

Hearing: January 25, 2007

## ITEM 15

### CHIEF LEGAL COUNSEL'S REPORT New Filings, Recent Decisions, Litigation Calendar

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This public session report is intended only as an information item for the public.<sup>1</sup> Commission communications with legal counsel about pending litigation or potential litigation are reserved for Closed Executive Session, per the Notice and Agenda.

#### New Filings

None.

#### Dismissals

*State of California Department of Finance v. Commission on State Mandates, et al.* Sacramento County Superior Court, Case No. 03CS01069 [**Animal Adoption**]. The Department of Finance dismissed the case on December 21, 2006. The related *County of Los Angeles* case (Case No. 05CS00865) remains pending.

#### Recent Decisions

*CSAC Excess Insurance Authority v. Commission on State Mandates, et al.*, Second District Court of Appeal, Case Number B188169 -

Unpublished decision issued December 20, 2006. A copy of the decision is attached.

#### Litigation Calendar

Case Reference	Hearing Date
<i>County of Los Angeles, et al., v. Commission on State Mandates, et al.</i> Second District Court of Appeal, Case No. B183981 [ <i>Transit Trash Receptacles/Waste Discharge Requirements</i> ]	February 15, 2007

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<sup>1</sup> Based on information available as of January 11, 2007. Release of this litigation report shall not be deemed to be a waiver of any privileged communication or act, including, but not limited to, the attorney-client privilege and the attorney work product doctrine.

**NOT TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL REPORTS**

California Rules of Court, rule 977(a), prohibits courts and parties from citing or relying on opinions not certified for publication or ordered published, except as specified by rule 977(b). This opinion has not been certified for publication or ordered published for purposes of rule 977.

IN THE COURT OF APPEAL OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
SECOND APPELLATE DISTRICT  
DIVISION FOUR

CSAC EXCESS INSURANCE  
AUTHORITY et al.,

Plaintiffs and Respondents,

v.

COMMISSION ON STATE MANDATES,

Defendant and Appellant;

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF  
FINANCE,

Intervener and Appellant.

B188169

(Los Angeles County  
Super. Ct. Nos. BS092146  
& BS095456)

FILED

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APPELLATE DISTRICT

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

APPEAL from a judgment of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, David P. Yaffe, Judge. Affirmed in part; reversed in part with directions.

Camille Shelton and Katherine A. Tokarski for Defendant and Appellant  
Commission on State Mandates.

Bill Lockyer, Attorney General, Louis R. Maura, Assistant Attorney General, Christopher E. Krueger and Jack C. Woodside, Deputy Attorneys General, for Intervener and Appellant California Department of Finance.

Stephen D. Underwood; Robin Lynn Clauson, Newport Beach City Attorney, and Aaron C. Harp, Assistant City Attorney, for Plaintiffs and Respondents.

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In this appeal from a judgment granting consolidated writ of mandate petitions, we affirm in part, reverse in part, and reinstate in part the administrative rulings of appellant Commission on State Mandates (commission).

### INTRODUCTION

Article XIII B, section 6 of the California Constitution provides in relevant part that “[w]henver the Legislature or any state agency mandates a new program or higher level of service on any local government, the State shall provide a subvention of funds to reimburse such local government for the costs of such program or increased level of service” (article XIII B, section 6). In this appeal, we must decide whether three workers’ compensation statutes (Lab. Code, §§ 3212.1, 3212.11, 3213.2 (the test statutes)),<sup>1</sup> which provide certain publicly employed peace officers, firefighters, and lifeguards with a rebuttable presumption that their injuries arose out of and in the course of employment, mandated a new program or higher level of service of an existing program for which reimbursement is required under article XIII B, section 6.

Respondents CSAC (California State Association of Counties) Excess Insurance Authority (hereafter EIA), a joint powers authority that provides insurance to its 54 member counties, and City of Newport Beach (city) petitioned for writs of mandate to

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<sup>1</sup> All further undesignated statutory references are to the Labor Code.

vacate the commission's denials of their claims for reimbursement of state-mandated costs created by the test statutes. The commission and the California Department of Finance (department), which filed a complaint in intervention, opposed the consolidated writ petitions and demurred on the ground that the EIA lacked standing. The superior court overruled the demurrer and entered judgment for the EIA and the city. The superior court issued a peremptory writ of mandate that vacated the commission's rulings and directed it to determine the amount of increased workers' compensation benefits paid, if any, by the city and the EIA's member counties as a result of the presumptions created by the test statutes.

In this appeal from the judgment by the commission and the department, we conclude that the EIA has standing as a joint powers authority to sue for reimbursement of state-mandated costs on behalf of its member counties. We also conclude that because workers' compensation is not a program administered by local governments, the test statutes did not mandate a new program or higher level of service of an existing program for which reimbursement is required under article XIII B, section 6, notwithstanding any increased costs imposed on local governments by the statutory presumptions.

## **BACKGROUND**

### *A. The Administrative Proceedings*

The EIA is a joint powers authority. The EIA states that it "was formed in 1979 to provide insurance coverage, risk management and related services to its members in accordance with Government Code [section] 998.4. Specifically, with respect to the issues presented here, the EIA provides both primary and excess workers' compensation coverage for member counties, including the payment of claims and losses arising out of work related injuries." The EIA's members include 54 of the 58 California counties. According to the EIA, "[e]very California county except Los Angeles, San Francisco, Orange and San Mateo [is a member] of the EIA."

In 2002, the County of Tehama, which is not a party to this appeal, the EIA, and the city filed test claims with the commission concerning the three test statutes. A "test

claim” is “the first claim filed with the commission alleging that a particular statute or executive order imposes costs mandated by the state.” (§ 17521.) The test claims alleged that each test statute, by creating a presumption of industrial causation in favor of certain public employees seeking workers’ compensation benefits for work-related injuries, imposed state-mandated costs for which reimbursement is required under article XIII B, section 6.

In the first test claim, the County of Tehama and the EIA challenged section 3212.1, which grants a rebuttable presumption of industrial causation to certain publicly employed peace officers and firefighters who, either during or within a specified period following termination of service, develop cancer, including leukemia, after being exposed to a known carcinogen. Section 3212.1, subdivision (d) allows employers to rebut this presumption with “evidence that the primary site of the cancer has been established and that the carcinogen to which the member has demonstrated exposure is not reasonably linked to the disabling cancer.” If the presumption is not rebutted, “the appeals board is bound to find in accordance with the presumption.” (§ 3212.1, subd. (d).)

In the second test claim, the County of Tehama and the EIA challenged section 3213.2, which grants a rebuttable presumption of industrial causation to certain publicly employed peace officers who wear a duty belt (a belt used to hold a gun, handcuffs, baton, and other law enforcement items) as a condition of employment and, either during or within a specified period after termination of service, suffer a lower back injury. Section 3213.2, subdivision (b) allows employers to rebut this presumption with “other evidence, but unless so controverted, the appeals board is bound to find in accordance with it.”

In the third test claim, the city challenged section 3212.11, which grants a rebuttable presumption of industrial causation to certain publicly employed lifeguards who develop skin cancer during or immediately following their employment. Section 3212.11 allows employers to rebut this presumption with “other evidence, but unless so controverted, the appeals board shall find in accordance with it.”

The commission denied each test claim after determining that each test statute's respective presumption of industrial causation did not mandate increased costs for which local entities must be reimbursed under article XIII B, section 6. The commission also concluded that the EIA lacked standing to pursue the test claims because the EIA does not employ the peace officers, firefighters, or lifeguards affected by the test statutes and is a separate entity from its member counties.

*B. The Judicial Proceeding*

The EIA and the city petitioned for writs of mandate to vacate the commission's denials of their respective test claims. (Code Civ. Proc., § 1094.5.) The commission and the department, which filed a complaint in intervention, opposed the consolidated petitions. (Gov. Code, § 13070; see *Redevelopment Agency v. Commission on State Mandates* (1996) 43 Cal.App.4th 1188, 1198.)

The commission and the department challenged on demurrer the EIA's standing to prosecute the test claims. When the test claims were filed, Government Code section 17520 defined "special district" to include joint powers authorities and Government Code section 17552 defined "local agency" to include special districts. The superior court determined that because the EIA, as a joint powers authority, was a special district under Government Code section 17520 when the test claims were filed, the EIA was a local agency under Government Code section 17552 and, therefore, had standing to file the test claims. The superior court noted that although in 2004, the Legislature deleted joint powers agencies or authorities from the definition of special district (Gov. Code, § 17520, as amended by Stats. 2004, ch. 890), because the EIA's test claims were filed before the amendment took effect, the amendment did not apply to the EIA's pending test claims.

Regarding the issue of state-mandated costs, the superior court concluded that the test statutes mandated a new program or increased services under article XIII B, section 6. The superior court reasoned that "[l]egislation that expands the ability of an injured employee to prove that his injury is job related, expands the cost to the employer to compensate its injured workers. The assertion by the state that the employer can

somehow ‘opt out’ of that cost increase is clearly without merit. By contending that the counties need not ‘dispute’ the presumptions mandated by the legislature, that the injury is job related, misses the point. The counties are entitled to subvention, not for increased LITIGATION costs, but for the increased costs of COMPENSATING their injured workers which has been mandated by the legislature.”

The superior court granted judgment to the EIA and the city, and issued a peremptory writ of mandate directing the commission to vacate its administrative rulings and “to determine the amount, if any, that the cost of providing workers’ compensation benefits to the employees of the City of Newport Beach and each member county [of the EIA] has been increased by the enactment of the presumptions created by” the test statutes. On appeal, the commission and the department challenge the EIA’s standing to prosecute the test claims and argue that the test statutes do not mandate a new program or increased services within an existing program for which reimbursement is required under article XIII B, section 6.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **I**

#### **Standing**

The commission and the department contend that the EIA lacks standing to prosecute the test claims on behalf of its member counties. We disagree.

In 1984, the Legislature established the administrative procedure by which local agencies and school districts may file claims with the commission for reimbursement of costs mandated by the state. (Gov. Code, §§ 17500, 17551, subd. (a).) In this context, “costs mandated by the state” means “any increased costs which a local agency or school district is required to incur . . . as a result of any statute . . . which mandates a new program or higher level of service of an existing program within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.” (Gov. Code, § 17514.)

Given that Government Code section 17551, subdivision (a) allows local agencies and school districts to seek reimbursement of state-mandated costs and Government Code

section 17518 includes counties within the definition of local agency, it must follow that the EIA's 54 member counties have standing to bring test claims for reimbursement of state-mandated costs. We must decide whether the EIA has standing to bring the test claims on behalf of its member counties.

When the EIA filed its test claims in 2002, Government Code section 17520 included joint powers authorities within the definition of special districts. As of January 1, 2005, however, joint powers agencies were eliminated from the definition of special districts. (Stats. 2004, ch. 890 (AB 2856).) Because the amended definition of special districts applies to pending cases such as this one, we conclude that the EIA is not a special district under section 17520 and has no standing to pursue its test claims on that basis. (See *Californians for Disability Rights v. Mervyn's, LLC* (2006) 39 Cal.4th 223 [Proposition 64, which limited standing to bring actions under the unfair competition law to governmental parties and injured private parties, eliminated the appellant's standing to pursue an appeal that was pending when the proposition was passed].)

Nevertheless, we agree with the EIA that it may pursue the test claims on behalf of its member counties because “[r]ather than having 54 counties bring individual test claims, the EIA, in its representative capacity is statutorily authorized to proceed on its members’ behalf.”<sup>2</sup>

According to the joint powers agreement, the EIA's purpose is “to jointly develop and fund insurance programs as determined. Such programs may include, but are not limited to, the creation of joint insurance funds, including excess insurance funds, the pooling of self-insured claims and losses, purchased insurance, including reinsurance,

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<sup>2</sup> Under *Branick v. Downey Savings & Loan Assn.* (2006) 39 Cal.4th 235, the companion case to *Californians for Disability Rights v. Mervyn's LLC*, *supra*, 39 Cal.4th 223, even if we were to conclude that the EIA lacked standing to bring a test claim on behalf of its member counties, it is possible that the EIA would be granted leave to amend to identify the county or counties that might be named as a plaintiff. Given our determination that the EIA has standing as a representative of its member counties to pursue the test claims, we need not address this unbriefed issue.



and the provision of necessary administrative services. Such administrative services may include, but shall not be limited to, risk management consulting, loss prevention and control, centralized loss reporting, actuarial consulting, claims adjusting, and legal defense services.”

By law, the EIA as a joint powers authority possesses the common powers enumerated in the joint powers agreement and may exercise those powers in the manner provided therein. (Gov. Code, § 6508.) California law provides that a joint powers agency may sue and be sued in its own name if it is authorized in its own name to do any or all of the following: to make and enter contracts; to employ agents and employees; to acquire, construct, manage, maintain, or operate any building, works, or improvements; to acquire, hold, or dispose of property; or to incur debts, liabilities, or obligations. (*Id.*, § 6508.) In this case, the joint powers agreement gave the EIA “all of the powers common to counties in California and all additional powers set forth in the joint powers law, and . . . authorized [it] to do all acts necessary for the exercise of said powers. Such powers include, but are not limited to, the following: [¶] (a) To make and enter into contracts. [¶] (b) To incur debts, liabilities, and obligations. [¶] (c) To acquire, hold, or dispose of property, contributions and donations of property, funds, services, and other forms of assistance from persons, firms, corporations, and government entities. [¶] (d) To sue and be sued in its own name, and to settle any claim against it. . . .”

Given that the joint powers agreement expressly authorized the EIA to exercise all of the powers common to counties in California, to do all acts necessary for the exercise of said powers, and to sue and be sued in its own name, we conclude that the joint powers agreement authorized the EIA to bring the test claims on behalf of its member counties, each of which qualifies as a local agency to bring a test claim under Government Code section 17518. Although as appellants point out, the EIA is a separate entity from the contracting counties and is not directly affected by the test statutes because it does not employ the peace officers, firefighters, and lifeguards specified in the test statutes, we conclude that those factors do not preclude the EIA from exercising its power under the agreement to sue on behalf of its member counties.

Appellants' reliance on *Kinlaw v. State of California* (1991) 54 Cal.3d 326 is misplaced. In *Kinlaw*, the plaintiffs filed suit as individual taxpayers and medically indigent adult residents of Alameda County to compel the state either to restore their Medi-Cal eligibility or to reimburse the county for their medical costs under article XIII B, section 6. The Supreme Court held that the plaintiffs in *Kinlaw* lacked standing because the right to reimbursement under article XIII B, section 6 "is a right given by the Constitution to local agencies, not individuals either as taxpayers or recipients of government benefits and services." (54 Cal.3d at p. 334.) The Supreme Court noted that the interest of the plaintiffs, "although pressing, is indirect and does not differ from the interest of the public at large in the financial plight of local government." (*Id.* at p. 335.)

In this case, however, the EIA has standing to sue as a joint powers authority on behalf of its 54 member counties that have standing as local agencies to bring test claims. Unlike the plaintiffs in *Kinlaw*, the EIA claims standing not as an individual or as a taxpayer, but as a joint powers authority with the right to exercise "all of the powers common to counties in California," and "to do all acts necessary for the exercise of said powers," including the right to sue in its own name. We therefore distinguish *Kinlaw* and conclude that it does not deprive the EIA of standing in this case.

## II

### Article XIII B, Section 6

Article XIII B, section 6 provides in relevant part that "[w]henver the Legislature or any state agency mandates a new program or higher level of service on any local government, the State shall provide a subvention of funds to reimburse such local government for the costs of such program or increased level of service . . . ." We conclude that because the test statutes did not mandate a new program or higher level of service of an existing program, reimbursement under article XIII B, section 6 is not required.

*A. The Purpose of Article XIII B, Section 6*

Article XIII A, which was added to the California Constitution by Proposition 13 in 1978, imposed a limit on the power of state and local governments to adopt and levy taxes. Article XIII B, which was added to the Constitution by Proposition 4 in 1979, imposed a complementary limit on government spending. The two provisions “work in tandem, together restricting California governments’ power both to levy and to spend for public purposes.” (*City of Sacramento v. State of California* (1990) 50 Cal.3d 51, 59, fn. 1.)

Article XIII B, section 6 prevents the state from shifting financial responsibility for governmental functions to local agencies by requiring the state to reimburse local agencies for the costs of providing a new program or higher level of service mandated by the state. (*County of Fresno v. State of California* (1991) 53 Cal.3d 482, 487.) “Specifically, it was designed to protect the tax revenues of local governments from state mandates that would require expenditure of such revenues.” (*Ibid.*)

*B. State Mandates*

We will assume for the sake of argument that the test statutes’ presumptions of industrial causation will impose some increased costs on local governments in the form of increased workers’ compensation benefit payments to injured local peace officers, firefighters, or lifeguards. The mere imposition of increased costs, however, is not determinative of whether the presumptions mandated a new program or higher level of service within an existing program as stated in article XIII B, section 6. “Although a law is addressed only to local governments and imposes new costs on them, it may still not be a reimbursable state mandate.” (*City of Richmond v. Commission on State Mandates* (1998) 64 Cal.App.4th 1190, 1197.) Whether the increased costs resulted from a state-mandated program or higher level of service presents solely a question of law as there are no disputed facts. (*County of San Diego v. State of California* (1997) 15 Cal.4th 68, 109.)

As previously noted, “costs mandated by the state” means “any increased costs which a local agency or school district is required to incur . . . as a result of any statute . . . which mandates a new program or higher level of service of an existing program within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.” (Gov. Code, § 17514.) As the Supreme Court explained in *County of Los Angeles v. State of California* (1987) 43 Cal.3d 46, “Looking at the language of section 6 then, it seems clear that by itself the term ‘higher level of service’ is meaningless. It must be read in conjunction with the predecessor phrase ‘new program’ to give it meaning. Thus read, it is apparent that the subvention requirement for increased or higher level of service is directed to state mandated increases in the services provided by local agencies in existing ‘programs.’ But the term ‘program’ itself is not defined in article XIII B. What programs then did the electorate have in mind when section 6 was adopted? We conclude that the drafters and the electorate had in mind the commonly understood meanings of the term--programs that carry out the governmental function of providing services to the public, or laws which, to implement a state policy, impose unique requirements on local governments and do not apply generally to all residents and entities in the state.” (*Id.* at p. 56; see *County of Los Angeles v. Commission on State Mandates* (2003) 110 Cal.App.4th 1176, 1191.)

In this case, the test statutes affect the administration of the workers’ compensation program. The Supreme Court has held that statutes increasing workers’ compensation benefits to reflect cost-of-living increases did not mandate either a new program or higher level of service in an existing program. “Workers’ compensation is not a program administered by local agencies to provide service to the public. Although local agencies must provide benefits to their employees either through insurance or direct payment, they are indistinguishable in this respect from private employers. In no sense can employers, public or private, be considered to be administrators of a program of workers’ compensation or to be providing services incidental to administration of the program. Workers’ compensation is administered by the state through the Division of Industrial Accidents and the Workers’ Compensation Appeals Board. (See Lab. Code,

§ 3201 et seq.) Therefore, although the state requires that employers provide workers' compensation for nonexempt categories of employees, increases in the cost of providing this employee benefit are not subject to reimbursement as state-mandated programs or higher levels of service within the meaning of section 6." (*County of Los Angeles v. State of California*, *supra*, 43 Cal.3d at pp. 57-58.)

We similarly conclude that because workers' compensation is not a program administered by local governments, the test statutes' presumptions of industrial causation do not mandate a new program or higher level of service within an existing program, even assuming that the test statutes' presumptions will impose increased workers' compensation costs solely on local entities. Because the test statutes do not involve a program administered by local governments, the increased costs resulting from the presumptions imposed to implement a public policy do not qualify for reimbursement under article XIII B, section 6. (See *City of Sacramento v. State of California*, *supra*, 50 Cal.3d 51 [state law extending mandatory coverage under state's unemployment insurance law to include state and local governments did not mandate a new program or higher level of service]; *City of Richmond v. Commission on State Mandates*, *supra*, 64 Cal.App.4th 1190 [state law requiring local governments to provide death benefits to local safety officers under both the Public Employees Retirement System and the workers' compensation system did not mandate a new program or higher level of service].)

Respondents' reliance on *Carmel Valley Fire Protection Dist. v. State of California* (1987) 190 Cal.App.3d 521 is misplaced. In *Carmel Valley*, the appellate court concluded that executive orders requiring local agencies to purchase updated firefighting equipment mandated both a new program and a higher level of service within an existing program because firefighting is "a peculiarly governmental function" (*id.* at p. 537) and the executive orders, to implement a state policy, imposed unique requirements on local governments that did not apply generally to all residents and entities in the state (*ibid.*). In this case, on the other hand, providing workers' compensation benefits is not a peculiarly governmental function and, even assuming the

test statutes implemented a state policy of paying increased workers' compensation benefits to local peace officers, firefighters, and lifeguards, the costs are not reimbursable because they do not arise within an existing program administered by local governments.

Respondents contend that the effect of the test statutes, increased costs, is borne only by local governments. As peace officers, firefighters, and lifeguards are uniquely governmental employees, respondents argue the test statutes do not apply generally to all entities in the state. The question which remains, however, is whether increased costs alone equate to a higher level of service within the meaning of article XIII B, section 6, even if paid only by local entities and not the private sector. We conclude they do not.

In a similar case, the City of Anaheim sought reimbursement for costs it incurred as a result of a statute that temporarily increased retirement benefits to public employees. The City of Anaheim argued, as do respondents, that since the statute "dealt with pensions for *public* employees, it imposed unique requirements on local governments that did not apply to all state residents or entities." (*City of Anaheim v. State of California* (1987) 189 Cal.App.3d 1478, 1483-1484.) The court held that subvention was not required because the program involved, the Public Employees' Retirement System, is not a program administered by local agencies. Such is the case here with the workers' compensation program. As noted, the program is administered by the state, not the local authorities.

The court also noted: "Moreover, the goals of article XIII B of the California Constitution 'were to protect residents from excessive taxation and government spending . . . [and] preclud[e] a shift of financial responsibility for carrying out governmental functions from the state to local agencies. . . . Bearing the costs of salaries, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation coverage--costs which all employers must bear--neither threatens excessive taxation or governmental spending, nor shifts from the state to a local agency the expense of providing governmental services.'" (*County of Los Angeles v. State of California, supra*, 43 Cal.3d at p. 61.) Similarly, City is faced with a higher cost of compensation to its employees. This is not the same as a

higher cost of providing services to the public.” (*City of Anaheim v. State of California, supra*, 189 Cal.App.3d at p. 1484.)

The reasoning applies here. The service provided by the counties represented by the EIA and the city, workers’ compensation benefits to its employees, is unchanged. The fact that some employees are more likely to receive those benefits does not equate to an increased level of service within the meaning of article XIII B, section 6. (*County of Los Angeles v. State of California, supra*, 43 Cal.3d at pp. 57-58.)

### **DISPOSITION**

The judgment granting the petitions for writ of mandate is affirmed in part on the issue of standing and reversed in part on the issue of reimbursement of state-mandated costs under article XIII B, section 6. The superior court is directed to enter a new and different judgment denying the petitions for writ of mandate and to reinstate that portion of the administrative rulings denying the test claims. The parties are to bear their own costs.

### **NOT TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL REPORTS**

SUZUKAWA, J.

We concur:

WILLHITE, Acting P.J.

MANELLA, J.