

Memorandum on Liability of Volunteer Directors of Nonprofit Corporations

California Corporations Code Section 5230-5239

5230. (a) Any duties and liabilities set forth in this article shall apply without regard to whether a director is compensated by the corporation.

(b) Part 4 (commencing with Section 16000) of Division 9 of the Probate Code does not apply to the directors of any corporation.

5231. (a) A director shall perform the duties of a director, including duties as a member of any committee of the board upon which the director may serve, in good faith, in a manner that director believes to be in the best interests of the corporation and with such care, including reasonable inquiry, as an ordinarily prudent person in a like position would use under similar circumstances.

(b) In performing the duties of a director, a director shall be entitled to rely on information, opinions, reports or statements, including financial statements and other financial data, in each case prepared or presented by:

(1) One or more officers or employees of the corporation whom the director believes to be reliable and competent in the matters presented;

(2) Counsel, independent accountants or other persons as to matters which the director believes to be within that person's professional or expert competence; or

(3) A committee upon which the director does not serve that is composed exclusively of any or any combination of directors, persons described in paragraph (1), or persons described in paragraph (2), as to matters within the committee's designated authority, which committee the director believes to merit confidence, so long as, in any case, the director acts in good faith, after reasonable inquiry when the need therefor is indicated by the circumstances and without knowledge that would cause that reliance to be unwarranted.

(c) Except as provided in Section 5233, a person who performs the duties of a director in accordance with subdivisions (a) and (b) shall have no liability based upon any alleged failure to discharge the person's obligations as a director, including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, any actions or omissions which exceed or defeat a public or charitable purpose to which a corporation, or assets held by it, are dedicated.

5232. (a) Section 5231 governs the duties of directors as to any acts or omissions in connection with the election, selection, or nomination of directors.

(b) This section shall not be construed to limit the generality of Section 5231.

5233. (a) Except as provided in subdivision (b), for the purpose of this section, a self-dealing transaction means a transaction to which the corporation is a party and in which one or more of its directors has a material financial interest and which does not meet the requirements of paragraph (1), (2), or (3) of subdivision (d). Such a director is an "interested director" for the purpose of this section.

(b) The provisions of this section do not apply to any of the following:

(1) An action of the board fixing the compensation of a director as a director or officer of the corporation.

(2) A transaction which is part of a public or charitable program of the corporation if it: (i) is approved or authorized by the corporation in good faith and without unjustified favoritism; and (ii) results in a benefit to one or more directors or their families because they are in the class of persons intended to be benefited by the public or charitable program.

(3) A transaction, of which the interested director or directors have no actual knowledge, and which does not exceed the lesser of 1 percent of the gross receipts of the corporation for the preceding fiscal year or one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000).

(c) The Attorney General or, if the Attorney General is joined as an indispensable party, any of the following may bring an action in the superior court of the proper county for the remedies specified in subdivision (h):

(1) The corporation, or a member asserting the right in the name of the corporation pursuant to Section 5710.

(2) A director of the corporation.

(3) An officer of the corporation.

(4) Any person granted relator status by the Attorney General.

(d) In any action brought under subdivision (c) the remedies specified in subdivision (h) shall not be granted if:

(1) The Attorney General, or the court in an action in which the Attorney General is an indispensable party, has approved the transaction before or after it was consummated; or

(2) The following facts are established:

(A) The corporation entered into the transaction for its own benefit;

(B) The transaction was fair and reasonable as to the corporation at the time the corporation entered into the transaction;

(C) Prior to consummating the transaction or any part thereof the board authorized or approved the transaction in good faith by a vote of a majority of the directors then in office without counting the vote of the interested director or directors, and with knowledge of the material facts concerning the transaction and the director's interest in the transaction. Except as provided in paragraph (3) of this subdivision, action by a committee of the board shall not satisfy this paragraph; and

(D) (i) Prior to authorizing or approving the transaction the board considered and in good faith determined after reasonable investigation under the circumstances that the corporation could not have obtained a more advantageous arrangement with reasonable effort under the circumstances or (ii) the corporation in fact could not have obtained a more advantageous arrangement with reasonable effort under the circumstances; or

(3) The following facts are established:

(A) A committee or person authorized by the board approved the transaction in a manner consistent with the standards set forth in paragraph (2) of this subdivision;

(B) It was not reasonably practicable to obtain approval of the board prior to entering into the transaction; and

(C) The board, after determining in good faith that the conditions of subparagraphs (A) and (B) of this paragraph were satisfied, ratified the transaction at its next meeting by a vote of the majority of the directors then in office without counting the vote of the interested director or directors.

(e) Except as provided in subdivision (f), an action under subdivision (c) must be filed within two years after written notice setting forth the material facts of the transaction and the director's interest in the transaction is filed with the Attorney General in accordance with such regulations, if any, as the Attorney General may adopt or, if no such notice is filed, within three years after the transaction occurred, except for the Attorney General, who shall have 10 years after the transaction occurred within which to file an action.

(f) In any action for breach of an obligation of the corporation owed to an interested director, where the obligation arises from a self-dealing transaction which has not been approved as provided in subdivision (d), the court may, by way of offset only, make any order authorized by subdivision (h), notwithstanding the expiration of the applicable period specified in subdivision (e).

(g) Interested directors may be counted in determining the presence of a quorum at a meeting of the board which authorizes, approves or ratifies a contract or transaction.

(h) If a self-dealing transaction has taken place, the interested director or directors shall do such things and pay such damages as in the discretion of the court will provide an equitable and fair remedy to the corporation, taking into account any benefit received by the corporation and whether the interested director or directors acted in good faith and with intent to further the best interest of the corporation. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the court may order the director to do any or all of the following:

(1) Account for any profits made from such transaction, and pay them to the corporation;

(2) Pay the corporation the value of the use of any of its property used in such transaction; and

(3) Return or replace any property lost to the corporation as a result of such transaction, together with any income or appreciation lost to the corporation by reason of such transaction, or account for any proceeds of sale of such property, and pay the proceeds to the corporation together with interest at the legal rate. The court may award prejudgment interest to the extent allowed in Section 3287 or 3288 of the Civil Code. In addition, the court may, in its discretion, grant exemplary damages for a fraudulent or malicious violation of this section.

5234. (a) No contract or other transaction between a corporation and any domestic or foreign corporation, firm or association of which one or more of its directors are directors is either void or voidable because such director or directors are present at the meeting of the board or a committee thereof which authorizes,

approves or ratifies the contract or transaction, if:

(1) The material facts as to the transaction and as to such director's other directorship are fully disclosed or known to the board or committee, and the board or committee authorizes, approves or ratifies the contract or transaction in good faith by a vote sufficient without counting the vote of the common director or directors; or

(2) As to contracts or transactions not approved as provided in paragraph (1) of this subdivision, the contract or transaction is just and reasonable as to the corporation at the time it is authorized, approved or ratified.

(b) This section does not apply to transactions covered by Section 5233.

5235. (a) The board may fix the compensation of a director, as director or officer, and no obligation, otherwise valid, to pay such compensation shall be voidable merely because the persons receiving the compensation participated in the decision to pay it, unless it was not just and reasonable as to the corporation at the time it was authorized, ratified or approved. The board shall take other actions that are required by subdivision (g) of Section 12586 of the Government Code, if applicable.

(b) In the absence of fraud, any liability under this section shall be limited to the amount by which the compensation exceeded what was just and reasonable, plus interest from the date of payment.

5236. (a) A corporation shall not make any loan of money or property to or guarantee the obligation of any director or officer, unless approved by the Attorney General; provided, however, that a corporation may advance money to a director or officer of the corporation or of its parent or any subsidiary for expenses reasonably anticipated to be incurred in the performance of the duties of such officer or director, provided that in the absence of such advance, such director or officer would be entitled to be reimbursed for such expenses by such corporation, its parent, or any subsidiary.

(b) The provisions of subdivision (a) do not apply to the payment of premiums in whole or in part by a corporation on a life insurance policy on the life of a director or officer so long as repayment to the corporation of the amount paid by it is secured by the proceeds of the policy and its cash surrender value.

(c) The provisions of subdivision (a) do not apply to a loan of money to or for the benefit of an officer in circumstances where the loan is necessary, in the judgment of the board, to provide financing for the purchase of the principal residence of the officer in order to secure the services or continued services of the officer and the loan is secured by real property located in the state.

5237. (a) Subject to the provisions of Section 5231, directors of a corporation who approve any of the following corporate actions shall be jointly and severally liable to the corporation for:

(1) The making of any distribution.

(2) The distribution of assets after institution of dissolution proceedings of the corporation, without paying or adequately providing for all known liabilities of the corporation, excluding any claims not filed by creditors within the time limit set by the court in a notice given to creditors under Chapters 15 (commencing with Section 6510), 16 (commencing with Section 6610) and 17 (commencing with Section 6710).

(3) The making of any loan or guaranty contrary to Section 5236.

(b) A director who is present at a meeting of the board, or any committee thereof, at which action specified in subdivision (a) is taken and who abstains from voting shall be considered to have approved the action.

(c) Suit may be brought in the name of the corporation to enforce the liability:

(1) Under paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) against any or all directors liable by the persons entitled to sue under subdivision (b) of Section 5420;

(2) Under paragraph (2) or (3) of subdivision (a) against any or all directors liable by any one or more creditors of the corporation whose debts or claims arose prior to the time of the corporate action who have not consented to the corporate action, whether or not they have reduced their claims to judgment;

(3) Under paragraph (1), (2) or (3) of subdivision (a), by the Attorney General.

(d) The damages recoverable from a director under this section shall be the amount of the illegal distribution, or if the illegal distribution consists of property, the fair market value of that property at the time of the illegal distribution, plus interest thereon from the date of the distribution at the legal rate on judgments until paid, together with all reasonably incurred costs of appraisal or other valuation, if any, of that property, or the loss suffered by the corporation as a result of the illegal loan or guaranty.

(e) Any director sued under this section may implead all other directors liable and may compel contribution, either in that action or in an independent action against directors not joined in that action.

(f) Directors liable under this section shall also be entitled to be subrogated to the rights of the corporation:

(1) With respect to paragraph (1) of subdivision (a), against the persons who received the distribution.

(2) With respect to paragraph (2) of subdivision (a), against the persons who received the distribution.

(3) With respect to paragraph (3) of subdivision (a), against the person who received the loan or guaranty.

Any director sued under this section may file a cross-complaint against the person or persons who are liable to the director as a result of the subrogation provided for in this subdivision or may proceed against them in an independent action.

5238. (a) For the purposes of this section, "agent" means any person who is or was a director, officer, employee or other agent of the corporation, or is or was serving at the request of the corporation as a director, officer, employee or agent of another foreign or domestic corporation, partnership, joint venture, trust or

other enterprise, or was a director, officer, employee or agent of a foreign or domestic corporation that was a predecessor corporation of the corporation or of another enterprise at the request of the predecessor corporation; "proceeding" means any threatened, pending or completed action or proceeding, whether civil, criminal, administrative or investigative; and "expenses" includes without limitation attorneys' fees and any expenses of establishing a right to indemnification under subdivision (d) or paragraph (3) of subdivision (e).

(b) A corporation shall have power to indemnify any person who was or is a party or is threatened to be made a party to any proceeding (other than an action by or in the right of the corporation to procure a judgment in its favor, an action brought under Section 5233, or an action brought by the Attorney General or a person granted relator status by the Attorney General for any breach of duty relating to assets held in charitable trust) by reason of the fact that the person is or was an agent of the corporation, against expenses, judgments, fines, settlements and other amounts actually and reasonably incurred in connection with the proceeding if the person acted in good faith and in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interests of the corporation and, in the case of a criminal proceeding, had no reasonable cause to believe the conduct of the person was unlawful. The termination of any proceeding by judgment, order, settlement, conviction or upon a plea of nolo contendere or its equivalent shall not, of itself, create a presumption that the person did not act in good faith and in a manner which the person reasonably believed to be in the best interests of the corporation or that the person had reasonable cause to believe that the person's conduct was unlawful.

(c) A corporation shall have power to indemnify any person who was or is a party or is threatened to be made a party to any threatened, pending or completed action by or in the right of the corporation, or brought under Section 5233, or brought by the Attorney General or a person granted relator status by the Attorney General for breach of duty relating to assets held in charitable trust, to procure a judgment in its favor by reason of the fact that the person is or was an agent of the corporation, against expenses actually and reasonably incurred by the person in connection with the defense or settlement of the action if the person acted in good faith, in a manner the person believed to be in the best interests of the corporation and with such care, including reasonable inquiry, as an ordinarily prudent person in a like position would use under similar circumstances. No indemnification shall be made under this subdivision:

(1) In respect of any claim, issue or matter as to which the person shall have been adjudged to be liable to the corporation in the performance of the person's duty to the corporation, unless and only to the extent that the court in which the proceeding is or was pending shall determine upon application that, in view of all the circumstances of the case, the person is fairly and reasonably entitled to indemnity for the expenses which the court shall determine;

(2) Of amounts paid in settling or otherwise disposing of a threatened or pending action, with or without court approval; or

(3) Of expenses incurred in defending a threatened or pending action which is settled or otherwise disposed of without court approval unless it is settled with the approval of the Attorney

General.

(d) To the extent that an agent of a corporation has been successful on the merits in defense of any proceeding referred to in subdivision (b) or (c) or in defense of any claim, issue or matter therein, the agent shall be indemnified against expenses actually and reasonably incurred by the agent in connection therewith.

(e) Except as provided in subdivision (d), any indemnification under this section shall be made by the corporation only if authorized in the specific case, upon a determination that indemnification of the agent is proper in the circumstances because the agent has met the applicable standard of conduct set forth in subdivision (b) or (c), by:

(1) A majority vote of a quorum consisting of directors who are not parties to the proceeding;

(2) Approval of the members (Section 5034), with the persons to be indemnified not being entitled to vote thereon; or

(3) The court in which the proceeding is or was pending upon application made by the corporation or the agent or the attorney or other person rendering services in connection with the defense, whether or not the application by the agent, attorney, or other person is opposed by the corporation.

(f) Expenses incurred in defending any proceeding may be advanced by the corporation prior to the final disposition of the proceeding upon receipt of an undertaking by or on behalf of the agent to repay the amount unless it shall be determined ultimately that the agent is entitled to be indemnified as authorized in this section. The provisions of subdivision (a) of Section 5236 do not apply to advances made pursuant to this subdivision.

(g) No provision made by a corporation to indemnify its or its subsidiary's directors or officers for the defense of any proceeding, whether contained in the articles, bylaws, a resolution of members or directors, an agreement or otherwise, shall be valid unless consistent with this section. Nothing contained in this section shall affect any right to indemnification to which persons other than the directors and officers may be entitled by contract or otherwise.

(h) No indemnification or advance shall be made under this section, except as provided in subdivision (d) or paragraph (3) of subdivision (e), in any circumstance where it appears:

(1) That it would be inconsistent with a provision of the articles, bylaws, a resolution of the members or an agreement in effect at the time of the accrual of the alleged cause of action asserted in the proceeding in which the expenses were incurred or other amounts were paid, which prohibits or otherwise limits indemnification; or

(2) That it would be inconsistent with any condition expressly imposed by a court in approving a settlement.

(i) A corporation shall have power to purchase and maintain insurance on behalf of any agent of the corporation against any liability asserted against or incurred by the agent in such capacity or arising out of the agent's status as such whether or not the corporation would have the power to indemnify the agent against that liability under the provisions of this section; provided, however, that a corporation shall have no power to purchase and maintain that insurance to indemnify any agent of the corporation for a violation of Section 5233.

(j) This section does not apply to any proceeding against any trustee, investment manager, or other fiduciary of a pension,

deferred compensation, saving, thrift, or other retirement, incentive, or benefit plan, trust, or provision for any or all of the corporation's directors, officers, employees, and persons providing services to the corporation or any of its subsidiary or related or affiliated corporations, in that person's capacity as such, even though the person may also be an agent as defined in subdivision (a) of the employer corporation. A corporation shall have power to indemnify the trustee, investment manager or other fiduciary to the extent permitted by subdivision (f) of Section 5140.

5239. (a) There shall be no personal liability to a third party for monetary damages on the part of a volunteer director or volunteer executive officer of a nonprofit corporation subject to this part, caused by the director's or officer's negligent act or omission in the performance of that person's duties as a director or officer, if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The act or omission was within the scope of the director's or executive officer's duties.

(2) The act or omission was performed in good faith.

(3) The act or omission was not reckless, wanton, intentional, or grossly negligent.

(4) Damages caused by the act or omission are covered pursuant to a liability insurance policy issued to the corporation, either in the form of a general liability policy or a director's and officer's liability policy, or personally to the director or executive officer. In the event that the damages are not covered by a liability insurance policy, the volunteer director or volunteer executive officer shall not be personally liable for the damages if the board of directors of the corporation and the person had made all reasonable efforts in good faith to obtain available liability insurance.

(b) "Volunteer" means the rendering of services without compensation. "Compensation" means remuneration whether by way of salary, fee, or other consideration for services rendered. However, the payment of per diem, mileage, or other reimbursement expenses to a director or executive officer does not affect that person's status as a volunteer within the meaning of this section.

(c) "Executive officer" means the president, vice president, secretary, or treasurer of a corporation, or such other individual who serves in like capacity, who assists in establishing the policy of the corporation.

(d) Nothing in this section shall limit the liability of the corporation for any damages caused by acts or omissions of the volunteer director or volunteer executive officer.

(e) This section does not eliminate or limit the liability of a director or officer for any of the following:

(1) As provided in Section 5233 or 5237.

(2) In any action or proceeding brought by the Attorney General.

(f) Nothing in this section creates a duty of care or basis of liability for damage or injury caused by the acts or omissions of a director or officer.

(g) This section is only applicable to causes of action based upon acts or omissions occurring on or after January 1, 1988.

(h) As used in this section as applied to nonprofit public benefit corporations which have an annual budget of less than twenty-five

thousand dollars (\$25,000) and that are exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, the condition of making "all reasonable efforts in good faith to obtain available liability insurance" shall be satisfied by the corporation if it makes at least one inquiry per year to purchase a general liability insurance policy and that insurance was not available at a cost of less than 5 percent of the previous year's annual budget of the corporation. If the corporation is in its first year of operation, this subdivision shall apply for as long as the budget of the corporation does not exceed twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) in its first year of operation.

An inquiry pursuant to this subdivision shall obtain premium costs for a general liability policy with an amount of coverage of at least five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000).

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