

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1997 AMENDMENT

Amendment by Pub. L. 105-33 effective Oct. 1, 1997, except as otherwise provided in title XI of Pub. L. 105-33, see section 11721 of Pub. L. 105-33, set out as a note under section 4246 of Title 18, Crimes and Criminal Procedure.

§ 14408. Relation to other laws

The provisions of this chapter supersede other Federal laws (including laws enacted after April 30, 1997) except to the extent such laws specifically supersede the provisions of this chapter.

(Pub. L. 105-12, §10, Apr. 30, 1997, 111 Stat. 29.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

This chapter, referred to in text, was in the original "this Act", meaning Pub. L. 105-12, Apr. 30, 1997, 111 Stat. 23, known as the Assisted Suicide Funding Restriction Act of 1997, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 14401 of this title and Tables.

CHAPTER 139—VOLUNTEER PROTECTION

Sec.	
14501.	Findings and purpose.
14502.	Preemption and election of State nonapplicability.
14503.	Limitation on liability for volunteers.
14504.	Liability for noneconomic loss.
14505.	Definitions.

§ 14501. Findings and purpose**(a) Findings**

The Congress finds and declares that—

(1) the willingness of volunteers to offer their services is deterred by the potential for liability actions against them;

(2) as a result, many nonprofit public and private organizations and governmental entities, including voluntary associations, social service agencies, educational institutions, and other civic programs, have been adversely affected by the withdrawal of volunteers from boards of directors and service in other capacities;

(3) the contribution of these programs to their communities is thereby diminished, resulting in fewer and higher cost programs than would be obtainable if volunteers were participating;

(4) because Federal funds are expended on useful and cost-effective social service programs, many of which are national in scope, depend heavily on volunteer participation, and represent some of the most successful public-private partnerships, protection of volunteerism through clarification and limitation of the personal liability risks assumed by the volunteer in connection with such participation is an appropriate subject for Federal legislation;

(5) services and goods provided by volunteers and nonprofit organizations would often otherwise be provided by private entities that operate in interstate commerce;

(6) due to high liability costs and unwarranted litigation costs, volunteers and nonprofit organizations face higher costs in purchasing insurance, through interstate insurance markets, to cover their activities; and

(7) clarifying and limiting the liability risk assumed by volunteers is an appropriate subject for Federal legislation because—

(A) of the national scope of the problems created by the legitimate fears of volunteers about frivolous, arbitrary, or capricious lawsuits;

(B) the citizens of the United States depend on, and the Federal Government expends funds on, and provides tax exemptions and other consideration to, numerous social programs that depend on the services of volunteers;

(C) it is in the interest of the Federal Government to encourage the continued operation of volunteer service organizations and contributions of volunteers because the Federal Government lacks the capacity to carry out all of the services provided by such organizations and volunteers; and

(D)(i) liability reform for volunteers, will promote the free flow of goods and services, lessen burdens on interstate commerce and uphold constitutionally protected due process rights; and

(ii) therefore, liability reform is an appropriate use of the powers contained in article 1, section 8, clause 3 of the United States Constitution, and the fourteenth amendment to the United States Constitution.

(b) Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to promote the interests of social service program beneficiaries and taxpayers and to sustain the availability of programs, nonprofit organizations, and governmental entities that depend on volunteer contributions by reforming the laws to provide certain protections from liability abuses related to volunteers serving nonprofit organizations and governmental entities.

(Pub. L. 105-19, §2, June 18, 1997, 111 Stat. 218.)

EFFECTIVE DATE

Pub. L. 105-19, §7, June 18, 1997, 111 Stat. 223, provided that:

“(a) IN GENERAL.—This Act [enacting this chapter] shall take effect 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act [June 18, 1997].

“(b) APPLICATION.—This Act applies to any claim for harm caused by an act or omission of a volunteer where that claim is filed on or after the effective date of this Act but only if the harm that is the subject of the claim or the conduct that caused such harm occurred after such effective date.”

SHORT TITLE

Pub. L. 105-19, §1, June 18, 1997, 111 Stat. 218, provided that: “This Act [enacting this chapter] may be cited as the ‘Volunteer Protection Act of 1997.’”

§ 14502. Preemption and election of State nonapplicability**(a) Preemption**

This chapter preempts the laws of any State to the extent that such laws are inconsistent with this chapter, except that this chapter shall not preempt any State law that provides additional protection from liability relating to volunteers or to any category of volunteers in the performance of services for a nonprofit organization or governmental entity.

(b) Election of State regarding nonapplicability

This chapter shall not apply to any civil action in a State court against a volunteer in

which all parties are citizens of the State if such State enacts a statute in accordance with State requirements for enacting legislation—

- (1) citing the authority of this subsection;
- (2) declaring the election of such State that this chapter shall not apply, as of a date certain, to such civil action in the State; and
- (3) containing no other provisions.

(Pub. L. 105–19, § 3, June 18, 1997, 111 Stat. 219.)

§ 14503. Limitation on liability for volunteers

(a) Liability protection for volunteers

Except as provided in subsections (b) and (d) of this section, no volunteer of a nonprofit organization or governmental entity shall be liable for harm caused by an act or omission of the volunteer on behalf of the organization or entity if—

- (1) the volunteer was acting within the scope of the volunteer's responsibilities in the nonprofit organization or governmental entity at the time of the act or omission;
- (2) if appropriate or required, the volunteer was properly licensed, certified, or authorized by the appropriate authorities for the activities or practice in the State in which the harm occurred, where the activities were or practice was undertaken within the scope of the volunteer's responsibilities in the nonprofit organization or governmental entity;
- (3) the harm was not caused by willful or criminal misconduct, gross negligence, reckless misconduct, or a conscious, flagrant indifference to the rights or safety of the individual harmed by the volunteer; and
- (4) the harm was not caused by the volunteer operating a motor vehicle, vessel, aircraft, or other vehicle for which the State requires the operator or the owner of the vehicle, craft, or vessel to—
 - (A) possess an operator's license; or
 - (B) maintain insurance.

(b) Concerning responsibility of volunteers to organizations and entities

Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect any civil action brought by any nonprofit organization or any governmental entity against any volunteer of such organization or entity.

(c) No effect on liability of organization or entity

Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect the liability of any nonprofit organization or governmental entity with respect to harm caused to any person.

(d) Exceptions to volunteer liability protection

If the laws of a State limit volunteer liability subject to one or more of the following conditions, such conditions shall not be construed as inconsistent with this section:

- (1) A State law that requires a nonprofit organization or governmental entity to adhere to risk management procedures, including mandatory training of volunteers.
- (2) A State law that makes the organization or entity liable for the acts or omissions of its volunteers to the same extent as an employer is liable for the acts or omissions of its employees.
- (3) A State law that makes a limitation of liability inapplicable if the civil action was

brought by an officer of a State or local government pursuant to State or local law.

(4) A State law that makes a limitation of liability applicable only if the nonprofit organization or governmental entity provides a financially secure source of recovery for individuals who suffer harm as a result of actions taken by a volunteer on behalf of the organization or entity. A financially secure source of recovery may be an insurance policy within specified limits, comparable coverage from a risk pooling mechanism, equivalent assets, or alternative arrangements that satisfy the State that the organization or entity will be able to pay for losses up to a specified amount. Separate standards for different types of liability exposure may be specified.

(e) Limitation on punitive damages based on actions of volunteers

(1) General rule

Punitive damages may not be awarded against a volunteer in an action brought for harm based on the action of a volunteer acting within the scope of the volunteer's responsibilities to a nonprofit organization or governmental entity unless the claimant establishes by clear and convincing evidence that the harm was proximately caused by an action of such volunteer which constitutes willful or criminal misconduct, or a conscious, flagrant indifference to the rights or safety of the individual harmed.

(2) Construction

Paragraph (1) does not create a cause of action for punitive damages and does not preempt or supersede any Federal or State law to the extent that such law would further limit the award of punitive damages.

(f) Exceptions to limitations on liability

(1) In general

The limitations on the liability of a volunteer under this chapter shall not apply to any misconduct that—

- (A) constitutes a crime of violence (as that term is defined in section 16 of title 18) or act of international terrorism (as that term is defined in section 2331 of title 18) for which the defendant has been convicted in any court;
- (B) constitutes a hate crime (as that term is used in the Hate Crime Statistics Act (28 U.S.C. 534 note));
- (C) involves a sexual offense, as defined by applicable State law, for which the defendant has been convicted in any court;
- (D) involves misconduct for which the defendant has been found to have violated a Federal or State civil rights law; or
- (E) where the defendant was under the influence (as determined pursuant to applicable State law) of intoxicating alcohol or any drug at the time of the misconduct.

(2) Rule of construction

Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to effect subsection (a)(3) or (e) of this section.

(Pub. L. 105–19, § 4, June 18, 1997, 111 Stat. 219.)