

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 non-applicability

(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), (c), and (e), 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) Liability protection for pilots that fly for public benefit

Except as provided in subsections (c) and (e), no volunteer of a volunteer pilot nonprofit organization that arranges flights for public benefit shall be liable for harm caused by an act or omission of the volunteer on behalf of the organization if, at the time of the act or omission, the volunteer—

(1) was operating an aircraft in furtherance of the purpose of, and acting within the scope of the volunteer's responsibilities on behalf of, the nonprofit organization to provide patient and medical transport (including medical transport for veterans), disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, or other similar charitable missions;

(2) was properly licensed and insured for the operation of the aircraft;

(3) was in compliance with all requirements of the Federal Aviation Administration for recent flight experience; and

(4) did not cause the harm through 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.

(c) 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.

(d) 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.

(e) 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.

(f) 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.

(g) 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));¹

(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 (f).

(Pub. L. 105-19, § 4, June 18, 1997, 111 Stat. 219; Pub. L. 115-254, div. B, title V, § 584, Oct. 5, 2018, 132 Stat. 3399.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

The Hate Crime Statistics Act, referred to in subsec. (g)(1)(B), is Pub. L. 101-275, Apr. 23, 1990, 104 Stat. 140, which was set out as a note under section 534 of Title 28, Judiciary and Judicial Procedure, prior to editorial reclassification as section 41305 of Title 34, Crime Control and Law Enforcement, and as provisions set out as a note under section 41305 of Title 34.

AMENDMENTS

2018—Subsec. (a). Pub. L. 115-254, § 584(2), in introductory provisions, substituted “subsections (b), (c), and (e)” for “subsections (b) and (d)”.

Subsecs. (b) to (g). Pub. L. 115-254, § 584(1), (3), added subsec. (b) and redesignated former subsecs. (b) to (f) as (c) to (g), respectively.

Subsec. (g)(2). Pub. L. 115-254, § 584(4), substituted “(f)” for “(e)”.

§ 14504. Liability for noneconomic loss

(a) General rule

In any civil action against a volunteer, based on an action of a volunteer acting within the

¹ See References in Text note below.