

RCW 7.68.050 Right of action for damages—Election—Effect of election or recovery—Lien of state. (1) No right of action at law for damages incurred as a consequence of a criminal act shall be lost as a consequence of being entitled to benefits under the provisions of this chapter. The victim or his or her beneficiary may elect to seek damages from the person or persons liable for the claimed injury or death, and such victim or beneficiary is entitled to the full compensation and benefits provided by this chapter regardless of any election or recovery made pursuant to this section.

(2) For the purposes of this section, the rights, privileges, responsibilities, duties, limitations, and procedures contained in subsections (3) through (25) of this section apply.

(3) (a) If a third person is or may become liable to pay damages on account of a victim's injury for which benefits and compensation are provided under this chapter, the injured victim or beneficiary may elect to seek damages from the third person.

(b) In every action brought under this section, the plaintiff shall give notice to the department when the action is filed. The department may file a notice of statutory interest in recovery. When such notice has been filed by the department, the parties shall thereafter serve copies of all notices, motions, pleadings, and other process on the department. The department may then intervene as a party in the action to protect its statutory interest in recovery.

(c) For the purposes of this subsection, "injury" includes any physical or mental condition, disease, ailment, or loss, including death, for which compensation and benefits are paid or payable under this chapter.

(d) For the purposes of this chapter, "recovery" includes all damages and insurance benefits, including life insurance, paid in connection with the victim's injuries or death.

(4) An election not to proceed against the third person operates as an assignment of the cause of action to the department, which may prosecute or compromise the action in its discretion in the name of the victim, beneficiary, or legal representative.

(5) If an injury to a victim results in the victim's death, the department to which the cause of action has been assigned may petition a court for the appointment of a special personal representative for the limited purpose of maintaining an action under this chapter and chapter 4.20 RCW.

(6) If a beneficiary is a minor child, an election not to proceed against a third person on such beneficiary's cause of action may be exercised by the beneficiary's legal custodian or guardian.

(7) Any recovery made by the department shall be distributed as follows:

(a) The department shall be paid the expenses incurred in making the recovery including reasonable costs of legal services;

(b) The victim or beneficiary shall be paid twenty-five percent of the balance of the recovery made, which shall not be subject to subsection (8) of this section, except that in the event of a compromise and settlement by the parties, the victim or beneficiary may agree to a sum less than twenty-five percent;

(c) The department shall be paid the amount paid to or on behalf of the victim or beneficiary by the department; and

(d) The victim or beneficiary shall be paid any remaining balance.

(8) Thereafter no payment shall be made to or on behalf of a victim or beneficiary by the department for such injury until any further amount payable shall equal any such remaining balance. Thereafter, such benefits shall be paid by the department to or on behalf of the victim or beneficiary as though no recovery had been made from a third person.

(9) If the victim or beneficiary elects to seek damages from the third person, any recovery made shall be distributed as follows:

(a) The costs and reasonable attorneys' fees shall be paid proportionately by the victim or beneficiary and the department. The department may require court approval of costs and attorneys' fees or may petition a court for determination of the reasonableness of costs and attorneys' fees;

(b) The victim or beneficiary shall be paid twenty-five percent of the balance of the award, except that in the event of a compromise and settlement by the parties, the victim or beneficiary may agree to a sum less than twenty-five percent;

(c) The department shall be paid the balance of the recovery made, but only to the extent necessary to reimburse the department for the amount paid;

(i) The department shall bear its proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the victim or beneficiary to the extent of the benefits paid under this title. The department's proportionate share shall not exceed one hundred percent of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees;

(ii) The department's proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees shall be determined by dividing the gross recovery amount into the benefits paid amount and multiplying this percentage times the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the victim or beneficiary;

(iii) The department's reimbursement share shall be determined by subtracting their proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees from the benefits paid amount;

(d) Any remaining balance shall be paid to the victim or beneficiary; and

(e) Thereafter no payment shall be made to or on behalf of a victim or beneficiary by the department for such injury until the amount of any further amount payable shall equal any such remaining balance minus the department's proportionate share of the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees in regards to the remaining balance. This proportionate share shall be determined by dividing the gross recovery amount into the remaining balance amount and multiplying this percentage times the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the victim or beneficiary. Thereafter, such benefits shall be paid by the department to or on behalf of the victim or beneficiary as though no recovery had been made from a third person.

(10) The recovery made shall be subject to a lien by the department for its share under this section. Notwithstanding RCW 48.18.410, a recovery made from life insurance shall be subject to a lien by the department.

(11) The department has sole discretion to compromise the amount of its lien. In deciding whether or to what extent to compromise its lien, the department shall consider at least the following:

(a) The likelihood of collection of the award or settlement as may be affected by insurance coverage, solvency, or other factors relating to the third person;

(b) Factual and legal issues of liability as between the victim or beneficiary and the third person. Such issues include but are not limited to possible contributory negligence and novel theories of liability; and

(c) Problems of proof faced in obtaining the award or settlement.

(12) It shall be the duty of the person to whom any recovery is paid before distribution under this section to advise the department of the fact and amount of such recovery, the costs and reasonable attorneys' fees associated with the recovery, and to distribute the recovery in compliance with this section.

(13) The distribution of any recovery made by award or settlement of the third party action shall be confirmed by department order, served by electronic, registered or certified mail, and shall be subject to chapter 51.52 RCW. In the event the order of distribution becomes final under chapter 51.52 RCW, the director or the director's designee may file with the clerk of any county within the state a warrant in the amount of the sum representing the unpaid lien plus interest accruing from the date the order became final. The clerk of the county in which the warrant is filed shall immediately designate a superior court cause number for such warrant and the clerk shall cause to be entered in the judgment docket under the superior court cause number assigned to the warrant, the name of such victim or beneficiary mentioned in the warrant, the amount of the unpaid lien plus interest accrued and the date when the warrant was filed. The amount of such warrant as docketed shall become a lien upon the title to and interest in all real and personal property of the victim or beneficiary against whom the warrant is issued, the same as a judgment in a civil case docketed in the office of such clerk. The sheriff shall then proceed in the same manner and with like effect as prescribed by law with respect to execution or other process issued against rights or property upon judgment in the superior court. Such warrant so docketed shall be sufficient to support the issuance of writs of garnishment in favor of the department in the manner provided by law in the case of judgment, wholly or partially unsatisfied. The clerk of the court shall be entitled to a filing fee under RCW 36.18.012(10), which shall be added to the amount of the warrant. A copy of such warrant shall be mailed to the victim or beneficiary within three days of filing with the clerk.

(14) The director, or the director's designee, may issue to any person, firm, corporation, municipal corporation, political subdivision of the state, public corporation, or agency of the state, a notice and order to withhold and deliver property of any kind if he or she has reason to believe that there is in the possession of such person, firm, corporation, municipal corporation, political subdivision of the state, public corporation, or agency of the state, property which is due, owing, or belonging to any victim or beneficiary upon whom a warrant has been served by the department for payments due to the crime victims' compensation program. The notice and order to withhold and deliver shall be served by the sheriff of the county or by the sheriff's deputy; by certified mail, return receipt requested; or by any authorized representatives of the director. Any person, firm, corporation, municipal corporation, political subdivision of the state, public corporation, or agency of the state upon whom service has been made shall answer the notice within twenty days exclusive of the day of service, under oath and in writing, and shall make true answers to the matters inquired of in the notice and order to withhold and deliver. In the event there is in the

possession of the party named and served with such notice and order, any property which may be subject to the claim of the department, such property shall be delivered forthwith to the director or the director's authorized representative upon demand. If the party served and named in the notice and order fails to answer the notice and order within the time prescribed in this section, the court may, after the time to answer such order has expired, render judgment by default against the party named in the notice for the full amount claimed by the director in the notice together with costs. In the event that a notice to withhold and deliver is served upon an employer and the property found to be subject thereto is wages, the employer may assert in the answer to all exemptions provided for by chapter 6.27 RCW to which the wage earner may be entitled.

(15) The department may require the victim or beneficiary to exercise the right of election under this chapter by serving a written demand by electronic mail, registered mail, certified mail, or personal service on the victim or beneficiary.

(16) Unless an election is made within sixty days of the receipt of the demand, and unless an action is instituted or settled within the time granted by the department, the victim or beneficiary is deemed to have assigned the action to the department. The department shall allow the victim or beneficiary at least ninety days from the election to institute or settle the action. When a beneficiary is a minor child the demand shall be served upon the legal custodian or guardian of such beneficiary.

(17) If an action which has been filed is not diligently prosecuted, the department may petition the court in which the action is pending for an order assigning the cause of action to the department. Upon a sufficient showing of a lack of diligent prosecution the court in its discretion may issue the order.

(18) If the department has taken an assignment of the third party cause of action under subsection (16) of this section, the victim or beneficiary may, at the discretion of the department, exercise a right of reelection and assume the cause of action subject to reimbursement of litigation expenses incurred by the department.

(19) If the victim or beneficiary elects to seek damages from the third person, notice of the election must be given to the department. The notice shall be by registered mail, certified mail, or personal service. If an action is filed by the victim or beneficiary, a copy of the complaint must be sent by registered mail to the department.

(20) A return showing service of the notice on the department shall be filed with the court but shall not be part of the record except as necessary to give notice to the defendant of the lien imposed by subsection (10) of this section.

(21) Any compromise or settlement of the third party cause of action by the victim or beneficiary which results in less than the entitlement under this title is void unless made with the written approval of the department. For the purposes of this chapter, "entitlement" means benefits and compensation paid and estimated by the department to be paid in the future.

(22) If a compromise or settlement is void because of subsection (21) of this section, the department may petition the court in which the action was filed for an order assigning the cause of action to the department. If an action has not been filed, the department may proceed as provided in chapter 7.24 RCW.

(23) The fact that the victim or beneficiary is entitled to compensation under this title shall not be pleaded or admissible in

evidence in any third-party action under this chapter. Any challenge of the right to bring such action shall be made by supplemental pleadings only and shall be decided by the court as a matter of law.

(24) Actions against third persons that are assigned by the claimant to the department, voluntarily or by operation of law in accordance with this chapter, may be prosecuted by special assistant attorneys general.

(25) The attorney general shall select special assistant attorneys general from a list compiled by the department and the Washington state bar association. The attorney general, in conjunction with the department and the Washington state bar association, shall adopt rules and regulations outlining the criteria and the procedure by which private attorneys may have their names placed on the list of attorneys available for appointment as special assistant attorneys general to litigate third-party actions under subsection (24) of this section.

(26) The 1980 amendments to this section apply only to injuries which occur on or after April 1, 1980. [2011 c 346 s 704; 2011 c 336 s 247; 1998 c 91 s 1; 1980 c 156 s 3; 1977 ex.s. c 302 s 3; 1973 1st ex.s. c 122 s 5.]

Reviser's note: This section was amended by 2011 c 336 s 247 and by 2011 c 346 s 704, each without reference to the other. Both amendments are incorporated in the publication of this section under RCW 1.12.025(2). For rule of construction, see RCW 1.12.025(1).

Intent—Retroactive application—Effective date—2011 c 346: See notes following RCW 7.68.020.

Legislative intent—"Public or private insurance"—1980 c 156: See note following RCW 7.68.020.