

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 915

To amend title 49, United States Code, to provide protection for airline employees who provide certain air safety information.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 4, 1997

Mr. BOEHLERT (for himself and Mr. CLYBURN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

A BILL

To amend title 49, United States Code, to provide protection for airline employees who provide certain air safety information.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Aviation Safety Protec-
5 tion Act of 1997”.

6 **SEC. 2. PROTECTION OF EMPLOYEES PROVIDING AIR**
7 **SAFETY INFORMATION.**

8 (a) GENERAL RULE.—Chapter 421 of title 49,
9 United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the
10 following:

1 “SUBCHAPTER III—WHISTLEBLOWER
2 PROTECTION PROGRAM
3 **“§ 42121. Protection of employees providing air safety**
4 **information**

5 “(a) DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AIRLINE EMPLOY-
6 EES.—No air carrier or contractor or subcontractor of an
7 air carrier may discharge an employee or otherwise dis-
8 criminate against an employee with respect to compensa-
9 tion, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment be-
10 cause the employee (or any person acting pursuant to a
11 request of the employee)—

12 “(1) provided, caused to be provided, or is
13 about to provide or cause to be provided to the Fed-
14 eral Government information relating to air safety
15 under this subtitle or any other law of the United
16 States;

17 “(2) has filed, caused to be filed, or is about to
18 file or cause to be filed a proceeding relating to air
19 carrier safety under this subtitle or any other law of
20 the United States;

21 “(3) testified or is about to testify in such a
22 proceeding; or

23 “(4) assisted or participated or is about to as-
24 sist or participate in such a proceeding.

1 “(b) DEPARTMENT OF LABOR COMPLAINT PROCE-
2 DURE.—

3 “(1) FILING AND NOTIFICATION.—A person
4 who believes that he or she has been discharged or
5 otherwise discriminated against by a person in viola-
6 tion of subsection (a) may, within 180 days after
7 such violation occurs, file (or have any person file on
8 his or her behalf) a complaint with the Secretary of
9 Labor alleging such discharge or discrimination.
10 Upon receipt of such a complaint, the Secretary of
11 Labor shall notify the person named in the com-
12 plaint and the Administrator of the Federal Aviation
13 Administration of the filing of the complaint, of the
14 allegations contained in the complaint, of the sub-
15 stance of evidence supporting the complaint, and of
16 the opportunities which will be afforded to such per-
17 son under paragraph (2).

18 “(2) INVESTIGATION; PRELIMINARY ORDER.—
19 Within 60 days of receipt of a complaint filed under
20 paragraph (1) and after affording the person named
21 in the complaint of an opportunity to submit to the

1 Secretary of Labor a written response to the com-
2 plaint and an opportunity to meet with a representa-
3 tive of the Secretary to present statements from wit-
4 nesses, the Secretary of Labor shall conduct an in-
5 vestigation and determine whether there is reason-
6 able cause to believe that the complaint has merit
7 and notify the complainant and the person alleged to
8 have committed a violation of subsection (a) of the
9 Secretary's findings. If the Secretary of Labor con-
10 cludes that there is a reasonable cause to believe
11 that a violation of subsection (a) has occurred, the
12 Secretary shall accompany the Secretary's findings
13 with a preliminary order providing the relief pre-
14 scribed by paragraph (3)(B). Within 30 days after
15 notification of findings under this paragraph, either
16 the person alleged to have committed the violation or
17 the complainant may file objections to the findings
18 or preliminary order, or both, and request a hearing
19 on the record. The filing of such objections shall not
20 operate to stay any reinstatement remedy contained
21 in the preliminary order. Such hearings shall be con-
22 ducted expeditiously. If a hearing is not requested
23 within such 30-day period, the preliminary order
24 shall be deemed a final order which is not subject to
25 judicial review.

1 “(3) FINAL ORDER.—

2 “(A) DEADLINE FOR ISSUANCE; SETTLE-
3 MENT AGREEMENTS.—Within 120 days after
4 conclusion of a hearing under paragraph (2),
5 the Secretary of Labor shall issue a final order
6 providing the relief prescribed by this para-
7 graph or denying the complaint. At any time
8 before issuance of a final order, a proceeding
9 under this subsection may be terminated on the
10 basis of a settlement agreement entered into by
11 the Secretary of Labor, the complainant, and
12 the person alleged to have committed the viola-
13 tion.

14 “(B) REMEDY.—If, in response to a com-
15 plaint filed under paragraph (1), the Secretary
16 of Labor determines that a violation of sub-
17 section (a) has occurred, the Secretary of Labor
18 shall order the person who committed such vio-
19 lation to—

20 “(i) take affirmative action to abate
21 the violation;

22 “(ii) reinstate the complainant to his
23 or her former position together with the
24 compensation (including back pay), terms,

1 conditions, and privileges associated with
2 his or her employment; and

3 “(iii) provide compensatory damages
4 to the complainant.

5 If such an order is issued under this paragraph,
6 the Secretary of Labor, at the request of the
7 complainant, shall assess against the person
8 against whom the order is issued a sum equal
9 to the aggregate amount of all costs and ex-
10 penses (including attorneys’ and expert witness
11 fees) reasonably incurred, as determined by the
12 Secretary of Labor, by the complainant for, or
13 in connection with, the bringing of the com-
14 plaint upon which the order was issued.

15 “(C) FRIVOLOUS COMPLAINTS.—If the
16 Secretary of Labor finds that a complaint
17 under paragraph (1) is frivolous or has been
18 brought in bad faith, the Secretary of Labor
19 may award to the prevailing employer a reason-
20 able attorney’s fee not exceeding \$5,000.

21 “(4) REVIEW.—

22 “(A) APPEAL TO COURT OF APPEALS.—
23 Any person adversely affected or aggrieved by
24 an order issued under paragraph (3) may ob-
25 tain review of the order in the United States

1 Court of Appeals for the circuit in which the
2 violation, with respect to which the order was
3 issued, allegedly occurred or the circuit in which
4 the complainant resided on the date of such vio-
5 lation. The petition for review must be filed
6 within 60 days from the issuance of the order
7 of the Secretary of Labor. Review shall conform
8 to chapter 7 of title 5, United States Code. The
9 commencement of proceedings under this sub-
10 paragraph shall not, unless ordered by the
11 court, operate as a stay of the order.

12 “(B) LIMITATION ON COLLATERAL AT-
13 TACK.—An order of the Secretary of Labor
14 with respect to which review could have been
15 obtained under subparagraph (A) shall not be
16 subject to judicial review in any criminal or
17 other civil proceeding.

18 “(5) ENFORCEMENT OF ORDER BY SECRETARY
19 OF LABOR.—Whenever a person has failed to comply
20 with an order issued under paragraph (3), the Sec-
21 retary of Labor may file a civil action in the United
22 States district court for the district in which the vio-
23 lation was found to occur to enforce such order. In
24 actions brought under this paragraph, the district
25 courts shall have jurisdiction to grant all appropriate

1 relief including, but not limited to, injunctive relief
2 and compensatory damages.

3 “(6) ENFORCEMENT OF ORDER BY PARTIES.—

4 “(A) COMMENCEMENT OF ACTION.—A per-
5 son on whose behalf an order was issued under
6 paragraph (3) may commence a civil action
7 against the person to whom such order was is-
8 sued to require compliance with such order. The
9 appropriate United States district court shall
10 have jurisdiction, without regard to the amount
11 in controversy or the citizenship of the parties,
12 to enforce such order.

13 “(B) ATTORNEY FEES.—The court, in is-
14 suing any final order under this paragraph,
15 may award costs of litigation (including reason-
16 able attorney and expert witness fees) to any
17 party whenever the court determines such
18 award is appropriate.

19 “(c) MANDAMUS.—Any nondiscretionary duty im-
20 posed by this section shall be enforceable in a mandamus
21 proceeding brought under section 1361 of title 28, United
22 States Code.

23 “(d) NONAPPLICABILITY TO DELIBERATE VIOLA-
24 TIONS.—Subsection (a) of this section shall not apply with

1 respect to an employee of an air carrier who, acting with-
2 out direction from such air carrier (or such air carrier’s
3 agent), deliberately causes a violation of any requirement
4 relating to air carrier safety under this subtitle or any
5 other law of the United States.”.

6 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-
7 tions at the beginning of such chapter is amended by add-
8 ing at the end the following:

“SUBCHAPTER III—WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION PROGRAM
“42121. Protection of employees providing air safety information.”.

9 **SEC. 3. CIVIL PENALTY.**

10 Section 46301(a)(1)(A) of title 49, United States
11 Code, is amended by striking “subchapter II of chapter
12 421” and inserting “subchapter II or III of chapter 421”.

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