By:  Hinojosa S.B. No. 2551

(In the Senate - Filed April 22, 2019; April 23, 2019, read first time and referred to Committee on Business & Commerce; May 2, 2019, reported adversely, with favorable Committee Substitute by the following vote: Yeas 8, Nays 1; May 2, 2019, sent to printer.)

COMMITTEE VOTE

                    Yea Nay Absent  PNV

Hancock              X

Nichols              X

Campbell             X

Creighton            X

Menéndez             X

Paxton               X

Schwertner               X

Whitmire             X

Zaffirini            X

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR S.B. No. 2551 By:  Creighton

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to liability, payment, and death benefits for certain workers' compensation claims.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Section 607.055, Government Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 607.055.  CANCER. (a)  A firefighter or emergency medical technician who suffers from cancer resulting in death or total or partial disability is presumed to have developed the cancer during the course and scope of employment as a firefighter or emergency medical technician if:

(1)  the firefighter or emergency medical technician:

(A)  regularly responded on the scene to calls involving fires or fire fighting; or

(B)  regularly responded to an event involving the documented release of radiation or a known or suspected carcinogen while the person was employed as a firefighter or emergency medical technician; and

(2)  the cancer is [~~known to be associated with fire fighting or exposure to heat, smoke, radiation, or a known or suspected carcinogen, as~~] described by Subsection (b).

(b)  This section applies only to:

(1)  cancer that originates at the stomach, colon, rectum, skin, prostate, testis, or brain;

(2)  non-Hodgkin's lymphoma;

(3)  multiple myeloma;

(4)  malignant melanoma; and

(5)  renal cell carcinoma [~~a type of cancer that may be caused by exposure to heat, smoke, radiation, or a known or suspected carcinogen as determined by the International Agency for Research on Cancer~~].

SECTION 2.  Section 409.021, Labor Code, is amended by adding Subsection (a-3) to read as follows:

(a-3)  An insurance carrier is not required to comply with Subsection (a) if the claim seeks to recover benefits under Subchapter B, Chapter 607, Government Code, and, not later than the 15th day after the date on which the insurance carrier received written notice of the injury, the insurance carrier has provided the employee with a notice that describes the evidence the carrier reasonably believes is necessary to complete its investigation of the compensability of the injury. The commissioner shall adopt rules as necessary to implement this subsection.

SECTION 3.  Section 409.022, Labor Code, is amended by adding Subsection (d-1) to read as follows:

(d-1)  An insurance carrier has not committed an administrative violation and has reasonable grounds for a refusal to pay benefits if the carrier has sent notice to the employee as required by Subsection (d) or Section 409.021(a-3).

SECTION 4.  Section 415.021, Labor Code, is amended by adding Subsection (c-2) to read as follows:

(c-2)  In determining whether to assess any sanctions, an administrative penalty, or another remedy authorized by this subtitle, the commissioner shall consider whether:

(1)  the employee has cooperated with the insurance carrier's investigation of the claim; and

(2)  the employee has timely authorized access to the applicable medical records before the insurance carrier's deadline:

(A)  to begin payment of benefits; or

(B)  to notify the division and the employee of its refusal to pay benefits.

SECTION 5.  Section 504.053(e), Labor Code, is amended to read as follows:

(e)  Nothing in this chapter waives sovereign immunity or creates a new cause of action, except that a political subdivision that self-insures either individually or collectively is liable for:

(1)  sanctions, administrative penalties, and other remedies authorized under Chapter 415;

(2)  attorney's fees as provided by Section 408.221(c); and

(3)  attorney's fees as provided by Section 417.003.

SECTION 6.  Subchapter D, Chapter 504, Labor Code, is amended by adding Section 504.074 to read as follows:

Sec. 504.074.  SELF-INSURANCE ACCOUNT FOR CERTAIN DEATH BENEFITS. (a)  A pool or a political subdivision that self-insures may establish an account for the payment of death benefits for a compensable injury to a firefighter or emergency medical technician described by Section 607.055, Government Code.

(b)  An account established under this section may accumulate assets in an amount that the pool or political subdivision, in its sole discretion, determines is necessary in order to pay death benefits described by Subsection (a). The establishment of an account under this section or the amount of assets accumulated in the account does not affect the liability of a pool or political subdivision for the payment of death benefits.

(c)  Chapter 2256, Government Code, does not apply to the investment of assets in an account established under this section. A pool or political subdivision investing or reinvesting the assets of an account shall exercise the judgment and care, under the circumstances, that a person of prudence, discretion, and intelligence would exercise in the management of the person's own affairs, considering the probable income to be derived and the probable safety of capital. A determination of whether the pool or political subdivision exercised prudence in making an investment decision shall be made by considering the investment of all assets of the account rather than by considering the prudence of a single investment.

SECTION 7.  Section 607.055, Government Code, as amended by this Act, applies only to a claim for workers' compensation benefits filed on or after the effective date of this Act. A claim filed before that date is governed by the law as it existed on the date the claim was filed, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

SECTION 8.  The commissioner of workers' compensation shall adopt the rules required by Section 409.021(a-3), Labor Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act.

SECTION 9.  (a)  Section 504.053(e)(1), Labor Code, as added by this Act, applies only to an administrative violation that occurs on or after the effective date of this Act. An administrative violation that occurs before the effective date of this Act is governed by the law applicable to the violation immediately before the effective date of this Act, and that law is continued in effect for that purpose.

(b)  Section 504.053(e)(2), Labor Code, as added by this Act, applies only to a claim for workers' compensation benefits filed on or after the effective date of this Act. A claim filed before the effective date of this Act is governed by the law in effect on the date the claim was filed, and the former law is continued in effect for that purpose.

SECTION 10.  This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2019.

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