

Introduced by Senator Wolk

January 19, 2016

An act to amend Section 2782 of the Civil Code, relating to contracts.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 885, as introduced, Wolk. Construction contracts: indemnity.

Existing law makes specified provisions in construction contracts void and unenforceable, including provisions that purport to indemnify the promisee against liability for damages for death or bodily injury to persons, injury to property, or any other loss arising from the sole negligence or willful misconduct of the promisee or the promisee's agents who are directly responsible to the promisee, or for defects in design furnished by those persons.

This bill would specify, for construction contracts entered into on or after January 1, 2017, that a design professional, as defined, only has the duty to defend claims that arise out of, or pertain or relate to, negligence, recklessness, or willful misconduct of the design professional. Under the bill, a design professional would not have a duty to defend claims against any other person or entity arising from a construction project, except that person or entity's reasonable defense costs arising out of the design professional's degree of fault, as specified. The bill would prohibit waiver of these provisions and would provide that any clause in a contract that requires a design professional to defend claims against other persons or entities is void and unenforceable. The bill would provide Legislative findings and declarations in support of these provisions.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: no.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
2 following:

3 (a) Errors and omissions insurance for design professionals does
4 not provide coverage for the defense of claims against other persons
5 and other entities involved in construction projects.

6 (b) Requiring design professionals to defend claims against
7 other persons or other entities involved in construction projects
8 when insurance coverage is not available is unfair and contrary to
9 sound public policy.

10 (c) It is sound public policy for all persons and entities in
11 projects to defend themselves against claims of negligence or error.

12 (d) It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this act to
13 prohibit indemnity agreements that require design professionals
14 to defend claims made against other persons or other entities
15 involved in construction projects.

16 SEC. 2. Section 2782 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

17 2782. (a) Except as provided in Sections 2782.1, 2782.2,
18 2782.5, and 2782.6, provisions, clauses, covenants, or agreements
19 contained in, collateral to, or affecting any construction contract
20 and that purport to indemnify the promisee against liability for
21 damages for death or bodily injury to persons, injury to property,
22 or any other loss, damage or expense arising from the sole
23 negligence or willful misconduct of the promisee or the promisee's
24 agents, servants, or independent contractors who are directly
25 responsible to the promisee, or for defects in design furnished by
26 those persons, are against public policy and are void and
27 unenforceable; provided, however, that this section shall not affect
28 the validity of any insurance contract, workers' compensation, or
29 agreement issued by an admitted insurer as defined by the
30 Insurance Code.

31 (b) (1) Except as provided in Sections 2782.1, 2782.2, and
32 2782.5, provisions, clauses, covenants, or agreements contained
33 in, collateral to, or affecting any construction contract with a public
34 agency entered into before January 1, 2013, that purport to impose
35 on the contractor, or relieve the public agency from, liability for
36 the active negligence of the public agency are void and
37 unenforceable.

1 (2) Except as provided in Sections 2782.1, 2782.2, and 2782.5,
2 provisions, clauses, covenants, or agreements contained in,
3 collateral to, or affecting any construction contract with a public
4 agency entered into on or after January 1, 2013, that purport to
5 impose on any contractor, subcontractor, or supplier of goods or
6 services, or relieve the public agency from, liability for the active
7 negligence of the public agency are void and unenforceable.

8 (c) (1) Except as provided in subdivision (d) and Sections
9 2782.1, 2782.2, and 2782.5, provisions, clauses, covenants, or
10 agreements contained in, collateral to, or affecting any construction
11 contract entered into on or after January 1, 2013, with the owner
12 of privately owned real property to be improved and as to which
13 the owner is not acting as a contractor or supplier of materials or
14 equipment to the work, that purport to impose on any contractor,
15 subcontractor, or supplier of goods or services, or relieve the owner
16 from, liability are unenforceable to the extent of the active
17 negligence of the owner, including that of its employees.

18 (2) For purposes of this subdivision, an owner of privately
19 owned real property to be improved includes the owner of any
20 interest therein, other than a mortgage or other interest that is held
21 solely as security for performance of an obligation.

22 (3) This subdivision shall not apply to a homeowner performing
23 a home improvement project on his or her own single family
24 dwelling.

25 (d) For all construction contracts, and amendments thereto,
26 entered into after January 1, 2009, for residential construction, as
27 used in Title 7 (commencing with Section 895) of Part 2 of
28 Division 2, all provisions, clauses, covenants, and agreements
29 contained in, collateral to, or affecting any construction contract,
30 and amendments thereto, that purport to insure or indemnify,
31 including the cost to defend, the builder, as defined in Section 911,
32 or the general contractor or contractor not affiliated with the
33 builder, as described in subdivision (b) of Section 911, by a
34 subcontractor against liability for claims of construction defects
35 are unenforceable to the extent the claims arise out of, pertain to,
36 or relate to the negligence of the builder or contractor or the
37 builder's or contractor's other agents, other servants, or other
38 independent contractors who are directly responsible to the builder,
39 or for defects in design furnished by those persons, or to the extent
40 the claims do not arise out of, pertain to, or relate to the scope of

1 work in the written agreement between the parties. This section
2 shall not be waived or modified by contractual agreement, act, or
3 omission of the parties. Contractual provisions, clauses, covenants,
4 or agreements not expressly prohibited herein are reserved to the
5 agreement of the parties. Nothing in this subdivision shall prevent
6 any party from exercising its rights under subdivision (a) of Section
7 910. This subdivision shall not affect the obligations of an
8 insurance carrier under the holding of *Presley Homes, Inc. v.*
9 *American States Insurance Company* (2001) 90 Cal.App.4th 571.
10 Nor shall this subdivision affect the obligations of a builder or
11 subcontractor pursuant to Title 7 (commencing with Section 895)
12 of Part 2 of Division 2.

13 (e) Subdivision (d) does not prohibit a subcontractor and builder
14 or general contractor from mutually agreeing to the timing or
15 immediacy of the defense and provisions for reimbursement of
16 defense fees and costs, so long as that agreement does not waive
17 or modify the provisions of subdivision (d) subject, however, to
18 paragraphs (1) and (2). A subcontractor shall owe no defense or
19 indemnity obligation to a builder or general contractor for a
20 construction defect claim unless and until the builder or general
21 contractor provides a written tender of the claim, or portion thereof,
22 to the subcontractor which includes all of the information provided
23 to the builder or general contractor by the claimant or claimants,
24 including, but not limited to, information provided pursuant to
25 subdivision (a) of Section 910, relating to claims caused by that
26 subcontractor's scope of work. This written tender shall have the
27 same force and effect as a notice of commencement of a legal
28 proceeding. If a builder or general contractor tenders a claim for
29 construction defects, or a portion thereof, to a subcontractor in the
30 manner specified by this provision, the subcontractor shall elect
31 to perform either of the following, the performance of which shall
32 be deemed to satisfy the subcontractor's defense obligation to the
33 builder or general contractor:

34 (1) Defend the claim with counsel of its choice, and the
35 subcontractor shall maintain control of the defense for any claim
36 or portion of claim to which the defense obligation applies. If a
37 subcontractor elects to defend under this paragraph, the
38 subcontractor shall provide written notice of the election to the
39 builder or general contractor within a reasonable time period
40 following receipt of the written tender, and in no event later than

1 90 days following that receipt. Consistent with subdivision (d),
2 the defense by the subcontractor shall be a complete defense of
3 the builder or general contractor of all claims or portions thereof
4 to the extent alleged to be caused by the subcontractor, including
5 any vicarious liability claims against the builder or general
6 contractor resulting from the subcontractor's scope of work, but
7 not including claims resulting from the scope of work, actions, or
8 omissions of the builder, general contractor, or any other party.
9 Any vicarious liability imposed upon a builder or general contractor
10 for claims caused by the subcontractor electing to defend under
11 this paragraph shall be directly enforceable against the
12 subcontractor by the builder, general contractor, or claimant.

13 (2) Pay, within 30 days of receipt of an invoice from the builder
14 or general contractor, no more than a reasonable allocated share
15 of the builder's or general contractor's defense fees and costs, on
16 an ongoing basis during the pendency of the claim, subject to
17 reallocation consistent with subdivision (d), and including any
18 amounts reallocated upon final resolution of the claim, either by
19 settlement or judgment. The builder or general contractor shall
20 allocate a share to itself to the extent a claim or claims are alleged
21 to be caused by its work, actions, or omissions, and a share to each
22 subcontractor to the extent a claim or claims are alleged to be
23 caused by the subcontractor's work, actions, or omissions,
24 regardless of whether the builder or general contractor actually
25 tenders the claim to any particular subcontractor, and regardless
26 of whether that subcontractor is participating in the defense. Any
27 amounts not collected from any particular subcontractor may not
28 be collected from any other subcontractor.

29 (f) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, if a
30 subcontractor fails to timely and adequately perform its obligations
31 under paragraph (1) of subdivision (e), the builder or general
32 contractor shall have the right to pursue a claim against the
33 subcontractor for any resulting compensatory damages,
34 consequential damages, and reasonable attorney's fees. If a
35 subcontractor fails to timely perform its obligations under
36 paragraph (2) of subdivision (e), the builder or general contractor
37 shall have the right to pursue a claim against the subcontractor for
38 any resulting compensatory and consequential damages, as well
39 as for interest on defense and indemnity costs, from the date
40 incurred, at the rate set forth in subdivision (g) of Section 3260,

1 and for the builder's or general contractor's reasonable attorney's
2 fees incurred to recover these amounts. The builder or general
3 contractor shall bear the burden of proof to establish both the
4 subcontractor's failure to perform under either paragraph (1) or
5 (2) of subdivision (e) and any resulting damages. If, upon request
6 by a subcontractor, a builder or general contractor does not
7 reallocate defense fees to subcontractors within 30 days following
8 final resolution of the claim as described above, the subcontractor
9 shall have the right to pursue a claim against the builder or general
10 contractor for any resulting compensatory and consequential
11 damages, as well as for interest on the fees, from the date of final
12 resolution of the claim, at the rate set forth in subdivision (g) of
13 Section 3260, and the subcontractor's reasonable attorney's fees
14 incurred in connection therewith. The subcontractor shall bear the
15 burden of proof to establish both the failure to reallocate the fees
16 and any resulting damages. Nothing in this section shall prohibit
17 the parties from mutually agreeing to reasonable contractual
18 provisions for damages if any party fails to elect for or perform
19 its obligations as stated in this section.

20 (g) A builder, general contractor, or subcontractor shall have
21 the right to seek equitable indemnity for any claim governed by
22 this section.

23 (h) Nothing in this section limits, restricts, or prohibits the right
24 of a builder, general contractor, or subcontractor to seek equitable
25 indemnity against any supplier, design professional, or product
26 manufacturer.

27 (i) As used in this section, "construction defect" means a
28 violation of the standards set forth in Sections 896 and 897.

29 (j) *(1) Commencing with contracts entered into on or after*
30 *January 1, 2017, a design professional, as defined in paragraph*
31 *(2) of subdivision (c) of Section 2782.8, shall only have the duty*
32 *to defend claims that arise out of, pertain to, or relate to, the*
33 *negligence, recklessness, or willful misconduct of the design*
34 *professional. A design professional shall have no duty to defend*
35 *claims against other persons or entities. A design professional*
36 *shall be obligated to reimburse reasonable defense costs incurred*
37 *by other persons or entities, limited to the design professional's*
38 *degree of fault, as determined by a court or arbitration.*

39 *(2) The provisions of this subdivision shall not be waived or*
40 *modified by contract. Contract provisions in violation of this*

- 1 *subdivision are void and unenforceable. The duty of a design*
- 2 *professional to defend is limited as provided in this subdivision.*

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