

177.27 POWERS AND DUTIES OF COMMISSIONER.

Subdivision 1. **Examination of records.** The commissioner may enter during reasonable office hours or upon request and inspect the place of business or employment of any employer of employees working in the state, to examine and inspect books, registers, payrolls, and other records of any employer that in any way relate to wages, hours, and other conditions of employment of any employees. The commissioner may transcribe any or all of the books, registers, payrolls, and other records as the commissioner deems necessary or appropriate and may question the employees to ascertain compliance with sections 177.21 to 177.435. The commissioner may investigate wage claims or complaints by an employee against an employer if the failure to pay a wage may violate Minnesota law or an order or rule of the department.

Subd. 2. **Submission of records; penalty.** The commissioner may require the employer of employees working in the state to submit to the commissioner photocopies, certified copies, or, if necessary, the originals of employment records which the commissioner deems necessary or appropriate. The records which may be required include full and correct statements in writing, including sworn statements by the employer, containing information relating to wages, hours, names, addresses, and any other information pertaining to the employer's employees and the conditions of their employment as the commissioner deems necessary or appropriate.

The commissioner may require the records to be submitted by certified mail delivery or, if necessary, by personal delivery by the employer or a representative of the employer, as authorized by the employer in writing.

The commissioner may fine the employer up to \$1,000 for each failure to submit or deliver records as required by this section. This penalty is in addition to any penalties provided under section 177.32, subdivision 1. In determining the amount of a civil penalty under this subdivision, the appropriateness of such penalty to the size of the employer's business and the gravity of the violation shall be considered.

Subd. 3. **Adequacy of records.** If the records maintained by the employer do not provide sufficient information to determine the exact amount of back wages due an employee, the commissioner may make a determination of wages due based on available evidence and mediate a settlement with the employer.

Subd. 4. **Compliance orders.** The commissioner may issue an order requiring an employer to comply with sections 177.21 to 177.435, 181.02, 181.03, 181.031, 181.032, 181.101, 181.11, 181.12, 181.13, 181.14, 181.145, 181.15, 181.275, subdivision 2a, 181.722, and 181.79, or with any rule promulgated under section 177.28. The commissioner shall issue an order requiring an employer to comply with sections 177.41 to 177.435 if the violation is repeated. For purposes of this subdivision only, a violation is repeated if at any time during the two years that preceded the date of violation, the commissioner issued an order to the employer for violation of sections 177.41 to 177.435 and the order is final or the commissioner and the employer have entered into a settlement agreement that required the employer to pay back wages that were required by sections 177.41 to 177.435. The department shall serve the order upon the employer or the employer's authorized representative in person or by certified mail at the employer's place of business. An employer who wishes to contest the order must file written notice of objection to the order with the commissioner within 15 calendar days after being served with the order. A contested case proceeding must then be held in accordance with sections 14.57 to 14.69. If, within 15 calendar days after being served with the order, the employer fails to file a written notice of objection with the commissioner, the order becomes a final order of the commissioner.

Subd. 5. **Civil actions.** The commissioner may bring an action in the district court where an employer resides or where the commissioner maintains an office to enforce or require compliance with orders issued under subdivision 4.

Subd. 6. [Repealed, 1996 c 386 s 13]

Subd. 7. **Employer liability.** If an employer is found by the commissioner to have violated a section identified in subdivision 4, or any rule adopted under section 177.28, and the commissioner issues an order to comply, the commissioner shall order the employer to cease and desist from engaging in the violative practice and to take such affirmative steps that in the judgment of the commissioner will effectuate the purposes of the section or rule violated. The commissioner shall order the employer to pay to the aggrieved parties back pay, gratuities, and compensatory damages, less any amount actually paid to the employee by the employer, and for an additional equal amount as liquidated damages. Any employer who is found by the commissioner to have repeatedly or willfully violated a section or sections identified in subdivision 4 shall be subject to a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 for each violation for each employee. In determining the amount of a civil penalty under this subdivision, the appropriateness of such penalty to the size of the employer's business and the gravity of the violation shall be considered. In addition, the commissioner may order the employer to reimburse the department and the attorney general for all appropriate litigation and hearing costs expended in preparation for and in conducting the contested case proceeding, unless payment of costs would impose extreme financial hardship on the employer. If the employer is able to establish extreme financial hardship, then the commissioner may order the employer to pay a percentage of the total costs that will not cause extreme financial hardship. Costs include but are not limited to the costs of services rendered by the attorney general, private attorneys if engaged by the department, administrative law judges, court reporters, and expert witnesses as well as the cost of transcripts. Interest shall accrue on, and be added to, the unpaid balance of a commissioner's order from the date the order is signed by the commissioner until it is paid, at an annual rate provided in section 549.09, subdivision 1, paragraph (c). The commissioner may establish escrow accounts for purposes of distributing damages.

Subd. 8. **Court actions; suits brought by private parties.** An employee may bring a civil action seeking redress for a violation or violations of sections 177.21 to 177.44 directly to district court. An employer who pays an employee less than the wages and overtime compensation to which the employee is entitled under sections 177.21 to 177.44 is liable to the employee for the full amount of the wages, gratuities, and overtime compensation, less any amount the employer is able to establish was actually paid to the employee and for an additional equal amount as liquidated damages. In addition, in an action under this subdivision the employee may seek damages and other appropriate relief provided by subdivision 7 and otherwise provided by law. An agreement between the employee and the employer to work for less than the applicable wage is not a defense to the action.

Subd. 9. **District court jurisdiction.** Any action brought under subdivision 8 may be filed in the district court of the county wherein a violation or violations of sections 177.21 to 177.44 are alleged to have been committed, where the respondent resides or has a principal place of business, or any other court of competent jurisdiction. The action may be brought by one or more employees.

Subd. 10. **Attorney fees and costs.** In any action brought pursuant to subdivision 8, the court shall order an employer who is found to have committed a violation or violations of sections 177.21 to 177.44 to pay to the employee or employees reasonable costs, disbursements, witness fees, and attorney fees.

History: 1973 c 721 s 7; 1982 c 424 s 49,130; 1983 c 209 s 1; 1984 c 628 art 4 s 1; 1Sp1985 c 13 s 279; 1986 c 444; 1987 c 329 s 21; 1987 c 384 art 2 s 1; 1996 c 386 s 1-6; 2007 c 46 s 1; 2007 c 135 art 3 s 4-8; 2009 c 78 art 5 s 2; 2013 c 85 art 2 s 2