acted with apparent authority, regardless of whether the agent acted, in whole or in part, to benefit the principal and regardless of whether the principal adopted or ratified the agent's claims, representation, statement or other action or conduct.

(12) Sections 5B to 5O, inclusive shall not apply to claims, records or statements made or presented to establish, limit, reduce, or evade liability for the payment of tax to the commonwealth, or any other governmental authority.

(13) A person who has engaged in conduct described in paragraphs (1) to (9), inclusive, prior to payment shall only

be entitled to payment from the commonwealth of the actual amount due less the excess amount falsely or fraudulently claimed.

### **§ 5C. Violations under Secs. 5B to 5O; investigation by attorney general; relators; civil actions**

(1) The attorney general shall investigate violations under sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, involving state funds or funds from any political subdivision. If the attorney general finds that a person has violated or is violating said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, the attorney general may bring a civil action in superior court against the person.

(2) An individual, hereafter referred to as relator, may bring a civil action in superior court for a violation of said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, on behalf of the relator and the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof. The action shall be brought in the name of the commonwealth or the political subdivision thereof. The action may be dismissed only if the attorney general gives written reasons for consenting to the dismissal and the court approves the dismissal. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, it shall not be a cause for dismissal or a basis for a defense that the relator could have brought another action based on the same or similar facts under any other law or administrative proceeding.

(3) When a relator brings an action pursuant to said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, a copy of the complaint and written disclosure of substantially all material evidence and information the relator possesses shall be served on the attorney general pursuant to Rule 4(d)(3) of the Massachusetts Rules of Civil Procedure. The complaint shall be filed under seal and shall remain so for 120 days. Notwithstanding any other general or special law or procedural rule to the contrary, service on the defendant shall not be required until the period provided in paragraph (5). The attorney general may, for good cause shown, ask the court for extensions of no more than 90 days during which the complaint shall remain under seal. Any such motions may be supported by affidavits or other submissions under seal. The court shall not grant more than two requests for extensions unless the attorney general can demonstrate extraordinary circumstances requiring a further extension. The attorney general may elect to intervene and proceed with the action on behalf of the commonwealth or political subdivision within the 120 day period or during any extension, after he receives both the complaint and the material evidence and information. Any information or documents furnished by the relator to the attorney general in connection with an action or investigation under said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, shall be exempt from disclosure under section 10 of chapter 66.

(4) Before the expiration of the initial 120 day period or any 90 day extensions obtained under paragraph (3), the attorney general shall; (i) assume control of the action, in which case the action shall be conducted by the attorney general; or (ii) notify the court that he declines to take over the action, in which case the relator shall have the right to conduct the action.

(5) If the attorney general decides to proceed with the action, the complaint shall be unsealed and served promptly thereafter. The defendant shall not be required to respond to any complaint filed under said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, until 20 days after the complaint is unsealed and served upon the defendant pursuant to rule 4 of the Massachusetts rules of civil procedure.

(6) When a relator brings an action pursuant to this section, no person other than the attorney general may intervene or bring a related action based on the facts underlying the pending action.

### **§ 5D. Prosecution by attorney general; relator's right to continue as party to action**

(1) If the attorney general proceeds with the action, he shall have primary responsibility for prosecuting the action, and shall not be bound by any act of the relator. The relator shall have the right to continue as a party to the action, subject to the limitations in sections 5B to 5O, inclusive.

(2) The attorney general may dismiss the action notwithstanding the objections of the relator if the relator has been

notified by the attorney general of the filing of the motion and the court has provided the relator with an opportunity for a hearing on the motion. Upon a showing of good cause, such hearing may be held in camera.

(3) The attorney general may settle the action with the defendant notwithstanding the objections of the relator if the court determines, after a hearing, that the proposed settlement is fair, adequate and reasonable under all the circumstances. Upon a showing of good cause, such hearing may be held in camera.

(4) Upon a showing by the attorney general that unrestricted participation during the course of the litigation by the relator initiating the action would interfere with or unduly delay the attorney general's prosecution of the case, or would be repetitious, irrelevant or for purposes of harassment, the court may, in its discretion, impose limitations on the relator's participation, including but not limited to: (i) limiting the number of witnesses the relator may call; (ii) limiting the length of the testimony of such witnesses; (iii) limiting the relator's cross examination of witnesses; or (iv) otherwise limiting the participation by the relator in the litigation.

(5) Upon a showing by the defendant that unrestricted participation during the course of the litigation by the relator would be for purposes of harassment or would cause the defendant undue burden or unnecessary expense, the court may limit the participation by the relator in the litigation.

(6) If the attorney general elects not to proceed with the action, the relator who initiated the action shall have the right to conduct the action. If the attorney general so requests, it shall be served with copies of all pleadings filed in the action and shall be supplied with copies of all deposition transcripts at the attorney general's expense. When a relator proceeds with the action, the court, without limiting the status and rights of the relator initiating the action, may nevertheless permit the attorney general to intervene at a later date upon a showing of good cause.

(7) Whether or not the attorney general proceeds with the action, upon a showing by the attorney general that certain acts of discovery by the relator initiating the action would interfere with the attorney general's investigation or prosecution of a criminal or civil matter arising out of the same or similar facts, the court may stay such discovery for a period of not more than 60 days. Such showing by the attorney general shall be conducted in camera. The court may extend the 60 day period upon a further showing in camera that the attorney general has pursued the criminal or civil investigation or proceedings with reasonable diligence and may stay any proposed discovery in the civil action that will interfere with the ongoing criminal or civil investigations or proceedings.

## **§ 5F. Payments to relators; limitations**

(1) If the attorney general proceeds with an action brought by a relator pursuant to section 5C, the relator shall receive at least 15 per cent but not more than 25 per cent of the proceeds recovered and collected in the action or in settlement of the claim depending upon the extent to which the relator substantially contributed to the prosecution of the action.

(2) Where the action is one which the court finds to be based primarily on disclosures of specific information, other than information provided by the relator, relating to allegations or transactions in a criminal, civil, or administrative hearing; in a legislative, administrative, auditor or inspector general hearing, audit, or investigation; or from the news media, the court may award such sums as it considers appropriate, but in no case more than 10 per cent of the proceeds, taking into account the significance of the information and the role of the relator bringing the action in advancing the case to litigation.

(3) Any payment to a relator pursuant to this section shall be made only from the proceeds recovered and collected in the action or in settlement of the claim. Any such relator shall also receive an amount for reasonable expenses which the court finds to have been necessarily incurred, including reasonable attorney's fees and costs. All such expenses, shall be awarded against the defendant.

(4) If the attorney general does not proceed with an action pursuant to section 5C, the relator bringing the action or

settling the claim shall receive an amount which the court decides is reasonable for collecting the civil penalty and damages on behalf of the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof. The amount shall be not less than 25 per cent nor more than 30 per cent of the proceeds recovered and collected in the action or settlement of the claim, and shall be paid out of such proceeds. The relator shall also receive an amount for reasonable expenses which the court finds to have been necessarily incurred, including reasonable attorney's fees and costs. All such expenses shall be awarded against the defendant.

(5) Whether or not the attorney general proceeds with the action, if the court finds that the action was brought by a relator who planned, initiated or knowingly participated in the violation of sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, then the court may, to the extent the court considers appropriate, reduce or eliminate the share of the proceeds of the action which the relator would otherwise receive pursuant to paragraphs (1) to (4), inclusive, taking into account the role of the relator in advancing the case to litigation and any relevant circumstances pertaining to the violation. If the relator bringing the action is convicted of criminal conduct arising from his role in the violation of this section, the relator shall be dismissed from the civil action and shall not receive any share of the proceeds of the action. Such dismissal shall not prejudice the right of the attorney general to continue the action.

#### **§ 5J. Employers preventing employees from acting to further false claim actions; liability**

(1) No employer shall make, adopt or enforce any rule, regulation, or policy preventing an employee from disclosing information to a government or law enforcement agency or from acting to further a false claims action, including investigating, initiating, testifying, or assisting in an action filed or to be filed pursuant to said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive. No employer shall require as a condition of employment, during the term of employment, or at the termination of employment, that any employee agree to, accept or sign any agreement that limits or denies the employee's rights to bring an action or provide information to a government or law enforcement agency pursuant to said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive. Any such agreement shall be void.

(2) No employer shall discharge, demote, suspend, threaten, harass, deny promotion to, or in any other manner discriminate against an employee in the terms or conditions of employment because of lawful acts done by the employee on behalf of the employee or others in disclosing information to a government or law enforcement agency or in furthering a false claims action, including investigation for, initiation of, testimony for, or assistance in an action filed or to be filed pursuant to sections 5B to 5O, inclusive.

(3) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, an employer who violates paragraph (2) shall be liable for such damages or equitable relief as a court shall deem appropriate, including: reinstatement with the same seniority status such employee would have had but for the employer's violation of sections 5B to 5O, inclusive, two times the amount of back pay, interest on the back pay, and compensation for any special damage sustained as a result of the employer's violation of said sections 5B to 5O, inclusive. In addition, the defendant shall be required to pay litigation costs and reasonable attorney's fees. An employee may bring an action in the appropriate superior court or the superior court of the county of Suffolk for the relief provided in this section.

(4) An employee who is discharged, demoted, suspended, harassed, denied promotion, or in any other manner discriminated against in the terms and conditions of employment by his employer because of participation in conduct which directly or indirectly resulted in a false claim being submitted to the commonwealth or a political subdivision thereof shall be entitled to the remedies pursuant to paragraph (3) only if both of the following occurred:

(i) the employee has been harassed, threatened with termination or demotion, or otherwise coerced by the employer or its management into engaging in the fraudulent activity in the first place; and

(ii) the employee voluntarily disclosed information prior to being dismissed to a government or law enforcement agency or acts in furtherance of a false claims action, including investigation for, initiation of, testimony for, or assistance in an action filed or to be filed.