

As Introduced

**133rd General Assembly
Regular Session
2019-2020**

S. B. No. 46

**Senator Eklund
Cosponsor: Senator Huffman, M.**

A BILL

To amend section 2315.21 of the Revised Code to
expand the exemption from punitive or exemplary
damages limitations in tort law that is related
to certain felony convictions.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF OHIO:

Section 1. That section 2315.21 of the Revised Code be
amended to read as follows:

Sec. 2315.21. (A) As used in this section:

(1) "Tort action" means a civil action for damages for
injury or loss to person or property. "Tort action" includes a
product liability claim for damages for injury or loss to person
or property that is subject to sections 2307.71 to 2307.80 of
the Revised Code, but does not include a civil action for
damages for a breach of contract or another agreement between
persons.

(2) "Trier of fact" means the jury or, in a nonjury
action, the court.

(3) "Home" has the same meaning as in section 3721.10 of

the Revised Code. 18

(4) "Employer" includes, but is not limited to, a parent, 19
subsidiary, affiliate, division, or department of the employer. 20
If the employer is an individual, the individual shall be 21
considered an employer under this section only if the subject of 22
the tort action is related to the individual's capacity as an 23
employer. 24

(5) "Small employer" means an employer who employs not 25
more than one hundred persons on a full-time permanent basis, 26
or, if the employer is classified as being in the manufacturing 27
sector by the North American industrial classification system, 28
"small employer" means an employer who employs not more than 29
five hundred persons on a full-time permanent basis. 30

(B)(1) In a tort action that is tried to a jury and in 31
which a plaintiff makes a claim for compensatory damages and a 32
claim for punitive or exemplary damages, upon the motion of any 33
party, the trial of the tort action shall be bifurcated as 34
follows: 35

(a) The initial stage of the trial shall relate only to 36
the presentation of evidence, and a determination by the jury, 37
with respect to whether the plaintiff is entitled to recover 38
compensatory damages for the injury or loss to person or 39
property from the defendant. During this stage, no party to the 40
tort action shall present, and the court shall not permit a 41
party to present, evidence that relates solely to the issue of 42
whether the plaintiff is entitled to recover punitive or 43
exemplary damages for the injury or loss to person or property 44
from the defendant. 45

(b) If the jury determines in the initial stage of the 46

trial that the plaintiff is entitled to recover compensatory 47
damages for the injury or loss to person or property from the 48
defendant, evidence may be presented in the second stage of the 49
trial, and a determination by that jury shall be made, with 50
respect to whether the plaintiff additionally is entitled to 51
recover punitive or exemplary damages for the injury or loss to 52
person or property from the defendant. 53

(2) In a tort action that is tried to a jury and in which 54
a plaintiff makes a claim for both compensatory damages and 55
punitive or exemplary damages, the court shall instruct the jury 56
to return, and the jury shall return, a general verdict and, if 57
that verdict is in favor of the plaintiff, answers to an 58
interrogatory that specifies the total compensatory damages 59
recoverable by the plaintiff from each defendant. 60

(3) In a tort action that is tried to a court and in which 61
a plaintiff makes a claim for both compensatory damages and 62
punitive or exemplary damages, the court shall make its 63
determination with respect to whether the plaintiff is entitled 64
to recover compensatory damages for the injury or loss to person 65
or property from the defendant and, if that determination is in 66
favor of the plaintiff, shall make findings of fact that specify 67
the total compensatory damages recoverable by the plaintiff from 68
the defendant. 69

(C) Subject to division (E) of this section, punitive or 70
exemplary damages are not recoverable from a defendant in 71
question in a tort action unless both of the following apply: 72

(1) The actions or omissions of that defendant demonstrate 73
malice or aggravated or egregious fraud, or that defendant as 74
principal or master knowingly authorized, participated in, or 75
ratified actions or omissions of an agent or servant that so 76

demonstrate. 77

(2) The trier of fact has returned a verdict or has made a 78
determination pursuant to division (B) (2) or (3) of this section 79
of the total compensatory damages recoverable by the plaintiff 80
from that defendant. 81

(D) (1) In a tort action, the trier of fact shall determine 82
the liability of any defendant for punitive or exemplary damages 83
and the amount of those damages. 84

(2) Except as provided in division (D) (6) of this section, 85
all of the following apply regarding any award of punitive or 86
exemplary damages in a tort action: 87

(a) The court shall not enter judgment for punitive or 88
exemplary damages in excess of two times the amount of the 89
compensatory damages awarded to the plaintiff from that 90
defendant, as determined pursuant to division (B) (2) or (3) of 91
this section. 92

(b) If the defendant is a small employer or individual, 93
the court shall not enter judgment for punitive or exemplary 94
damages in excess of the lesser of two times the amount of the 95
compensatory damages awarded to the plaintiff from the defendant 96
or ten ~~percent~~ per cent of the employer's or individual's net 97
worth when the tort was committed up to a maximum of three 98
hundred fifty thousand dollars, as determined pursuant to 99
division (B) (2) or (3) of this section. 100

(c) Any ~~attorneys~~ attorney's fees awarded as a result of a 101
claim for punitive or exemplary damages shall not be considered 102
for purposes of determining the cap on punitive damages. 103

(3) No award of prejudgment interest under division (C) (1) 104
of section 1343.03 of the Revised Code shall include any 105

prejudgment interest on punitive or exemplary damages found by 106
the trier of fact. 107

(4) In a tort action, the burden of proof shall be upon a 108
plaintiff in question, by clear and convincing evidence, to 109
establish that the plaintiff is entitled to recover punitive or 110
exemplary damages. 111

(5) (a) In any tort action, except as provided in division 112
(D) (5) (b) or (6) of this section, punitive or exemplary damages 113
shall not be awarded against a defendant if that defendant files 114
with the court a certified judgment, judgment entries, or other 115
evidence showing that punitive or exemplary damages have already 116
been awarded and have been collected, in any state or federal 117
court, against that defendant based on the same act or course of 118
conduct that is alleged to have caused the injury or loss to 119
person or property for which the plaintiff seeks compensatory 120
damages and that the aggregate of those previous punitive or 121
exemplary damage awards exceeds the maximum amount of punitive 122
or exemplary damages that may be awarded under division (D) (2) 123
of this section against that defendant in the tort action. 124

(b) Notwithstanding division (D) (5) (a) of this section and 125
except as provided in division (D) (6) of this section, punitive 126
or exemplary damages may be awarded against a defendant in 127
either of the following types of tort actions: 128

(i) In subsequent tort actions involving the same act or 129
course of conduct for which punitive or exemplary damages have 130
already been awarded, if the court determines by clear and 131
convincing evidence that the plaintiff will offer new and 132
substantial evidence of previously undiscovered, additional 133
behavior of a type described in division (C) of this section on 134
the part of that defendant, other than the injury or loss for 135

which the plaintiff seeks compensatory damages. In that case, 136
the court shall make specific findings of fact in the record to 137
support its conclusion. The court shall reduce the amount of any 138
punitive or exemplary damages otherwise awardable pursuant to 139
this section by the sum of the punitive or exemplary damages 140
awards previously rendered against that defendant in any state 141
or federal court. The court shall not inform the jury about the 142
court's determination and action under division (D) (5) (b) (i) of 143
this section. 144

(ii) In subsequent tort actions involving the same act or 145
course of conduct for which punitive or exemplary damages have 146
already been awarded, if the court determines by clear and 147
convincing evidence that the total amount of prior punitive or 148
exemplary damages awards was totally insufficient to punish that 149
defendant's behavior of a type described in division (C) of this 150
section and to deter that defendant and others from similar 151
behavior in the future. In that case, the court shall make 152
specific findings of fact in the record to support its 153
conclusion. The court shall reduce the amount of any punitive or 154
exemplary damages otherwise awardable pursuant to this section 155
by the sum of the punitive or exemplary damages awards 156
previously rendered against that defendant in any state or 157
federal court. The court shall not inform the jury about the 158
court's determination and action under division (D) (5) (b) (ii) of 159
this section. 160

(6) Division (D) (2) of this section does not apply to a 161
tort action where the alleged injury, death, or loss to person 162
or property resulted from the defendant acting ~~with one or more~~ 163
~~of the culpable mental states of purposely and knowingly as~~ 164
~~described in section 2901.22 of the Revised Code in violation of~~ 165
a law and when the defendant has been convicted of or pleaded 166

guilty to a criminal offense that is a felony, that is a strict 167
criminal liability offense or that had as an element of the 168
offense one or more of the culpable mental states of purposely 169
and knowingly as described in ~~that~~ section 2901.22 of the 170
Revised Code, and that is the basis of the tort action. 171

(E) This section does not apply to tort actions against 172
the state in the court of claims, including, but not limited to, 173
tort actions against a state university or college that are 174
subject to division (B) (1) of section 3345.40 of the Revised 175
Code, to tort actions against political subdivisions of this 176
state that are commenced under or are subject to Chapter 2744. 177
of the Revised Code, or to the extent that another section of 178
the Revised Code expressly provides any of the following: 179

(1) Punitive or exemplary damages are recoverable from a 180
defendant in question in a tort action on a basis other than 181
that the actions or omissions of that defendant demonstrate 182
malice or aggravated or egregious fraud or on a basis other than 183
that the defendant in question as principal or master knowingly 184
authorized, participated in, or ratified actions or omissions of 185
an agent or servant that so demonstrate. 186

(2) Punitive or exemplary damages are recoverable from a 187
defendant in question in a tort action irrespective of whether 188
the plaintiff in question has adduced proof of actual damages. 189

(3) The burden of proof upon a plaintiff in question to 190
recover punitive or exemplary damages from a defendant in 191
question in a tort action is one other than clear and convincing 192
evidence. 193

(4) Punitive or exemplary damages are not recoverable from 194
a defendant in question in a tort action. 195

(F) If the trier of fact is a jury, the court shall not 196
instruct the jury with respect to the limits on punitive or 197
exemplary damages pursuant to division (D) of this section, and 198
neither counsel for any party or a witness shall inform the jury 199
or potential jurors of those limits. 200

(G) When determining the amount of an award of punitive or 201
exemplary damages against either a home or a residential 202
facility licensed under section 5123.19 of the Revised Code, the 203
trier of fact shall consider all of the following: 204

(1) The ability of the home or residential facility to pay 205
the award of punitive or exemplary damages based on the home's 206
or residential facility's assets, income, and net worth; 207

(2) Whether the amount of punitive or exemplary damages is 208
sufficient to deter future tortious conduct; 209

(3) The financial ability of the home or residential 210
facility, both currently and in the future, to provide 211
accommodations, personal care services, and skilled nursing 212
care. 213

Section 2. That existing section 2315.21 of the Revised 214
Code is hereby repealed. 215