

RCW 70.124.100 Retaliation against whistleblowers and residents

—Remedies—Rules. (1) An employee who is a whistleblower and who as a result of being a whistleblower has been subjected to workplace reprisal or retaliatory action, has the remedies provided under chapter 49.60 RCW. RCW 4.24.500 through 4.24.520, providing certain protection to persons who communicate to government agencies, apply to complaints made under this section. The identity of a whistleblower who complains, in good faith, to the department about suspected abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, or abandonment by any person in a state hospital may remain confidential if requested. The identity of the whistleblower shall subsequently remain confidential unless the department determines that the complaint was not made in good faith.

(2) (a) An attempt to discharge a resident from a state hospital or any type of discriminatory treatment of a resident by whom, or upon whose behalf, a complaint substantiated by the department has been submitted to the department or any proceeding instituted under or related to this chapter within one year of the filing of the complaint or the institution of the action, raises a rebuttable presumption that the action was in retaliation for the filing of the complaint.

(b) The presumption is rebutted by credible evidence establishing the alleged retaliatory action was initiated prior to the complaint.

(c) The presumption is rebutted by a functional assessment conducted by the department that shows that the resident's needs cannot be met by the reasonable accommodations of the facility due to the increased needs of the resident.

(3) For the purposes of this section:

(a) "Whistleblower" means a resident or employee of a state hospital or any person licensed under Title 18 RCW, who in good faith reports alleged abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, or abandonment to the department or to a law enforcement agency;

(b) "Workplace reprisal or retaliatory action" means, but is not limited to: Denial of adequate staff to perform duties; frequent staff changes; frequent and undesirable office changes; refusal to assign meaningful work; unwarranted and unsubstantiated report of misconduct under Title 18 RCW; letters of reprimand or unsatisfactory performance evaluations; demotion; denial of employment; or a supervisor or superior encouraging coworkers to behave in a hostile manner toward the whistleblower; and

(c) "Reasonable accommodation" by a facility to the needs of a prospective or current resident has the meaning given to this term under the federal Americans with disabilities act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq. and other applicable federal or state antidiscrimination laws and regulations.

(4) This section does not prohibit a state hospital from exercising its authority to terminate, suspend, or discipline an employee who engages in workplace reprisal or retaliatory action against a whistleblower. The protections provided to whistleblowers under this chapter shall not prevent a state hospital from: (a) Terminating, suspending, or disciplining a whistleblower for other lawful purposes; or (b) for facilities with six or fewer residents, reducing the hours of employment or terminating employment as a result of the demonstrated inability to meet payroll requirements. The department shall determine if the facility cannot meet payroll in cases where a whistleblower has been terminated or had hours of employment reduced due to the inability of a facility to meet payroll.

(5) The department shall adopt rules to implement procedures for filing, investigation, and resolution of whistleblower complaints that are integrated with complaint procedures under this chapter.

(6) No resident who relies upon and is being provided spiritual treatment in lieu of medical treatment in accordance with the tenets and practices of a well-recognized religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered abandoned, abused, or neglected, nor shall anything in this chapter be construed to authorize, permit, or require medical treatment contrary to the stated or clearly implied objection of such a person.

(7) The department shall adopt rules designed to discourage whistleblower complaints made in bad faith or for retaliatory purposes. [1999 c 176 § 26; 1997 c 392 § 201.]

Findings—Purpose—Severability—Conflict with federal requirements—1999 c 176: See notes following RCW 74.34.005.

Short title—Findings—Construction—Conflict with federal requirements—Part headings and captions not law—1997 c 392: See notes following RCW 74.39A.009.