

RCW 42.41.040 Retaliatory action unlawful—Relief by whistleblower—Penalty.

(1) It is unlawful for any local government official or employee to take retaliatory action against a local government employee because the employee provided information in good faith in accordance with the provisions of this chapter that an improper governmental action occurred.

(2) In order to seek relief under this chapter, a local government employee shall provide a written notice of the charge of retaliatory action to the governing body of the local government that:

- (a) Specifies the alleged retaliatory action; and
- (b) Specifies the relief requested.

(3) The charge shall be delivered to the local government no later than thirty days after the occurrence of the alleged retaliatory action. The local government has thirty days to respond to the charge of retaliatory action and request for relief.

(4) Upon receipt of either the response of the local government or after the last day upon which the local government could respond, the local government employee may request a hearing to establish that a retaliatory action occurred and to obtain appropriate relief as defined in this section. The request for a hearing shall be delivered to the local government within fifteen days of delivery of the response from the local government, or within fifteen days of the last day on which the local government could respond.

(5) Within five working days of receipt of the request for hearing, the local government shall apply to the state office of administrative hearings for an adjudicative proceeding before an administrative law judge. Except as otherwise provided in this section, the proceedings shall comply with RCW 34.05.410 through 34.05.598.

(6) The employee, as the initiating party, must prove his or her claim by a preponderance of the evidence. The administrative law judge shall issue a final decision consisting of findings of fact, conclusions of law, and judgment no later than forty-five days after the date the request for hearing was delivered to the local government. The administrative law judge may grant specific extensions of time beyond this period of time for rendering a decision at the request of either party upon a showing of good cause, or upon his or her own motion.

(7) Relief that may be granted by the administrative law judge consists of reinstatement, with or without back pay, and such injunctive relief as may be found to be necessary in order to return the employee to the position he or she held before the retaliatory action and to prevent any recurrence of retaliatory action. The administrative law judge may award costs and reasonable attorneys' fees to the prevailing party.

(8) If a determination is made that retaliatory action has been taken against the employee, the administrative law judge may, in addition to any other remedy, impose a civil penalty personally upon the retaliator of up to three thousand dollars payable by each person found to have retaliated against the employee and recommend to the local government that any person found to have retaliated against the employee be suspended with or without pay or dismissed. All penalties recovered shall be paid to the local government administrative hearings account created in RCW 42.41.060.

(9) The final decision of the administrative law judge is subject to judicial review under the arbitrary and capricious standard. Relief

ordered by the administrative law judge may be enforced by petition to superior court. [1992 c 44 § 4.]