



California
LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION

AB-1521 Disability access: construction-related accessibility claims. (2015-2016)

Assembly Bill No. 1521

CHAPTER 755

An act to amend Sections 55.3, 55.32, and 55.54 of the Civil Code, to amend Section 425.50 of, and to add Section 425.55 to, the Code of Civil Procedure, and to add Sections 68085.35 and 70616.5 to the Government Code, relating to disability access, and declaring the urgency thereof, to take effect immediately.

[Approved by Governor October 10, 2015. Filed with Secretary of State October 10, 2015.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1521, Committee on Judiciary. Disability access: construction-related accessibility claims.

Existing law provides that individuals with disabilities or medical conditions have the same right as the general public to the full and free use of the streets, highways, sidewalks, walkways, public buildings, medical facilities, public facilities, and other public places, and allows a person who is aggrieved or potentially aggrieved by a violation of specific provisions of law to bring an action to enjoin the violation. Existing law requires an attorney to provide a written advisory with each demand letter or complaint, as defined, sent to or served upon a defendant or potential defendant for any construction-related accessibility claim, as specified.

This bill would require the above-described advisory to include additional information regarding the rights and obligations of business owners and commercial tenants, as specified. In addition to the written advisory, the bill would require an attorney to provide a defendant or potential defendant of a construction-related accessibility claim with a verified answer form developed by the Judicial Council, which would allow a defendant to respond in the event a complaint is filed, as specified. The bill would, on or before July 1, 2016, require the Judicial Council to update the advisory form and adopt the answer form, as specified.

Existing law requires a demand letter alleging a violation of a construction-related accessibility standard or asserting a construction-related accessibility claim to include specified information and, among other things, until January 1, 2016, requires an attorney who provides a demand letter to send a copy of the demand letter to the State Bar of California.

This bill would extend that requirement until January 1, 2019.

Existing law requires an attorney who sends or serves a complaint on the basis of a construction-related accessibility claim to also send a copy of the complaint to the California Commission on Disability Access.

This bill would additionally require the attorney to notify the commission within 5 business days of judgment, settlement, or dismissal of the claim or claims alleged in the complaint of specified information, including, among others, whether or not the construction-related accessibility violations alleged in the complaint were remedied in whole or in part after the plaintiff filed a complaint or provided a demand letter.

Existing law requires every pleading, petition, or other similar paper to be signed by an attorney, or the party in cases where the party is not represented by counsel, as specified. Existing law further provides that an attorney or unrepresented party who presents a pleading, petition, or other similar paper to the court is certifying that

specified conditions have been met, including, but not limited to, that the action is not being presented primarily for an improper purpose, such as to harass or to cause unnecessary delay.

This bill would specify that those requirements and provisions apply to a complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility claim.

Existing law authorizes a defendant to file a request for a court stay and an early evaluation conference in the proceedings under certain circumstances, and tolls the period for responsive pleadings.

This bill would specify that these provisions also apply if a defendant is a business that has been served with a complaint filed by a high-frequency litigant, as defined, or is a business requesting an early evaluation conference.

Existing law, upon the filing of an application for a court stay and an early evaluation conference by a defendant, requires the court to immediately issue an order that does certain things, including, but not limited to, scheduling a mandatory early evaluation conference for a date as soon as possible from the date of the order, but in no event later than 70 days after the issuance of the order.

This bill would, if requested by the defendant, additionally require the court order to direct the parties and their counsel to meet at the premises, or other place as specified, no later than 30 days after issuance of the court order, to jointly inspect the premises, and review any programmatic or policy issues, that are claimed to constitute a violation of a construction-related accessibility standard. The bill would authorize the court to allow a plaintiff who is unable to meet in person at the premises to be excused from participation, or participate by alternative means, for good cause and would provide that a plaintiff or plaintiff's counsel is not required to attend more than one in-person site meeting.

Existing law requires a complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility claim to be verified by the plaintiff or be subject to a motion to strike, and further requires that an allegation of a construction-related accessibility claim in a complaint state facts sufficient to allow a reasonable person to identify the basis of the violation, including, but not limited to, a plain language explanation of the specific access barrier or barriers the individual encountered, or by which the individual alleges he or she was deterred.

This bill would, for cases filed by or on behalf of a high-frequency litigant, require the complaint to also state whether the complaint is filed by, or on behalf of, a high-frequency litigant, the number of complaints alleging a construction-related accessibility claim that the high-frequency litigant has filed during the 12 months prior to filing the complaint, and the reason why the individual visited the place of public accommodation. By expanding the definition of the crime of perjury, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

Existing law imposes a supplemental fee for filing first papers in certain civil proceedings, including, but not limited to, certain complex cases.

This bill would, in addition to the first paper filing fee, require payment of a single high-frequency litigant fee of \$1,000, at the time of the filing of the first paper if the complaint alleges a construction-related accessibility claim and the plaintiff is a high-frequency litigant, and would make conforming changes related to the distribution of those fees.

Existing constitutional provisions require a statute that limits the right of public access to meeting or writings of public officials to be adopted with findings demonstrating the interest to be protected by that limitation and the need to protect that interest.

This bill would declare that it includes limitations on access, that the interests to be protected are the privacy rights of the litigants, and that the need to protect those interests is to prevent a chilling effect on litigation.

This bill would also make other conforming changes.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

This bill would declare that it is to take effect immediately as an urgency statute.

Vote: 2/3 Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 55.3 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

55.3. (a) For purposes of this section, the following apply:

(1) "Complaint" means a civil complaint that is filed or is to be filed with a court and is sent to or served upon a defendant on the basis of one or more construction-related accessibility claims, as defined in this section.

(2) "Construction-related accessibility claim" means any claim of a violation of any construction-related accessibility standard, as defined by paragraph (6) of subdivision (a) of Section 55.52, with respect to a place of public accommodation. "Construction-related accessibility claim" does not include a claim of interference with housing within the meaning of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) of Section 54.1, or any claim of interference caused by something other than the construction-related accessibility condition of the property, including, but not limited to, the conduct of any person.

(3) "Demand for money" means a prelitigation written document or oral statement that is provided or issued to a building owner or tenant, or the owner's or tenant's agent or employee, that does all of the following:

(A) Alleges that the site is in violation of one or more construction-related accessibility standards, as defined in paragraph (6) of subdivision (a) of Section 55.52, or alleges one or more construction-related accessibility claims, as defined in paragraph (2).

(B) Contains or makes a request or demand for money or an offer or agreement to accept money.

(C) Is provided or issued whether or not the attorney intends to file a complaint, or eventually files a complaint, in state or federal court.

(4) "Demand letter" means a prelitigation written document that is provided to a building owner or tenant, or the owner's or tenant's agent or employee, that alleges the site is in violation of one or more construction-related accessibility standards, as defined in paragraph (6) of subdivision (a) of Section 55.52, or alleges one or more construction-related accessibility claims, as defined in paragraph (2), and is provided whether or not the attorney intends to file a complaint, or eventually files a complaint, in state or federal court.

(b) An attorney shall provide the following items with each demand letter or complaint sent to or served upon a defendant or potential defendant alleging a construction-related accessibility claim:

(1) A written advisory on the form described in subparagraph (B), or, until that form is available, on a separate page or pages that are clearly distinguishable from the demand letter or complaint. The advisory shall not be required in subsequent communications following the initial demand letter or initial complaint unless a new construction-related accessibility claim is asserted in the subsequent demand letter or amended complaint.

(A) The advisory shall state as follows:

STATE LAW REQUIRES THAT YOU GET THIS IMPORTANT ADVISORY INFORMATION FOR BUILDING OWNERS AND TENANTS

This information is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean through the Judicial Council of California. Persons with visual impairments can get assistance in viewing this form through the Judicial Council Internet Web site at www.courts.ca.gov.

California law requires that you receive this information because the demand letter or court complaint you received with this document claims that your building or property does not comply with one or more existing construction-related accessibility laws or regulations protecting the civil rights of persons with disabilities to access public places.

YOU HAVE IMPORTANT LEGAL OBLIGATIONS. Compliance with disability access laws is a serious and significant responsibility that applies to all California building owners and tenants with buildings open for business to the public. You may obtain information about your legal obligations and how to comply with disability access laws through the Division of the State Architect at www.dgs.ca.gov. Information is also available from the California Commission on Disability Access at www.cdda.ca.gov/guide.htm.

YOU HAVE IMPORTANT LEGAL RIGHTS. The allegations made in the accompanying demand letter or court complaint do not mean that you are required to pay any money unless and until a court finds you liable. Moreover, RECEIPT OF A DEMAND LETTER OR COURT COMPLAINT AND THIS ADVISORY DOES NOT

NECESSARILY MEAN YOU WILL BE FOUND LIABLE FOR ANYTHING. You will have the right if you are later sued to fully present your explanation why you believe you have not in fact violated disability access laws or have corrected the violation or violations giving rise to the claim.

You have the right to seek assistance or advice about this demand letter or court complaint from any person of your choice. If you have insurance, you may also wish to contact your insurance provider. Your best interest may be served by seeking legal advice or representation from an attorney, but you may also represent yourself and file the necessary court papers to protect your interests if you are served with a court complaint. If you have hired an attorney to represent you, you should immediately notify your attorney.

If a court complaint has been served on you, you will get a separate advisory notice with the complaint advising you of special options and procedures available to you under certain conditions.

ADDITIONAL THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

ATTORNEY MISCONDUCT. Except for limited circumstances, state law generally requires that a prelitigation demand letter from an attorney **MAY NOT MAKE A REQUEST OR DEMAND FOR MONEY OR AN OFFER OR AGREEMENT TO ACCEPT MONEY.** Moreover, a demand letter from an attorney **MUST INCLUDE THE ATTORNEY'S STATE BAR LICENSE NUMBER.**

If you believe the attorney who provided you with this notice and prelitigation demand letter is not complying with state law, you may send a copy of the demand letter you received from the attorney to the State Bar of California by facsimile transmission to 1-415-538-2171, or by mail to the State Bar of California, 180 Howard Street, San Francisco, CA, 94105, Attention: Professional Competence.

REDUCING YOUR DAMAGES. If you are a small business owner and correct all of the construction-related violations that are the basis of the complaint against you within 30 days of being served with the complaint, you may qualify for reduced damages. You may wish to consult an attorney to obtain legal advice. You may also wish to contact the California Commission on Disability Access for additional information about the rights and obligations of business owners.

COMMERCIAL TENANT. If you are a commercial tenant, you may not be responsible for ensuring that some or all portions of the premises you lease for your business, including common areas such as parking lots, are accessible to the public because those areas may be the responsibility of your landlord. You may want to refer to your lease agreement and consult with an attorney or contact your landlord, to determine if your landlord is responsible for maintaining and improving some or all of the areas you lease.

(B) On or before July 1, 2016, the Judicial Council shall update the advisory form that may be used by an attorney to comply with the requirements of subparagraph (A). The advisory form shall be in substantially the same format and include all of the text set forth in subparagraph (A). The advisory form shall be available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean, and shall include a statement that the advisory form is available in additional languages, and the Judicial Council Internet Web site address where the different versions of the advisory form are located. The advisory form shall include Internet Web site information for the Division of the State Architect and the California Commission on Disability Access.

(2) A verified answer form developed by the Judicial Council, which allows a defendant to respond to the complaint in the event a complaint is filed.

(A) The answer form shall be written in plain language and allow the defendant to state any relevant information affecting the defendant's liability or damages including, but not limited to, the following:

(i) Specific denials of the allegations in the complaint, including whether the plaintiff has demonstrated that he or she was denied full and equal access to the place of public accommodation on a particular occasion pursuant to Section 55.56.

(ii) Potential affirmative defenses available to the defendant, including:

(I) An assertion that the defendant's landlord is responsible for ensuring that some or all of the property leased by the defendant, including the areas at issue in the complaint, are accessible to the public. The defendant shall provide facts supporting that assertion, and the name and contact information of the defendant's landlord.

(II) Any other affirmative defense the defendant wishes to assert.

(iii) A request to meet in person at the subject premises, if the defendant qualifies for an early evaluation conference pursuant to Section 55.54.

(iv) Any other information that the defendant believes is relevant to his or her potential liability or damages, including that the defendant qualifies for reduced damages pursuant to paragraph (1) or (2) of subdivision (f) of Section 55.56, and, if so, any facts supporting that assertion.

(B) The answer form shall provide instructions to a defendant who wishes to file the form as an answer to the complaint. The form shall also notify the defendant that he or she may use the completed form as an informal response to a demand letter or for settlement discussion purposes.

(C) On or before July 1, 2016, the Judicial Council shall adopt the answer form that may be used by an attorney to comply with the requirements of this paragraph, and shall post the answer form on the Judicial Council Internet Web site.

(c) Subdivision (b) applies only to a demand letter or complaint made by an attorney. This section does not affect the right to file a civil complaint under any other law or regulation protecting the physical access rights of persons with disabilities. Additionally, this section does not require a party to provide or send a demand letter to another party before proceeding against that party with a civil complaint.

(d) This section does not apply to an action brought by the Attorney General or any district attorney, city attorney, or county counsel.

SEC. 2. Section 55.32 of the Civil Code, as added by Section 5 of Chapter 383 of the Statutes of 2012, is amended to read:

55.32. (a) An attorney who provides a demand letter, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 55.3, shall do all of the following:

(1) Include the attorney's State Bar license number in the demand letter.

(2) Contemporaneously with providing the demand letter, send a copy of the demand letter to the State Bar of California by facsimile transmission at 1-415-538-2171, or by mail to 180 Howard Street, San Francisco, CA, 94105, Attention: Professional Competence.

(3) Within five business days of providing the demand letter, send a copy of the demand letter to the California Commission on Disability Access.

(b) An attorney who sends or serves a complaint, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 55.3, shall do both of the following:

(1) Send a copy of the complaint to the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days of sending or serving the complaint.

(2) Notify the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days of judgment, settlement, or dismissal of the claim or claims alleged in the complaint of the following information in a standard format specified by the commission:

(A) The date of the judgment, settlement, or dismissal.

(B) Whether or not the construction-related accessibility violations alleged in the complaint were remedied in whole or in part after the plaintiff filed a complaint or provided a demand letter, as defined by Section 55.3.

(C) If the construction-related accessibility violations alleged in the complaint were not remedied in whole or in part after the plaintiff filed a complaint or provided a demand letter, as defined by Section 55.3, whether or not another favorable result was achieved after the plaintiff filed the complaint or provided the demand letter.

(D) Whether or not the defendant submitted an application for an early evaluation conference and stay pursuant to Section 55.54, whether the defendant requested a site inspection, the date of any early evaluation conference, and the date of any site inspection.

(c) A violation of paragraph (2) or (3) of subdivision (a) or subdivision (b) shall constitute cause for the imposition of discipline of an attorney where a copy of the complaint, demand letter, or notification of a case outcome is not sent to the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days, or a copy of the demand letter is not sent to the State Bar within five business days. In the event the State Bar receives information indicating that an attorney has failed to send a copy of the complaint, demand letter, or notification

of a case outcome to the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days, the State Bar shall investigate to determine whether paragraph (3) of subdivision (a) or subdivision (b) has been violated.

(d) Notwithstanding subdivisions (a) and (b), an attorney is not required to send to the State Bar of California or the California Commission on Disability Access a copy of any subsequent demand letter or amended complaint in the same dispute following the initial demand letter or complaint, unless that subsequent demand letter or amended complaint alleges a new construction-related accessibility claim.

(e) A demand letter, complaint, or notification of a case outcome sent to the California Commission on Disability Access shall be for the informational purposes of Section 8299.08 of the Government Code. A demand letter received by the State Bar from either the sender or recipient of the demand letter shall be reviewed by the State Bar to determine whether subdivision (b) or (c) of Section 55.31 has been violated.

(f) (1) Commencing July 31, 2013, and annually each July 31 thereafter, the State Bar shall report to the Legislature and the Chairs of the Senate and Assembly Committees on Judiciary, both of the following with respect to demand letters received by the State Bar:

(A) The number of investigations opened to date on a suspected violation of subdivision (b) or (c) of Section 55.31.

(B) Whether any disciplinary action resulted from the investigation, and the results of that disciplinary action.

(2) A report to be submitted pursuant to this subdivision shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

(g) The California Commission on Disability Access shall review and report on the demand letters, complaints, and notifications of case outcomes it receives as provided in Section 8299.08 of the Government Code.

(h) Paragraphs (2) and (3) of subdivision (a) and subdivision (b) shall not apply to a demand letter or complaint sent or filed by an attorney employed or retained by a qualified legal services project or a qualified support center, as defined in Section 6213 of the Business and Professions Code, when acting within the scope of employment in asserting a construction-related accessibility claim. The Legislature finds and declares that qualified legal services projects and support centers are extensively regulated by the State Bar of California, and that there is no evidence of any abusive use of demand letters or complaints by these organizations. The Legislature further finds that, in light of the evidence of the extraordinarily small number of construction-related accessibility cases brought by regulated legal services programs, and given the resources of those programs, exempting regulated legal services programs from the requirements of this section to report to the California Commission on Disability Access will not affect the purpose of the reporting to, and tabulation by, the commission of all other construction-related accessibility claims.

(i) This section shall become operative on January 1, 2013.

(j) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2019, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 3. Section 55.32 of the Civil Code, as added by Section 6 of Chapter 383 of the Statutes of 2012, is amended to read:

55.32. (a) An attorney who provides a demand letter, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 55.3, shall do all of the following:

(1) Include the attorney's State Bar license number in the demand letter.

(2) Within five business days of providing the demand letter, send a copy of the demand letter to the California Commission on Disability Access.

(b) An attorney who sends or serves a complaint, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 55.3, shall do both of the following:

(1) Send a copy of the complaint to the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days of sending or serving the complaint.

(2) Notify the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days of judgment, settlement, or dismissal of the claim or claims alleged in the complaint of the following information in a standard format specified by the commission:

(A) The date of the judgment, settlement, or dismissal.

(B) Whether or not the construction-related accessibility violations alleged in the complaint were remedied in whole or in part after the plaintiff filed a complaint or provided a demand letter, as defined by Section 55.3.

(C) If the construction-related accessibility violations alleged in the complaint were not remedied in whole or in part after the plaintiff filed a complaint or provided a demand letter, as defined by Section 55.3, whether or not another favorable result was achieved after the plaintiff filed the complaint or provided the demand letter.

(D) Whether or not the defendant submitted an application for an early evaluation conference and stay pursuant to Section 55.54, whether the defendant requested a site inspection, the date of any early evaluation conference, and the date of any site inspection.

(c) A violation of paragraph (2) of subdivision (a) or subdivision (b) shall constitute cause for the imposition of discipline of an attorney if a copy of the demand letter, complaint, or notification of a case outcome is not sent to the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days. In the event the State Bar receives information indicating that an attorney has failed to send a copy of the demand letter, complaint, or notification of a case outcome to the California Commission on Disability Access within five business days, the State Bar shall investigate to determine whether paragraph (2) of subdivision (a) or subdivision (b) has been violated.

(d) Notwithstanding subdivisions (a) and (b), an attorney is not required to send to the California Commission on Disability Access a copy of any subsequent demand letter or amended complaint in the same dispute following the initial demand letter or complaint, unless that subsequent demand letter or amended complaint alleges a new construction-related accessibility claim.

(e) A demand letter or notification of a case outcome sent to the California Commission on Disability Access shall be for the informational purposes of Section 8299.08 of the Government Code. A demand letter received by the State Bar from the recipient of the demand letter shall be reviewed by the State Bar to determine whether subdivision (b) or (c) of Section 55.31 has been violated.

(f) (1) Notwithstanding Section 10231.5 of the Government Code, on or before July 31, 2019, and annually thereafter, the State Bar shall report to the Legislature and the Chairs of the Senate and Assembly Judiciary Committees, both of the following with respect to demand letters received by the State Bar:

(A) The number of investigations opened to date on a suspected violation of subdivision (b) or (c) of Section 55.31.

(B) Whether any disciplinary action resulted from the investigation, and the results of that disciplinary action.

(2) A report to be submitted pursuant to this subdivision shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

(g) The California Commission on Disability Access shall review and report on the demand letters, complaints, and notifications of case outcomes it receives as provided in Section 8299.08 of the Government Code.

(h) The expiration of any ground for discipline of an attorney shall not affect the imposition of discipline for any act prior to the expiration. An act or omission that constituted cause for imposition of discipline of an attorney when committed or omitted prior to January 1, 2019, shall continue to constitute cause for the imposition of discipline of that attorney on and after January 1, 2019.

(i) Paragraph (2) of subdivision (a) and subdivision (b) shall not apply to a demand letter or complaint sent or filed by an attorney employed or retained by a qualified legal services project or a qualified support center, as defined in Section 6213 of the Business and Professions Code, when acting within the scope of employment in asserting a construction-related accessibility claim. The Legislature finds and declares that qualified legal services projects and support centers are extensively regulated by the State Bar of California, and that there is no evidence of any abusive use of demand letters or complaints by these organizations. The Legislature further finds that, in light of the evidence of the extraordinarily small number of construction-related accessibility cases brought by regulated legal services programs, and given the resources of those programs, exempting regulated legal services programs from the requirements of this section to report to the California Commission on Disability Access will not affect the purpose of the reporting to, and tabulation by, the commission of all other construction-related accessibility claims.

(j) This section shall become operative on January 1, 2019.

SEC. 4. Section 55.54 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

55.54. (a) (1) An attorney who causes a summons and complaint to be served in an action that includes a construction-related accessibility claim, including, but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51, 54, 54.1, or 55, shall, at the same time, cause to be served a copy of the application form specified in subdivision (c) and a copy of the following notice, including, until January 1, 2013, the bracketed text, to the defendant on separate papers that shall be served with the summons and complaint:

ADVISORY NOTICE TO DEFENDANT

YOU MAY BE ENTITLED TO ASK FOR A COURT STAY (AN ORDER TEMPORARILY STOPPING ANY LAWSUIT) AND EARLY EVALUATION CONFERENCE IN THIS LAWSUIT AND MAY BE ASSESSED REDUCED STATUTORY DAMAGES IF YOU MEET CERTAIN CONDITIONS.

If the construction-related accessibility claim pertains to a site that has a Certified Access Specialist (CASp) inspection report for that site, or to a site where new construction or improvement was approved after January 1, 2008, by the local building permit and inspection process, you may make an immediate request for a court stay and early evaluation conference in the construction-related accessibility claim by filing the attached application form with the court. You may be entitled to the court stay and early evaluation conference regarding the accessibility claim only if ALL of the statements in the application form applicable to you are true.

FURTHER, if you are a defendant described above (with a CASp inspection report or with new construction after January 1, 2008), and, to the best of your knowledge, there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since the CASp report or building department approval of the new construction or improvement that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim, your liability for minimum statutory damages may be reduced to \$1,000 for each offense, unless the violation was intentional, and if all construction-related accessibility violations giving rise to the claim are corrected within 60 days of being served with this complaint.

ALSO, if your business has been served with a complaint filed by a high-frequency litigant, as defined in subdivision (b) of Section 425.55 of the Code of Civil Procedure, asserting a construction-related accessibility claim, including, but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51, 54, 54.1, or 55 of the Civil Code, you may also be entitled to a court stay and an early evaluation conference. If you choose to request a stay and early evaluation conference, you may also request to meet in person with the plaintiff and counsel for both parties, as well as experts if the parties so elect, at the subject premises no later than 30 days after issuance of the court order to jointly inspect the portions of the subject premises and review any conditions that are claimed to constitute a violation of a construction-related accessibility standard.

IN ADDITION, if your business is a small business that, over the previous three years, or the existence of the business if less than three years, employs 25 or fewer employees on average over that time period and meets specified gross receipts criteria, you may also be entitled to the court stay and early evaluation conference and your minimum statutory damages for each claim may be reduced to \$2,000 for each offense, unless the violation was intentional, and if all the alleged construction-related accessibility violations are corrected within 30 days of being served with the complaint.

If you plan to correct the violations giving rise to the claim, you should take pictures and measurements or similar action to document the condition of the physical barrier asserted to be the basis for a violation before undertaking any corrective action in case a court needs to see the condition of a barrier before it was corrected.

The court will schedule the conference to be held within 70 days after you file the attached application form.

[If you are not a defendant with a CASp inspection report, until a form is adopted by the Judicial Council, you may use the attached form if you modify the form and supplement it with your declaration stating any one of the following:

(1) Until January 1, 2018, that the site's new construction or improvement on or after January 1, 2008, and before January 1, 2016, was approved pursuant to the local building permit and inspection process; that, to the best of your knowledge, there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since the building department approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim; and that all violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of the complaint being served.

(2) That the site's new construction or improvement passed inspection by a local building department inspector who is a certified access specialist; that, to the best of your knowledge, there have been no modifications or

alterations completed or commenced since that inspection approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim; and that all violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of the complaint being served.

(3) That your business is a small business with 25 or fewer employees and meets the gross receipts criteria set out in Section 55.56 of the Civil Code, and that all violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 30 days of being served with the complaint.]

The court will also issue an immediate stay of the proceedings unless the plaintiff has obtained a temporary restraining order in the construction-related accessibility claim. You may obtain a copy of the application form, filing instructions, and additional information about the stay and early evaluation conference through the Judicial Council Internet Web site at www.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-start.htm.

You may file the application after you are served with a summons and complaint, but no later than your first court pleading or appearance in this case, which is due within 30 days after you receive the summons and complaint. If you do not file the application, you will still need to file your reply to the lawsuit within 30 days after you receive the summons and complaint to contest it. You may obtain more information about how to represent yourself and how to file a reply without hiring an attorney at www.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-start.htm.

You may file the application without the assistance of an attorney, but it may be in your best interest to immediately seek the assistance of an attorney experienced in disability access laws when you receive a summons and complaint. You may make an offer to settle the case, and it may be in your interest to put that offer in writing so that it may be considered under Section 55.55 of the Civil Code.

(2) An attorney who files a Notice of Substitution of Counsel to appear as counsel for a plaintiff who, acting in propria persona, had previously filed a complaint in an action that includes a construction-related accessibility claim, including, but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51, 54, 54.1, or 55, shall, at the same time, cause to be served a copy of the application form specified in subdivision (c) and a copy of the notice specified in paragraph (1) upon the defendant on separate pages that shall be attached to the Notice of Substitution of Counsel.

(b) (1) Notwithstanding any other law, upon being served with a summons and complaint asserting a construction-related accessibility claim, including, but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51, 54, 54.1, or 55, a qualified defendant, or other defendant as defined in paragraph (2), may file a request for a court stay and early evaluation conference in the proceedings of that claim prior to or simultaneous with that defendant's responsive pleading or other initial appearance in the action that includes the claim. If that defendant filed a timely request for stay and early evaluation conference before a responsive pleading was due, the period for filing a responsive pleading shall be tolled until the stay is lifted. Any responsive pleading filed simultaneously with a request for stay and early evaluation conference may be amended without prejudice, and the period for filing that amendment shall be tolled until the stay is lifted.

(2) This subdivision shall also apply to a defendant if any of the following apply:

(A) Until January 1, 2018, the site's new construction or improvement on or after January 1, 2008, and before January 1, 2016, was approved pursuant to the local building permit and inspection process, and the defendant declares with the application that, to the best of the defendant's knowledge, there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since that approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim, and that all violations have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of being served with the complaint.

(B) The site's new construction or improvement was approved by a local public building department inspector who is a certified access specialist, and the defendant declares with the application that, to the best of the defendant's knowledge, there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since that approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim, and that all violations have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of being served with the complaint.

(C) The defendant is a small business described in subdivision (f) of Section 55.56, and the defendant declares with the application that all violations have been corrected, or will be corrected within 30 days of being served with the complaint.

(D) The defendant is a business that has been served with a complaint filed by a high-frequency litigant, as defined in subdivision (b) of Section 425.55 of the Code of Civil Procedure, asserting a construction-related accessibility claim, including, but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51, 54, 54.1, or 55.

(3) Notwithstanding any other law, if the plaintiff had acted in propria persona in filing a complaint that includes a construction-related accessibility claim, including, but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51, 54, 54.1, or 55, a qualified defendant, or a defendant described by paragraph (2), who is served with a Notice of Substitution of Counsel shall have 30 days to file an application for a stay and an early evaluation conference. The application may be filed prior to or after the defendant's filing of a responsive pleading or other initial appearance in the action that includes the claim, except that an application may not be filed in a claim in which an early evaluation conference or settlement conference has already been held on the claim.

(c) (1) An application for an early evaluation conference and stay by a qualified defendant shall include a signed declaration that states both of the following:

(A) The site identified in the complaint has been CASp-inspected or meets applicable standards, or is CASp determination pending or has been inspected by a CASp, and if the site is CASp-inspected or meets applicable standards, there have been no modifications completed or commenced since the date of inspection that may impact compliance with construction-related accessibility standards to the best of the defendant's knowledge.

(B) An inspection report pertaining to the site has been issued by a CASp. The inspection report shall be provided to the court and the plaintiff at least 15 days prior to the court date set for the early evaluation conference.

(2) An application for an early evaluation conference and stay by a defendant described by subparagraph (A) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b), which may be filed until January 1, 2018, shall include a signed declaration that states all of the following:

(A) The site's new construction or improvement was approved pursuant to the local building permit and inspection process on or after January 1, 2008, and before January 1, 2016.

(B) To the best of the defendant's knowledge there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since that approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim.

(C) All construction-related violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of the complaint being served upon the defendant.

(3) An application for an early evaluation conference and stay by a defendant described in subparagraph (B) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) shall include a signed declaration that states all of the following:

(A) The site's new construction or improvement was approved by a local building department inspector who is a certified access specialist.

(B) To the best of the defendant's knowledge there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since that approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim.

(C) All construction related violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of the complaint being served upon the defendant.

(4) An application for an early evaluation conference and stay by a defendant described by subparagraph (C) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) shall include the materials listed in paragraphs (5) and (6) of this subdivision, and shall include a signed declaration that states both of the following:

(A) The defendant is a small business that employs 25 or fewer employees and meets the gross receipts eligibility criteria provided in paragraph (2) of subdivision (f) of Section 55.56.

(B) All construction-related violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 30 days of the complaint being served upon the defendant.

(5) An application for an early evaluation conference and stay by a small business defendant under paragraph (4) shall include evidence showing correction of all violations within 30 days of the service of the complaint and served upon the plaintiff with the reply unless the application is filed prior to completion of the corrections. In that event, the evidence shall be provided to the court and served upon the plaintiff within 10 days of the court

order as provided in paragraph (4) of subdivision (d). This paragraph shall not be construed to extend the permissible time under subdivision (f) of Section 55.56 to make the corrections.

(6) An application for an early evaluation conference and stay by a small business defendant under paragraph (4) shall also include both of the following, which shall be confidential documents filed only with the court and not served upon or available to the plaintiff:

(A) Proof of the defendant's number of employees, as shown by wage report forms filed with the Employment Development Department.

(B) Proof of the defendant's average gross receipts for the previous three years, or for the existence of the business if less than three years, as shown by a federal or state tax document.

(7) An application for an early evaluation conference and stay by a defendant described by subparagraph (D) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) shall include a signed declaration that the defendant was served with a complaint filed by a high-frequency litigant, as defined in subdivision (b) of Section 425.55 of the Code of Civil Procedure, asserting a construction-related accessibility claim, including, but not limited to, a claim brought under Section 51, 54, 54.1, or 55.

(8) The following provisional request and notice forms may be used and filed by a qualified defendant until forms are adopted by the Judicial Council for those purposes pursuant to subdivision (l):

PRINTER PLEASE NOTE: TIP-IN MATERIAL TO BE INSERTED

(9) The provisional forms and any replacement Judicial Council forms shall include the defendant's declaration of proof of service of the application, the notice of the court's order, and the court's order pursuant to subdivision (d).

(d) Upon the filing of an application for stay and early evaluation conference by a qualified defendant, or a defendant described by paragraph (2) of subdivision (b), the court shall immediately issue an order that does all of the following:

(1) Grants a 90-day stay of the proceedings with respect to the construction-related accessibility claim, unless the plaintiff has obtained temporary injunctive relief that is still in place for the construction-related accessibility claim.

(2) Schedules a mandatory early evaluation conference for a date as soon as possible from the date of the order, but in no event later than 70 days after issuance of the order, and in no event earlier than 50 days after the filing of the request.

(3) Directs the parties, and any other person whose authority is required to negotiate and enter into settlement, to appear in person at the time set for the conference. Appearance by counsel shall not satisfy the requirement that the parties or those with negotiation and settlement authority personally appear, provided, however, that the court may allow a party who is unable to attend in person due to his or her disability to participate in the hearing by telephone or other alternative means or through a representative authorized to settle the case.

(4) (A) Directs the qualified defendant to file with the court and serve on the plaintiff a copy of any relevant CASp inspection report at least 15 days before the date of the conference. The CASp inspection report is confidential and is available only as set forth in paragraph (5) of this subdivision and in paragraph (4) of subdivision (e).

(B) Directs a defendant described by subparagraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) who has filed a declaration stating that the violation or violations have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of service of the complaint to file with the court and serve on the plaintiff evidence showing correction of the violation or violations within 10 calendar days after the completion of the corrections.

(C) Directs a defendant described by subparagraph (C) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) who has filed a declaration stating that the violation or violations have been corrected, or will be corrected within 30 days of service of the complaint to file with the court and serve on the plaintiff within 10 days after issuance of the court order evidence of correction of the violation or violations, if that evidence showing correction was not filed previously with the application and served on the plaintiff.

(5) Directs the parties that the CASp inspection report may be disclosed only to the court, the parties to the action, the parties' attorneys, those individuals employed or retained by the attorneys to assist in the litigation, and insurance representatives or others involved in the evaluation and settlement of the case.

(6) If the defendant so requests, directs the parties that no later than 30 days after issuance of the court order the parties and their counsel, accompanied by their experts if the parties so elect, shall meet in person at the subject premises. They shall jointly inspect the portions of the subject premises, and shall review any programmatic or policy issues, that are claimed to constitute a violation of a construction-related accessibility standard. The court may allow a plaintiff who is unable to meet in person at the subject premises to be excused from participating in a site visit or to participate by telephone or other alternative means for good cause. A plaintiff or plaintiff's counsel is not required, but may agree, to attend more than one in-person site meeting. A site inspection pursuant to this paragraph shall not affect the right of the parties to conduct otherwise appropriate discovery.

(7) Directs the plaintiff to file with the court and serve on the defendant at least 15 days before the date of the conference a statement that includes, to the extent reasonably known, for use solely for the purpose of the early evaluation conference, all of the following:

(A) An itemized list of specific conditions on the subject premises that are the basis of the claimed violations of construction-related accessibility standards in the plaintiff's complaint.

(B) The amount of damages claimed.

(C) The amount of attorney's fees and costs incurred to date, if any, that are being claimed.

(D) Any demand for settlement of the case in its entirety.

(e) (1) A party failing to comply with any court order may be subject to court sanction at the court's discretion.

(2) (A) The court shall lift the stay when the defendant has failed to file and serve the CASp inspection report prior to the early evaluation conference and has failed also to produce the report at the time of the early evaluation conference, unless the defendant shows good cause for that failure.

(B) The court shall lift the stay when a defendant described by paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) has failed to file and serve the evidence showing correction of the violation or violations as required by law.

(3) The court may lift the stay at the conclusion of the early evaluation conference upon a showing of good cause by the plaintiff. Good cause may include the defendant's failure to make reasonably timely progress toward completion of corrections noted by a CASp.

(4) The CASp inspection report filed and served pursuant to subdivision (d) shall remain confidential throughout the stay and shall continue to be confidential until the conclusion of the claim, whether by dismissal, settlement, or final judgment, unless there is a showing of good cause by any party. Good cause may include the defendant's failure to make reasonably timely progress toward completion of corrections noted by a CASp. The confidentiality of the inspection report shall terminate upon the conclusion of the claim, unless the owner of the report obtains a court order pursuant to the California Rules of Court to seal the record.

(f) All discussions at the early evaluation conference shall be subject to Section 1152 of the Evidence Code. It is the intent of the Legislature that the purpose of the evaluation conference shall include, but not be limited to, evaluation of all of the following, as applicable:

(1) Whether the defendant is entitled to the 90-day stay for some or all of the identified issues in the case, as a qualified defendant.

(2) The current condition of the site and the status of any plan of corrections, including whether the qualified defendant has corrected or is willing to correct the alleged violations, and the timeline for doing so.

(3) Whether subdivision (f) of Section 55.56 may be applicable to the case, and whether all violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected within the specified time periods.

(4) Whether the case, including any claim for damages or injunctive relief, can be settled in whole or in part.

(5) Whether the parties should share other information that may facilitate early evaluation and resolution of the dispute.

(g) Nothing in this section precludes any party from making an offer to compromise pursuant to Section 998 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

(h) For a claim involving a qualified defendant, as provided in paragraph (1) of subdivision (b), the court may schedule additional conferences and may extend the 90-day stay for good cause shown, but not to exceed one additional 90-day extension.

(i) Early evaluation conferences shall be conducted by a superior court judge or commissioner, or a court early evaluation conference officer. A commissioner shall not be qualified to conduct early evaluation conferences pursuant to this subdivision unless he or she has received training regarding disability access requirements imposed by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336; 42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq.), state laws that govern access to public facilities, and federal and state regulations adopted pursuant to those laws. For purposes of this subdivision, a "court early evaluation conference officer" means an attorney employed by the court who has received training regarding disability access requirements imposed by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, state laws that govern access to public facilities, and federal and state regulations adopted pursuant to those laws. Attorneys serving in this capacity may also be utilized by the court for other purposes not related to these proceedings.

(j) Nothing in this part shall be deemed to make any inspection report, opinion, statement, or other finding or conclusion of a CASp binding on the court, or to abrogate in any manner the ultimate authority of the court to make all appropriate findings of fact and law. The CASp inspection report and any opinion, statement, finding, or conclusion therein shall be given the weight the trier of fact finds that it deserves.

(k) Nothing in this part shall be construed to invalidate or limit any California construction-related accessibility standard that provides greater or equal protection for the rights of individuals with disabilities than is afforded by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (Public Law 101-336; 42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq.) and the federal regulations adopted pursuant to that act.

(l) (1) The Judicial Council shall, by January 1, 2013, prepare and post on its Internet Web site instructions and a form for use by a qualified defendant, or other defendant described by paragraph (2) of subdivision (b), to file an application for stay and early evaluation conference as provided in subdivisions (b) and (c), a form for the court's notice of stay and early evaluation conference, and any other forms appropriate to implement the provisions relating to early evaluation conferences. Until those forms are adopted, the Judicial Council shall post on its Internet Web site the provisional forms set forth in subdivision (c).

(2) Until the adoption of the forms as provided in paragraph (1), the provisional application form may be used by a defendant described by paragraph (2) of subdivision (b).

(3) In lieu of the provisions specified in number 3 of page 1 of the application form set forth in paragraph (7) of subdivision (c), the application shall include one of the following declarations of the defendant as to the basis for the application, as follows:

(A) That all of the following apply to a defendant described by subparagraph (A) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b):

(i) The site's new construction or improvement was approved pursuant to the local building permit and inspection process on or after January 1, 2008, and before January 1, 2016.

(ii) To the best of the defendant's knowledge there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since that approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim.

(iii) All the violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of the complaint being served.

(B) That all of the following apply to a defendant described by subparagraph (B) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b):

(i) The site's new construction or improvement was approved by a local public building department inspector who is a certified access specialist.

(ii) To the best of the defendant's knowledge there have been no modifications or alterations completed or commenced since that approval that impacted compliance with construction-related accessibility standards with respect to the plaintiff's claim.

(iii) All the violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of the complaint being served.

(C) That both of the following apply to a defendant described by subparagraph (C) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (b):

(i) The defendant is a small business described in paragraph (2) of subdivision (f) of Section 55.56.

(ii) The violation or violations giving rise to the claim have been corrected, or will be corrected within 30 days of the complaint being served.

(4) In lieu of the provision specified in number 4(c) of page 1 of the application form set forth in paragraph (7) of subdivision (c), the application shall include a request that the court order the defendant to do either of the following:

(A) For a defendant who has filed a declaration stating that all violations have been corrected, or will be corrected within 60 days of service of the complaint, file with the court and serve on the plaintiff evidence showing correction of the violation or violations within 10 calendar days of the completion of the corrections.

(B) For a defendant who is a small business that has filed a declaration stating that all the violations have been corrected, or will be corrected within 30 days of the service of the complaint, file with the court and serve on the plaintiff evidence showing correction of the violation or violations within 10 calendar days after issuance of the court order, if that evidence showing correction was not filed previously with the application and served on the plaintiff.

(5) The Judicial Council shall also prepare and post on its Internet Web site instructions and cover pages to assist plaintiffs and defendants, respectively, to comply with their filing responsibilities under subdivision (d). The cover pages shall also provide for the party's declaration of proof of service of the pertinent document served under the court order.

(m) The stay provisions shall not apply to any construction-related accessibility claim in which the plaintiff has been granted temporary injunctive relief that remains in place.

(n) This section shall not apply to any action brought by the Attorney General, or by any district attorney, city attorney, or county counsel.

(o) The amendments to this section made by Senate Bill 1186 of the 2011-12 Regular Session of the Legislature shall apply only to claims filed on or after the operative date of that act. Nothing in this part is intended to affect any complaint filed before that date.

(p) Nothing in this part is intended to affect existing law regarding class action requirements.

SEC. 5. Section 425.50 of the Code of Civil Procedure is amended to read:

425.50. (a) An allegation of a construction-related accessibility claim in a complaint, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 55.52 of the Civil Code, shall state facts sufficient to allow a reasonable person to identify the basis of the violation or violations supporting the claim, including all of the following:

(1) A plain language explanation of the specific access barrier or barriers the individual encountered, or by which the individual alleges he or she was deterred, with sufficient information about the location of the alleged barrier to enable a reasonable person to identify the access barrier.

(2) The way in which the barrier denied the individual full and equal use or access, or in which it deterred the individual, on each particular occasion.

(3) The date or dates of each particular occasion on which the claimant encountered the specific access barrier, or on which he or she was deterred.

(4) (A) Except in complaints that allege physical injury or damage to property, a complaint filed by or on behalf of a high-frequency litigant shall also state all of the following:

(i) Whether the complaint is filed by, or on behalf of, a high-frequency litigant.

(ii) In the case of a high-frequency litigant who is a plaintiff, the number of complaints alleging a construction-related accessibility claim that the high-frequency litigant has filed during the 12 months prior to filing the complaint.

(iii) In the case of a high-frequency litigant who is a plaintiff, the reason the individual was in the geographic area of the defendant's business.

(iv) In the case of a high-frequency litigant who is a plaintiff, the reason why the individual desired to access the defendant's business, including the specific commercial, business, personal, social, leisure, recreational, or other purpose.

(B) As used in this section "high-frequency litigant" has the same meaning as set forth in subdivision (b) of Section 425.55.

(b) (1) A complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility claim, as those terms are defined in subdivision (a) of Section 55.3 of the Civil Code, shall be verified by the plaintiff. A complaint filed without verification shall be subject to a motion to strike.

(2) A complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility claim filed by, or on behalf of, a high-frequency litigant shall state in the caption "ACTION SUBJECT TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL FEE IN GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 70616.5."

(c) A complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility claim shall be signed by at least one attorney of record in the attorney's individual name, or, if the party is not represented by an attorney, shall be signed by the party. By signing the complaint, the attorney or unrepresented party is certifying that, to the best of the person's knowledge, information, and belief, formed after an inquiry reasonable under the circumstances, all of the following conditions are met:

(1) It is not being presented primarily for an improper purpose, such as to harass or to cause unnecessary delay or needless increase in the cost of litigation.

(2) The claims, defenses, and other legal contentions therein are warranted by existing law or by a nonfrivolous argument for the extension, modification, or reversal of existing law or the establishment of new law.

(3) The allegations and other factual contentions have evidentiary support or, if specifically so identified, are likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity for further investigation or discovery.

(4) The denials of factual contentions are warranted on the evidence or, if specifically so identified, are reasonably based on a lack of information or belief.

(d) A court may, after notice and a reasonable opportunity to respond, determine whether subdivision (c) has been violated and, if so, impose sanctions as provided in Section 128.7 for violations of subdivision (b) of Section 128.7.

(e) Nothing in this section shall limit the right of a plaintiff to amend a complaint under Section 472, or with leave of the court under Section 473. However, an amended pleading alleging a construction-related accessibility claim shall be pled as required by subdivision (a).

(f) The determination whether an attorney is a high-frequency litigant shall be made solely on the basis of the verified complaint and any other publicly available documents. Notwithstanding any other law, no party to the proceeding may conduct discovery with respect to whether an attorney is a high-frequency litigant.

(g) This section shall become operative on January 1, 2013.

SEC. 6. Section 425.55 is added to the Code of Civil Procedure, to read:

425.55. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Protection of the civil rights of persons with disabilities is of the utmost importance to this state, and private enforcement is the essential means of achieving that goal, as the law has been designed.

(2) According to information from the California Commission on Disability Access, more than one-half, or 54 percent, of all construction-related accessibility complaints filed between 2012 and 2014 were filed by two law firms. Forty-six percent of all complaints were filed by a total of 14 parties. Therefore, a very small number of plaintiffs have filed a disproportionately large number of the construction-related accessibility claims in the state, from 70 to 300 lawsuits each year. Moreover, these lawsuits are frequently filed against small businesses on the basis of boilerplate complaints, apparently seeking quick cash settlements rather than correction of the accessibility violation. This practice unfairly taints the reputation of other innocent disabled consumers who are merely trying to go about their daily lives accessing public accommodations as they are entitled to have full and equal access under the state's Unruh Civil Rights Act (Section 51 of the Civil Code) and the federal Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336).

(3) Therefore, given these special and unique circumstances, the provisions of this section are warranted for this limited group of plaintiffs.

(b) For the purposes of this article, "high-frequency litigant" means a person, except as specified in paragraph (3), who utilizes court resources in actions arising from alleged construction-related access violations at such a high level that it is appropriate that additional safeguards apply so as to ensure that the claims are warranted. A "high-frequency litigant" means one or more of the following:

(1) A plaintiff who has filed 10 or more complaints alleging a construction-related accessibility violation within the 12-month period immediately preceding the filing of the current complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility violation.

(2) An attorney who has represented as attorney of record 10 or more high-frequency litigant plaintiffs in actions that were resolved within the 12-month period immediately preceding the filing of the current complaint alleging a construction-related accessibility violation, excluding all of the following actions:

(A) An action in which an early evaluation conference was held pursuant to Section 55.54 of the Civil Code.

(B) An action in which judgment was entered in favor of the plaintiff.

(C) An action in which the construction-related accessibility violations alleged in the complaint were remedied in whole or in part, or a favorable result was achieved, after the plaintiff filed a complaint or provided a demand letter, as defined in Section 55.3 of the Civil Code.

(3) This section does not apply to an attorney employed or retained by a qualified legal services project or a qualified support center, as defined in Section 6213 of the Business and Professions Code, when acting within the scope of employment to represent a client in asserting a construction-related accessibility claim, or the client in such a case.

SEC. 7. Section 68085.35 is added to the Government Code, immediately following Section 68085.3, to read:

68085.35. (a) Fees collected under Section 70616.5 shall be deposited in a bank account established by the Administrative Office of the Courts for deposit of fees collected by the courts.

(b) For each one-thousand-dollar (\$1,000) fee listed in subdivision (a), the Administrative Office of the Courts shall distribute specified amounts as follows:

(1) Five hundred dollars (\$500) to the General Fund for use, upon appropriation by the Legislature, by the California Commission on Disability Access.

(2) The remainder of the fee to the Trial Court Trust Fund.

(c) If any of the fees listed in subdivision (a) are reduced or partially waived, the amount of the reduction or partial waiver shall be deducted from the amount to be distributed to each fund in the same proportion as the amount each distribution bears to the total amount of the fee.

(d) No revenue collected pursuant to Section 70616.5 shall be used to supplant existing program funding of the California Commission on Disability Access.

SEC. 8. Section 70616.5 is added to the Government Code, to read:

70616.5. (a) In addition to the first paper filing fee required by Section 70611 or 70613, a single high-frequency litigant fee shall be paid to the clerk on behalf of a plaintiff who is a high-frequency litigant, as that term is defined in Section 425.55 of the Code of Civil Procedure, at the time of the filing of the first paper if the complaint alleges a construction-related accessibility claim, as those terms are defined in subdivision (a) of Section 55.3 of the Civil Code.

(b) The fee established by this section shall be one thousand dollars (\$1,000). The fee shall be transmitted as provided in Section 68085.35.

(c) Failure to pay the fees required by this section shall have the same effect as the failure to pay a filing fee, and shall be subject to the same enforcement and penalties.

SEC. 9. The Legislature finds and declares that Section 3 of this act limits the public's right of access to public documents within the meaning of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution. Pursuant to that

constitutional provision, the Legislature makes the following findings to demonstrate the interest and the need for protecting that interest:

(a) The interest protected by this limitation is the privacy rights of litigants.

(b) The need for protecting those interests is to preclude the chilling effect on litigation if public disclosure were required.

SEC. 10. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.

SEC. 11. This act is an urgency statute necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety within the meaning of Article IV of the Constitution and shall go into immediate effect. The facts constituting the necessity are:

In order to ensure that the courts are not overburdened and are able to provide access to the judicial system for all persons seeking redress of their construction-related accessibility claims, it is necessary that these reasonable requirements placed on high-frequency litigants take effect immediately.