



State of California

PUBLIC CONTRACT CODE

Section 9204

9204. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that it is in the best interests of the state and its citizens to ensure that all construction business performed on a public works project in the state that is complete and not in dispute is paid in full and in a timely manner.

(b) Notwithstanding any other law, including, but not limited to, Article 7.1 (commencing with Section 10240) of Chapter 1 of Part 2, Chapter 10 (commencing with Section 19100) of Part 2, and Article 1.5 (commencing with Section 20104) of Chapter 1 of Part 3, this section shall apply to any claim by a contractor in connection with a public works project.

(c) For purposes of this section:

(1) "Claim" means a separate demand by a contractor sent by registered mail or certified mail with return receipt requested, for one or more of the following:

(A) A time extension, including, without limitation, for relief from damages or penalties for delay assessed by a public entity under a contract for a public works project.

(B) Payment by the public entity of money or damages arising from work done by, or on behalf of, the contractor pursuant to the contract for a public works project and payment for which is not otherwise expressly provided or to which the claimant is not otherwise entitled.

(C) Payment of an amount that is disputed by the public entity.

(2) "Contractor" means any type of contractor within the meaning of Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 7000) of Division 3 of the Business and Professions Code who has entered into a direct contract with a public entity for a public works project.

(3) (A) "Public entity" means, without limitation, except as provided in subparagraph (B), a state agency, department, office, division, bureau, board, or commission, the California State University, the University of California, a city, including a charter city, county, including a charter county, city and county, including a charter city and county, district, special district, public authority, political subdivision, public corporation, or nonprofit transit corporation wholly owned by a public agency and formed to carry out the purposes of the public agency.

(B) "Public entity" shall not include the following:

(i) The Department of Water Resources as to any project under the jurisdiction of that department.

(ii) The Department of Transportation as to any project under the jurisdiction of that department.

(iii) The Department of Parks and Recreation as to any project under the jurisdiction of that department.

(iv) The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation with respect to any project under its jurisdiction pursuant to Chapter 11 (commencing with Section 7000) of Title 7 of Part 3 of the Penal Code.

(v) The Military Department as to any project under the jurisdiction of that department.

(vi) The Department of General Services as to all other projects.

(vii) The High-Speed Rail Authority.

(4) "Public works project" means the erection, construction, alteration, repair, or improvement of any public structure, building, road, or other public improvement of any kind.

(5) "Subcontractor" means any type of contractor within the meaning of Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 7000) of Division 3 of the Business and Professions Code who either is in direct contract with a contractor or is a lower tier subcontractor.

(d) (1) (A) Upon receipt of a claim pursuant to this section, the public entity to which the claim applies shall conduct a reasonable review of the claim and, within a period not to exceed 45 days, shall provide the claimant a written statement identifying what portion of the claim is disputed and what portion is undisputed. Upon receipt of a claim, a public entity and a contractor may, by mutual agreement, extend the time period provided in this subdivision.

(B) The claimant shall furnish reasonable documentation to support the claim.

(C) If the public entity needs approval from its governing body to provide the claimant a written statement identifying the disputed portion and the undisputed portion of the claim, and the governing body does not meet within the 45 days or within the mutually agreed to extension of time following receipt of a claim sent by registered mail or certified mail, return receipt requested, the public entity shall have up to three days following the next duly publicly noticed meeting of the governing body after the 45-day period, or extension, expires to provide the claimant a written statement identifying the disputed portion and the undisputed portion.

(D) Any payment due on an undisputed portion of the claim shall be processed and made within 60 days after the public entity issues its written statement. If the public entity fails to issue a written statement, paragraph (3) shall apply.

(2) (A) If the claimant disputes the public entity's written response, or if the public entity fails to respond to a claim issued pursuant to this section within the time prescribed, the claimant may demand in writing an informal conference to meet and confer for settlement of the issues in dispute. Upon receipt of a demand in writing sent by registered mail or certified mail, return receipt requested, the public entity shall schedule a meet and confer conference within 30 days for settlement of the dispute.

(B) Within 10 business days following the conclusion of the meet and confer conference, if the claim or any portion of the claim remains in dispute, the public entity shall provide the claimant a written statement identifying the portion of the claim that remains in dispute and the portion that is undisputed. Any payment due on

an undisputed portion of the claim shall be processed and made within 60 days after the public entity issues its written statement. Any disputed portion of the claim, as identified by the contractor in writing, shall be submitted to nonbinding mediation, with the public entity and the claimant sharing the associated costs equally. The public entity and claimant shall mutually agree to a mediator within 10 business days after the disputed portion of the claim has been identified in writing. If the parties cannot agree upon a mediator, each party shall select a mediator and those mediators shall select a qualified neutral third party to mediate with regard to the disputed portion of the claim. Each party shall bear the fees and costs charged by its respective mediator in connection with the selection of the neutral mediator. If mediation is unsuccessful, the parts of the claim remaining in dispute shall be subject to applicable procedures outside this section.

(C) For purposes of this section, mediation includes any nonbinding process, including, but not limited to, neutral evaluation or a dispute review board, in which an independent third party or board assists the parties in dispute resolution through negotiation or by issuance of an evaluation. Any mediation utilized shall conform to the timeframes in this section.

(D) Unless otherwise agreed to by the public entity and the contractor in writing, the mediation conducted pursuant to this section shall excuse any further obligation under Section 20104.4 to mediate after litigation has been commenced.

(E) This section does not preclude a public entity from requiring arbitration of disputes under private arbitration or the Public Works Contract Arbitration Program, if mediation under this section does not resolve the parties' dispute.

(3) Failure by the public entity to respond to a claim from a contractor within the time periods described in this subdivision or to otherwise meet the time requirements of this section shall result in the claim being deemed rejected in its entirety. A claim that is denied by reason of the public entity's failure to have responded to a claim, or its failure to otherwise meet the time requirements of this section, shall not constitute an adverse finding with regard to the merits of the claim or the responsibility or qualifications of the claimant.

(4) Amounts not paid in a timely manner as required by this section shall bear interest at 7 percent per annum.

(5) If a subcontractor or a lower tier subcontractor lacks legal standing to assert a claim against a public entity because privity of contract does not exist, the contractor may present to the public entity a claim on behalf of a subcontractor or lower tier subcontractor. A subcontractor may request in writing, either on his or her own behalf or on behalf of a lower tier subcontractor, that the contractor present a claim for work which was performed by the subcontractor or by a lower tier subcontractor on behalf of the subcontractor. The subcontractor requesting that the claim be presented to the public entity shall furnish reasonable documentation to support the claim. Within 45 days of receipt of this written request, the contractor shall notify the subcontractor in writing as to whether the contractor presented the claim to the public entity and, if the original contractor did not present the claim, provide the subcontractor with a statement of the reasons for not having done so.

(e) The text of this section or a summary of it shall be set forth in the plans or specifications for any public works project that may give rise to a claim under this section.

(f) A waiver of the rights granted by this section is void and contrary to public policy, provided, however, that (1) upon receipt of a claim, the parties may mutually agree to waive, in writing, mediation and proceed directly to the commencement of a civil action or binding arbitration, as applicable; and (2) a public entity may prescribe reasonable change order, claim, and dispute resolution procedures and requirements in addition to the provisions of this section, so long as the contractual provisions do not conflict with or otherwise impair the timeframes and procedures set forth in this section.

(g) This section applies to contracts entered into on or after January 1, 2017.

(h) Nothing in this section shall impose liability upon a public entity that makes loans or grants available through a competitive application process, for the failure of an awardee to meet its contractual obligations.

(i) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2020, and as of that date is repealed, unless a later enacted statute, that is enacted before January 1, 2020, deletes or extends that date.

(Added by Stats. 2016, Ch. 810, Sec. 1. (AB 626) Effective January 1, 2017. Repealed as of January 1, 2020, by its own provisions.)