

SECOND REGULAR SESSION

HOUSE BILL NO. 1615

96TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVES OXFORD (Sponsor), MORGAN, PACE, WALTON GRAY, McCREERY, KIRKTON, HOLSMAN, STILL, McMANUS, RIZZO, JONES (63), SPRENG, ATKINS, NASHEED, SMITH (71), BROWN (50), PIERSON, McNEIL, NEWMAN, McGEOGHEGAN, McDONALD, MAY, MONTECILLO, SWEARINGEN, ELLINGTON, ELLINGER, TAYLOR, CARLSON, WEBBER, CARTER, McCANN BEATTY, HUGHES, TALBOY, LAMPE, COLONA, FALLERT, NICHOLS, HARRIS AND COX (Co-sponsors).

5201L.011

D. ADAM CRUMBLISS, Chief Clerk

AN ACT

To repeal section 537.528, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof one new section relating to actions for money damages for conduct or speech at public hearings or meetings.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the state of Missouri, as follows:

Section A. Section 537.528, RSMo, is repealed and one new section enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as section 537.528, to read as follows:

537.528. 1. Any action [seeking money damages] against a person for conduct or speech undertaken or made in connection with a public hearing or public meeting, in a quasi-judicial proceeding before a tribunal or decision-making body of the state or any political subdivision of the state is subject to a special motion to dismiss, motion for judgment on the pleadings, or motion for summary judgment that shall be considered by the court on a priority or expedited basis to ensure the early consideration of the issues raised by the motion and to prevent the unnecessary expense of litigation. Upon the filing of any special motion described in this subsection, all discovery shall be suspended pending a decision on the motion by the court and the exhaustion of all appeals regarding the special motion.

2. If the rights afforded by this section are raised as an affirmative defense and if a court grants a motion to dismiss, a motion for judgment on the pleadings or a motion for summary judgment filed within ninety days of the filing of the moving party's answer, the court shall award reasonable attorney fees and costs incurred by the moving party in defending the action.

EXPLANATION — Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in **bold-face** type in the above bill is proposed language.

14 If the court finds that a special motion to dismiss or motion for summary judgment is frivolous
15 or solely intended to cause unnecessary delay, the court shall award costs and reasonable attorney
16 fees to the party prevailing on the motion.

17 3. Any party shall have the right to an expedited appeal from a trial court order on the
18 special motions described in subsection 2 of this section or from a trial court's failure to rule on
19 the motion on an expedited basis.

20 4. As used in this section, a "public meeting in a quasi-judicial proceeding" means and
21 includes any meeting established and held by a state or local governmental entity, including
22 without limitations meetings or presentations before state, county, city, town or village councils,
23 planning commissions, review boards or commissions.

24 5. Nothing in this section limits or prohibits the exercise of a right or remedy of a party
25 granted pursuant to another constitutional, statutory, common law or administrative provision,
26 including civil actions for defamation.

27 6. If any provision of this section or the application of any provision of this section to
28 a person or circumstance is held invalid, the invalidity shall not affect other provisions or
29 applications of this section that can be given effect without the invalid provision or application,
30 and to this end the provisions of this section are severable.

31 7. The provisions of this section shall apply to all causes of actions.

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