

Public Officers Law – Section 18

§ 18. Defense and indemnification of officers and employees of public entities. 1. As used in this section, unless the context otherwise requires:

(a) The term "public entity" shall mean (i) a county, city, town, village or any other political subdivision or civil division of the state, (ii) a school district, board of cooperative educational services, or any other governmental entity or combination or association of governmental entities operating a public school, college, community college or university, (iii) a public improvement or special district, (iv) a public authority, commission, agency or public benefit corporation, or (v) any other separate corporate instrumentality or unit of government; but shall not include the state of New York or any other public entity the officers and employees of which are covered by section seventeen of this chapter or by defense and indemnification provisions of any other state statute taking effect after January first, nineteen hundred seventy-nine. (b) The term "employee" shall mean any commissioner, member of a public board or commission, trustee, director, officer, employee, volunteer expressly authorized to participate in a publicly sponsored volunteer program, or any other person holding a position by election, appointment or employment in the service of a public entity, whether or not compensated, but shall not include the sheriff of any county or an independent contractor. The term "employee" shall include a former employee, his estate or judicially appointed personal representative. (c) The term "governing body" shall mean the board or body in which the general legislative, governmental or public powers of the public entity are vested and by authority of which the business of the public entity is conducted.

2. The provisions of this section shall apply to any public entity:

(a) whose governing body has agreed by the adoption of local law, by-law, resolution, rule or regulation (i) to confer the benefits of this section upon its employees, and (ii) to be held liable for the costs incurred under these provisions; or (b) where the governing body of a municipality, for whose benefit the public entity has been established, has agreed by the adoption of local law or resolution (i) to confer the benefits of this section upon the employees of such public entity, and (ii) to be held liable for the costs incurred under these provisions.

3. (a) Upon compliance by the employee with the provisions of subdivision five of this section, the public entity shall provide for the defense of the employee in any civil action or proceeding, state or federal, arising out of any alleged act or omission which occurred or allegedly occurred while the employee was acting within the scope of his public employment or duties. This duty to provide for a defense shall not arise where such civil action or proceeding is brought by or at the behest of the public entity employing such employee. (b) Subject to the conditions set forth in paragraph (a) of this subdivision, the employee shall be entitled to be represented by private counsel of his choice in any civil action or proceeding whenever the chief legal officer of the public entity or other counsel designated by the public entity determines

that a conflict of interest exists, or whenever a court, upon appropriate motion or otherwise by a special proceeding, determines that a conflict of interest exists and that the employee is entitled to be represented by counsel of his choice, provided, however, that the chief legal officer or other counsel designated by the public entity may require, as a condition to payment of the fees and expenses of such representation, that appropriate groups of such employees be represented by the same counsel. Reasonable attorneys' fees and litigation expenses shall be paid by the public entity to such private counsel from time to time during the pendency of the civil action or proceeding with the approval of the governing body of the public entity. (c) Any dispute with respect to representation of multiple employees by a single counsel or the amount of litigation expenses or the reasonableness of attorneys' fees shall be resolved by the court upon motion or by way of a special proceeding. (d) Where the employee delivers process and a written request for a defense to the public entity under subdivision five of this section, the public entity shall take the necessary steps on behalf of the employee to avoid entry of a default judgment pending resolution of any question pertaining to the obligation to provide for a defense.

4. (a) The public entity shall indemnify and save harmless its employees in the amount of any judgment obtained against such employees in a state or federal court, or in the amount of any settlement of a claim, provided that the act or omission from which such judgment or claim arose occurred while the employee was acting within the scope of his public employment or duties; provided further that in the case of a settlement the duty to indemnify and save harmless shall be conditioned upon the approval of the amount of settlement by the governing body of the public entity. (b) Except as otherwise provided by law, the duty to indemnify and save harmless prescribed by this subdivision shall not arise where the injury or damage resulted from intentional wrongdoing or recklessness on the part of the employee. (c) Nothing in this subdivision shall authorize a public entity to indemnify or save harmless an employee with respect to punitive or exemplary damages, fines or penalties, or money recovered from an employee pursuant to section fifty-one of the general municipal law; provided, however, that the public entity shall indemnify and save harmless its employees in the amount of any costs, attorneys' fees, damages, fines or penalties which may be imposed by reason of an adjudication that an employee, acting within the scope of his public employment or duties, has, without willfulness or intent on his part, violated a prior order, judgment, consent decree or stipulation of settlement entered in any court of this state or of the United States. (d) Upon entry of a final judgment against the employee, or upon the settlement of the claim, the employee shall serve a copy of such judgment or settlement, personally or by certified or registered mail within thirty days of the date of entry or settlement, upon the chief administrative officer of the public entity; and if not inconsistent with the provisions of this section, the amount of such judgment or settlement shall be paid by the public entity.

5. The duty to defend or indemnify and save harmless prescribed by this section shall be conditioned upon: (i) delivery by the employee to the chief legal officer of the public entity or to its chief administrative officer of a written request to provide for his defense together with the original or a copy of any summons, complaint, process, notice, demand or pleading within ten days after he is served with such document, and (ii) the full cooperation of the employee in the defense of such action or proceeding and in defense of any action or proceeding against the public entity based upon the same act or omission, and in the prosecution of any appeal.

6. The benefits of this section shall inure only to employees as defined herein and shall not enlarge or diminish the rights of any other party nor shall any provision of this section be construed to affect, alter or repeal any provision of the workers' compensation law.

7. This section shall not in any way affect the obligation of any claimant to give notice to the public entity under section ten of the court of claims act, section fifty-e of the general municipal law, or any other provision of law.

8. Any public entity is hereby authorized and empowered to purchase insurance from any insurance company created by or under the laws of this state, or authorized by law to transact business in this state, against any liability imposed by the provisions of this section, or to act as a self-insurer with respect thereto.

9. All payments made under the terms of this section, whether for insurance or otherwise, shall be deemed to be for a public purpose and shall be audited and paid in the same manner as other public charges.

10. The provisions of this section shall not be construed to impair, alter, limit or modify the rights and obligations of any insurer under any policy of insurance.

11. Except as otherwise specifically provided in this section, the provisions of this section shall not be construed in any way to impair, alter, limit, modify, abrogate or restrict any immunity to liability available to or conferred upon any unit, entity, officer or employee of any public entity by, in accordance with, or by reason of, any other provision of state or federal statutory or common law.

12. Except as otherwise provided in this section, benefits accorded to employees under this section shall be in lieu of and take the place of defense or indemnification protections accorded the same employees by another enactment; unless the governing body of the public entity shall have provided that these

benefits shall supplement, and be available in addition to, defense or indemnification protection conferred by another enactment.

13. The provisions of this section shall also be applicable to any public library supported in whole or in part by a public entity whose governing body has determined by adoption of a local law, ordinance, by-law, resolution, rule or regulation to confer the benefits of this section upon the employees of such public library and to be held liable for the costs incurred under these provisions.

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14. If any provision of this section or the application thereof to any person or circumstance be held unconstitutional or invalid in whole or in part by any court, such holding of unconstitutionality or invalidity shall in no way affect or impair any other provision of this section or the application of any such provision to any other person or circumstance.

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