**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND TITLE 15 OF THE 1976 CODE OF LAWS, BY ADDING CHAPTER 83, TO ENACT THE “ASBESTOS BANKRUPTCY TRUST CLAIMS TRANSPARENCY ACT”; TO DEFINE TERMS; TO ESTABLISH THE REQUIRED DISCLOSURES BY PLAINTIFFS; TO ESTABLISH DISCOVERY PROVISIONS; TO ESTABLISH THAT A COURT MAY STAY AN ACTION; TO ESTABLISH THAT A DEFENDANT MAY IDENTIFY ADDITIONAL OR ALTERNATIVE ASBESTOS TRUSTS; TO ESTABLISH VALUATION OF ASBESTOS TRUST CLAIMS; TO ESTABLISH SETOFF PROVISIONS; AND TO ESTABLISH SANCTIONS.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. This act may be cited as the “Asbestos Bankruptcy Trust Claims Transparency Act.”

SECTION 2. Title 15 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“CHAPTER 83

Asbestos Bankruptcy Trust Claims Transparency Act

Section 15-83-10. For the purposes of this chapter:

(1) ‘Asbestos action’ means any claim for damages or other civil or equitable relief presented in a civil action arising out of, based on, or related to the health effects of exposure to asbestos, including any derivative claim made by or on behalf of a person exposed to asbestos or a representative, spouse, parent, child, or other relative of that person.

(2) ‘Asbestos trust’ means a government-approved or court-approved trust, qualified settlement fund, compensation fund, or claims facility created as a result of an administrative or legal action or a court-approved bankruptcy, or as pursuant to 11 U. S. C. §524(g) or 11 U. S. C. §1121(a) or other applicable provision of law, that is intended to provide compensation to claimants arising out of, based on, or related to the health effects of exposure to asbestos.

(3) ‘Plaintiff’ means a person asserting an asbestos action, a decedent if the action is brought through or on behalf of an estate, or a parent or guardian if the action is brought through or on behalf of a minor or incompetent.

(4) ‘Trust claims materials’ means a final executed proof of claim and all other documents and information related to a claim against an asbestos trust, including claims forms and supplementary materials, affidavits, depositions and trial testimony, work history, medical and health records, documents reflecting the status of a claim against an asbestos trust, and, if the asbestos trust claim has settled, all documents relating to the settlement of the asbestos trust claim.

(5) ‘Trust governance documents’ means all documents that relate to eligibility and payment levels for an asbestos trust, including claims payment matrices, trust distribution procedures, and plans for reorganization.

Section 15-83-20. (A) For each asbestos action filed in this State, the plaintiff shall provide all parties with a sworn statement identifying all asbestos trust claims that have been filed by the plaintiff or by anyone on the plaintiff’s behalf, including claims with respect to asbestos-related conditions other than those that are the basis for the asbestos action or that potentially could be filed by the plaintiff against an asbestos trust. The sworn statement shall be provided no later than one hundred twenty days prior to the date set for trial for the asbestos action. For each asbestos trust claim or potential asbestos trust claim identified in the sworn statement, the statement shall include the name, address, and contact information for the asbestos trust; the amount claimed or to be claimed by the plaintiff; the date the plaintiff filed the claim; the disposition of the claim; and if there had been a request to defer, delay, suspend, or toll the claim. The sworn statement shall include an attestation from the plaintiff, under penalties of perjury, that the sworn statement is complete and is based on a good faith investigation of all potential claims against asbestos trusts.

(B) The plaintiff shall make available to all parties all trust claims materials for each asbestos trust claim that has been filed by the plaintiff or by anyone on the plaintiff’s behalf against an asbestos trust, including any asbestos-related disease claims.

(C) The plaintiff shall supplement the information and materials provided pursuant to this section within ninety days after the plaintiff files an additional asbestos trust claim, supplements an existing asbestos trust claim, or receives additional information or materials related to any claim or potential claim against an asbestos trust.

(D) Failure by the plaintiff to make available to all parties all trust claims materials as required by this article shall constitute grounds for the court to extend the trial date in an asbestos action.

Section 15-83-30. (A) Trust claims materials and trust governance documents are presumed to be relevant and authentic and are admissible in evidence. No claims of privilege apply to any trust claims materials or trust governance documents.

(B) A defendant in an asbestos action may seek discovery from an asbestos trust. The plaintiff may not claim privilege or confidentiality to bar discovery and shall provide consent or other expression of permission that may be required by the asbestos trust to release information and materials sought by a defendant.

Section 15-83-40. (A) A court shall stay an asbestos action if the court finds that the plaintiff has failed to make the disclosures required under Section 15-83-20 within one hundred twenty days prior to the trial date.

(B) If, in the disclosures required by Section 15-83-20, a plaintiff identifies a potential asbestos trust claim, the judge shall have the discretion to stay the asbestos action until the plaintiff files the asbestos trust claim and provides all parties with all trust claims materials for the claim. The plaintiff shall also state if there has been a request to defer, delay, suspend, or toll the claim against the asbestos trust.

Section 15-83-50. (A) Not less than ninety days before trial, if a defendant identifies an asbestos trust claim not previously identified by the plaintiff that the defendant reasonably believes the plaintiff can file, the defendant shall meet and confer with the plaintiff to discuss why the defendant believes the plaintiff has an additional asbestos trust claim, and thereafter the defendant may move the court for an order to require the plaintiff to file the asbestos trust claim. The defendant shall produce or describe the documentation he possesses or is aware of in support of the motion.

(B) Within ten days of receiving the defendant’s motion under subsection (A), the plaintiff shall, for each asbestos trust claim identified by the defendant, respond by:

(1) filing the asbestos trust claim;

(2) filing a written response with the court setting forth the reasons why there is insufficient evidence for the plaintiff to file the asbestos trust claim; or

(3) filing a written response with the court requesting a determination that the plaintiff’s expenses or attorney’s fees and expenses to prepare and file the asbestos trust claim identified in the defendant’s motion exceed the plaintiff’s reasonably anticipated recovery from the trust.

(C)(1) If the court determines that there is a sufficient basis for the plaintiff to file the asbestos trust claim identified by a defendant, the court shall order the plaintiff to file the asbestos trust claim and shall stay the asbestos action until the plaintiff files the asbestos trust claim and provides all parties with all trust claims materials no later than thirty days before trial.

(2) If the court determines that the plaintiff’s expenses or attorney’s fees and expenses to prepare and file the asbestos trust claim identified in the defendant’s motion exceed the plaintiff’s reasonably anticipated recovery from the asbestos trust, the court shall stay the asbestos action until the plaintiff files with the court and provides all parties with a verified statement of the plaintiff’s history of exposure, usage, or other connection to asbestos covered by the asbestos trust.

(D) Not less than thirty days prior to trial in an asbestos action, the court shall enter into the record a trust claims document that identifies each claim the plaintiff has made against an asbestos trust.

Section 15-83-60. (A) If a plaintiff proceeds to trial in an asbestos action before an asbestos trust claim is resolved, the filing of the asbestos trust claim may be considered to be relevant and admissible evidence.

(B) Trust claim materials that are sufficient to entitle a claim to consideration for payment, under the applicable trust governance documents, may be sufficient to support a jury finding that the plaintiff may have been exposed to products for which the asbestos trust was established to provide compensation and that such exposure may be a substantial factor in causing the plaintiff’s injury that is at issue in the asbestos action.

Section 15-83-70. In any asbestos action in which damages are awarded, a defendant is entitled to a setoff or credit in the amount of the valuation established under the applicable trust governance documents, including payment percentages for asbestos trust claims pending at trial and any amount the plaintiff has been awarded from an asbestos trust claim that has been identified at the time of trial. If multiple defendants are found liable for damages, the court shall distribute the amount of setoff or credit proportionally between the defendants, according to the liability of each defendant.

Section 15-83-80. A plaintiff who fails to provide all of the information required under this chapter is subject to sanctions as provided in the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure and any other relief for the defendants that the court considers just and proper.”

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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