

Memorandum 89-71

Subject: Study L-1025 - Notice to Creditors (Draft of Bill for 1990)

The Commission at the July 1989 meeting decided to resubmit its notice to creditors recommendation (including the proposed one-year short term statute of limitations) to the Legislature in 1990. The staff has prepared the draft attached to this memorandum to implement this decision. The draft incorporates conforming changes approved by the Commission during the 1989 legislative process.

Respectfully submitted,

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Assistant Executive Secretary

An act to amend Section 353 of, and repeal Section 353.5 of, the Code of Civil Procedure, and to amend Sections 551, 6611, 9053, 9103, 9201, 9391, 11429, 13109, 13156, 13204, and 13554 of, and add Section 9392 to, the Probate Code, relating to creditors of a decedent, and declaring the urgency thereof, to take effect immediately.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

Code of Civil Procedure § 353 (amended). Statute of limitations

SECTION 1. Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure is amended to read:

353. (a) If a person entitled to bring an action dies before the expiration of the time limited for the commencement thereof, and the cause of action survives, an action may be commenced by the person's representatives, after the expiration of that time, and within six months from the person's death.

(b) Except as provided in ~~subdivision (e)~~ subdivisions (c) and (d), if a person against whom an action may be brought dies before the expiration of the time limited for the commencement thereof, and the cause of action survives, an action may be commenced ~~against the person's representatives, after the expiration of that time, and~~ within one year after the date of death, and the time otherwise limited for the commencement of the action does not apply.

(c) If a person against whom an action may be brought died before July 1, 1988, and before the expiration of the time limited for the commencement of the action, and the cause of action survives, an action may be commenced against the person's representatives before the expiration of the later of the following times:

(1) July 1, 1989, or one year after the issuing of letters testamentary or of administration, whichever is the earlier time.

(2) The time limited for the commencement of the action.

(d) If a person against whom an action may be brought died on or after July 1, 1988, and before the operative date of the 1990 amendment of this section, and before the expiration of the time limited for the

commencement of the action, and the cause of action survives, an action may be commenced within one year after the operative date of the 1990 amendment of this section, and the time otherwise limited for the commencement of the action does not apply.

Comment. Subdivision (b) of Section 353 is amended to impose a new statute of limitations on all actions against a decedent on which the statute of limitations otherwise applicable has not run at the time of death. The new statute is one year after the death of the decedent, regardless of whether the statute otherwise applicable would have expired before or after the one year period.

If a general personal representative is appointed during the one year period, the personal representative must notify known creditors, and the filing of a claim tolls the statute. Prob. Code §§ 9050 (notice required), 9352 (tolling of statute of limitations). If the creditor is concerned that the decedent's beneficiaries may not have a general personal representative appointed during the one year period, the creditor may petition for appointment during that time. Prob. Code §§ 8000 (petition), 8461 (priority for appointment); see also Prob. Code § 48 ("interested person" defined).

The reference to the decedent's "representatives" is also deleted from subdivision (b). The reference could be read to imply that the one year limitation is only applicable in actions against the decedent's personal representative. However, the one year statute of limitations is intended to apply in any action on a debt of the decedent, whether against the personal representative under Probate Code Sections 9350 to 9354 (claim on cause of action), or against another person, such as a distributee under Probate Code Section 9392 (liability of distributee), a person who takes the decedent's property and is liable for the decedent's debts under Sections 13109 (affidavit procedure for collection or transfer of personal property), 13156 (court order determining succession to real property), 13204 (affidavit procedure for real property of small value), and 13554 (passage of property to surviving spouse without administration), or a trustee.

Code of Civil Procedure § 353.5 (repealed). Limitation on action against spouse of decedent

SEC. 2. Section 353.5 of the Code of Civil Procedure is repealed.

~~353.5. If a person against whom an action may be brought dies before the expiration of the statute of limitations for the commencement of the action and the cause of action survives, an action against the surviving spouse of the person which is brought pursuant to Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 13550) of Part 2 of Division 8 of the Probate Code may be commenced within four months after the death of the person or before the expiration of the statute of limitations which would have been applicable to the cause of action against the person if the person had not died, whichever occurs later.~~

Comment. Section 353.5 is repealed because it is inconsistent with the general one-year limitation period for commencement of an action on a cause of action against a decedent under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353.

Probate Code § 551 (amended). Statute of limitations

SEC. 3. Section 551 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

551. If Notwithstanding Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure, if the limitations period otherwise applicable to the action has not expired at the time of the decedent's death, an action under this chapter may be commenced within one year after the expiration of the limitations period otherwise applicable.

Comment. Section 551 is amended to make clear that the general one-year limitation period for commencement of an action on a cause of action against a decedent under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353 does not apply to an action under this chapter.

Probate Code § 6611 (amended). Liability for unsecured debts of decedent

SEC. 4. Section 6611 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

6611. (a) Subject to the limitations and conditions specified in this section, the person or persons in whom title vested pursuant to Section 6609 are personally liable for the unsecured debts of the decedent.

(b) The personal liability of a person under this section shall not exceed the fair market value at the date of the decedent's death of the property title to which vested in that person pursuant to Section 6609, less the total of all of the following:

(1) The amount of any liens and encumbrances on that property.

(2) The value of any probate homestead interest set apart under Section 6520 out of that property.

(3) The value of any other property set aside under Section 6510 out of that property.

~~(e) The personal liability under this section ceases one year after the date the court makes its order under Section 6609, except with respect to an action or proceeding then pending in court.~~

~~(d)~~—In (c) Subject to Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure,
in any action or proceeding based upon an unsecured debt of the
decedent, the surviving spouse of the decedent, the child or children
of the decedent, or the guardian of the minor child or children of the
decedent, may assert any defense, cross-complaint, or setoff which
would have been available to the decedent if the decedent had not died.

(e) (d) If proceedings are commenced in this state for the
administration of the estate of the decedent and the time for filing
claims has commenced, any action upon the personal liability of a
person under this section is barred to the same extent as provided for
claims under Part 4 (commencing with Section 9000) of Division 7,
except as to the following:

(1) Creditors who commence judicial proceedings for the
enforcement of the debt and serve the person liable under this section
with the complaint therein prior to the expiration of the time for
filing claims.

(2) Creditors who have or who secure an acknowledgment in writing
of the person liable under this section that that person is liable for
the debts.

(3) Creditors who file a timely claim in the proceedings for the
administration of the estate of the decedent.

Comment. Section 6611 is amended for consistency with the general
one-year limitation period for commencement of an action on a cause of
action against a decedent under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353.

[Probate Code § 9053 (amended). Immunity of personal representative
SEC. 5. See AB 158.]

Probate Code § 9103 (amended). Late claims

SEC. 6. Section 9103 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

9103. (a) Upon petition by a creditor and notice of hearing given
as provided in Section 1220, the court may allow a claim to be filed
after expiration of the time for filing a claim if the creditor
establishes that either of the following conditions ~~are~~ is satisfied:

(1) Neither the creditor nor the attorney representing the creditor in the matter had actual knowledge of the administration of the estate within more than 15 days before expiration of the time provided in Section 9100, and the creditor's petition was filed within 30 days after either the creditor or the creditor's attorney had actual knowledge of the administration whichever occurred first.

(2) Neither the creditor nor the attorney representing the creditor in the matter had knowledge of the existence of the claim within more than 15 days before expiration of the time provided in Section 9100, and the creditor's petition was filed within 30 days after either the creditor or the creditor's attorney had knowledge of the existence of the claim whichever occurred first.

~~(b) This section applies only to a claim that relates to an action or proceeding pending against the decedent at the time of death or, if no action or proceeding is pending, to a cause of action that does not arise out of the creditor's conduct of a trade, business, or profession in this state.~~

(e) (b) The court shall not allow a claim to be filed under this section after the earlier of the following times:

(1) The time the court makes an order for final distribution of the estate.

(2) One year after the ~~time letters are first issued to a general personal representative~~ date of the decedent's death.

(d (c) The court may condition the claim on terms that are just and equitable, and may require the appointment or reappointment of a personal representative if necessary. The court may deny the creditor's petition if a preliminary distribution to beneficiaries or a payment to general creditors has been made and it appears that the filing or establishment of the claim would cause or tend to cause unequal treatment among beneficiaries or creditors.

(e) (d) Regardless of whether the claim is later established in whole or in part, property distributed under court order and payments otherwise properly made before a claim is filed under this section are not subject to the claim. The Except to the extent provided in Section 9392 and subject to Section 9053, the personal representative, designee distributee, or payee is not liable on account of the prior distribution or payment.

Comment. Former subdivision (b) of Section 9103, limiting the types of claims eligible for late claim treatment, is deleted. It should be noted that a creditor who is omitted because the creditor had no knowledge of the administration is not limited to the remedy provided in this section. If assets have been distributed, a remedy may be available against distributees under Section 9392 (liability of distributee). If the creditor can establish that the lack of knowledge is a result of the personal representative's bad faith failure to notify known creditors under Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 9050) (notice to creditors), recovery may be available against the personal representative personally or on the bond, if any. See Section 11429 (unpaid creditor). See also Section 9053 (immunity of personal representative).

Paragraph (b)(2) is revised to make clear that a late claim should not be permitted if the statute of limitations has run on the claim. This is the consequence of the rule stated in Section 9253 that a claim barred by the statute of limitations may not be allowed by the personal representative or approved by the court or judge. Under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353, the statute of limitations runs one year after the decedent's death.

Probate Code § 9201 (amended). Claims governed by special statutes

SEC. 7. Section 9201 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

9201. (a) Notwithstanding any other ~~provision of this part~~ statute, if a claim of a public entity arises under a law, act, or code listed in subdivision (b):

(1) The public entity may use a form as is necessary to effectively administer the law, act, or code. Where appropriate, the form may require the decedent's social security number, if known.

(2) The claim is barred only after written notice or request to the public entity and expiration of the period provided in the applicable section. If no written notice or request is made, the claim is enforceable by the remedies, and is barred at the time, otherwise provided in the law, act, or code.

(b)

Law, Act, or Code	Applicable Section
Sales and Use Tax Law (commencing with Section 6001 of the Revenue and Taxation Code)	Section 6487.1 of the Revenue and Taxation Code
Bradley-Burns Uniform Local Sales and Use Tax Law (commencing with Section 7200 of the Revenue and Taxation Code)	Section 6487.1 of the Revenue and Taxation Code

Transactions and Use
Tax Law (commencing
with Section 7251 of the
Revenue and Taxation Code)

Section 6487.1 of the
Revenue and
Taxation Code

Motor Vehicle Fuel License
Tax Law (commencing with
Section 7301 of the
Revenue and Taxation Code)

Section 7675.1 of the
Revenue and
Taxation Code

Use Fuel Tax Law
(commencing with Section
8601 of the Revenue
and Taxation Code)

Section 8782.1 of the
Revenue and
Taxation Code

Personal Income Tax
Law (commencing with
Section 17001 of the
Revenue and Taxation Code)

Section 19266 of the
Revenue and
Taxation Code

Cigarette Tax Law
(commencing with Section
30001 of the Revenue
and Taxation Code)

Section 30207.1 of
the Revenue and
Taxation Code

Alcoholic Beverage
Tax Law (commencing
with Section
32001 of the Revenue
and Taxation Code)

Section 32272.1 of
the Revenue and
Taxation Code

Unemployment Insurance
Code

Section 1090 of the
Unemployment
Insurance Code

State Hospitals for
the Mentally Disordered
(commencing with Section
7200 of the Welfare
and Institutions Code)

Section 7277.1 of the
Welfare and
Institutions Code

Medi-Cal Act (com-
mencing with Section
14000 of the Welfare
and Institutions Code)

Section 9202 of the
Probate Code

Waxman-Duffy Prepaid
Health Plan Act (com-
mencing with Section
14200 of the Welfare
and Institutions Code)

Section 9202 of the
Probate Code

Comment. Subdivision (a) of Section 9201 is amended to make clear that it applies notwithstanding statutes located in places other than this part. Specifically, Section 9201 applies notwithstanding Code of Civil Procedure Section 353 (general statute of limitations running one year from the decedent's death).

Probate Code § 9391 (amended). Enforcement of security interest

SEC. 8. Section 9391 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

9391. The holder of a mortgage or other lien on property in the decedent's estate, including but not limited to a judgment lien, may commence an action to enforce the lien against the property that is subject to the lien, without first filing a claim as provided in this part, if in the complaint the holder of the lien expressly waives all recourse against other property in the estate. Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure does not apply to an action under this section.

Comment. Section 9391 is amended to except an action to enforce a lien from the one-year statute of limitations in Code of Civil Procedure Section 353. The statute of limitations otherwise applicable to an action to enforce the lien continues to apply notwithstanding Section 353.

Probate Code § 9392 (added). Liability of distributee

SEC. 9. Section 9392 is added to the Probate Code, to read:

9392. (a) Subject to subdivision (b), a person to whom property is distributed is personally liable for the claim of a creditor, without a claim first having been filed, if all of the following conditions are satisfied:

(1) The identity of the creditor was known to, or reasonably ascertainable by, a general personal representative within four months after the date letters were first issued to the personal representative, and the claim of the creditor was not merely conjectural.

(2) Notice of administration of the estate was not given to the creditor under Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 9050) and neither the creditor nor the attorney representing the creditor in the matter had actual knowledge of the administration of the estate before the time the court made an order for final distribution of the property.

(3) The statute of limitations applicable to the claim under Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure has not expired at the time of commencement of an action under this section.

(b) Personal liability under this section is applicable only to the extent the claim of the creditor cannot be satisfied out of the estate of the decedent and is limited to the extent of the fair market value of the property on the date of the order for distribution, less the amount of any liens and encumbrances on the property at that time. Personal liability under this section is joint and several, based on the principles stated in Part 4 (commencing with Section 21400) of Division 11 (abatement).

(c) Nothing in this section affects the rights of a purchaser or encumbrancer of property in good faith and for value from a person who is personally liable under this section.

Comment. Section 9392 is new. It implements the rule of Tulsa Professional Collection Services, Inc. v. Pope, 108 S. Ct. 1340 (1988), that the claim of a known or reasonably ascertainable creditor whose claim is not merely conjectural but who is not given actual notice of administration may not be cut off by a short claim filing requirement. Section 9392 is intended as a limited remedy to cure due process failures only, and is not intended as a general provision applicable to all creditors.

A creditor who has knowledge of estate administration must file a claim or, if the claim filing period has expired, must petition for leave to file a late claim. See Sections 9100 (time for filing claims) and 9103 (late claims). This rule applies whether the creditor's knowledge is acquired through notification under Section 9050 (notice required), by virtue of publication under Section 8120 (publication required), or otherwise.

Under Section 9392, a creditor who has no knowledge of estate administration before an order is made for distribution of property has a remedy against distributees to the extent payment cannot be obtained from the estate. There is a one year statute of limitations, commencing with the date of the decedent's death, for an action under this section by the creditor. Code Civ. Proc. § 353. Since liability of distributees under this section is joint and several, a distributee may join, or seek contribution from, other distributees. Subdivision (c) is a specific application of the general purpose of this section to subject a distributee to personal liability but not to require rescission of a distribution already made.

An omitted creditor may also have a cause of action against a personal representative who in bad faith fails to give notice to a known creditor. See Sections 9053 (immunity of personal representative) and Section 11429 (unpaid creditor).

Prob. Code § 11429 (amended). Unpaid creditor

SEC. 10. Section 11429 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

11429. (a) Where the accounts of the personal representative have been settled and an order made for the payment of debts and distribution of the estate, a creditor who is not paid, whether or not included in the order for payment, has no right to require contribution from creditors who are paid or from distributees, except to the extent provided in Section 9392.

(b) Nothing in this section precludes recovery against the personal representative personally or on the bond, if any, by a creditor who is not paid, subject to Section 9053.

Comment. Subdivision (a) of Section 11429 is amended to recognize the liability of distributees provided by Section 9392 (liability of distributee).

Subdivision (b) is amended to make specific reference to the statutory immunity of the personal representative for actions and omissions in notifying creditors. This amendment is not a change in law, but is intended for cross-referencing purposes only. The reference to the specific immunity provided in Section 9053 should not be construed to limit the availability of any other applicable defenses of the personal representative.

Probate Code § 13109 (amended). Liability for decedent's unsecured debts

SEC. 11. Section 13109 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

13109. A person to whom payment, delivery, or transfer of the decedent's property is made under this chapter is personally liable, to the extent provided in Section 13112, for the unsecured debts of the decedent. Any such debt may be enforced against the person in the same manner as it could have been enforced against the decedent if the decedent had not died. In Subject to Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure, in any action based upon the debt, the person may assert any defenses, cross-complaints, or setoffs that would have been available to the decedent if the decedent had not died.

Comment. Section 13109 is amended for consistency with the general one-year limitation period for commencement of an action on a cause of action against a decedent under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353.

Probate Code § 13156 (amended). Liability for decedent's unsecured debts

SEC. 12. Section 13156 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

13156. (a) Subject to subdivisions (b) and (c), the petitioner who receives the decedent's property pursuant to an order under this chapter is personally liable for the unsecured debts of the decedent.

(b) The personal liability of any petitioner shall not exceed the fair market value at the date of the decedent's death of the property received by that petitioner pursuant to an order under this chapter, less the amount of any liens and encumbrances on the property.

(c) In Subject to Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure, in any action or proceeding based upon an unsecured debt of the decedent, the petitioner may assert any defense, cross-complaint, or setoff which would have been available to the decedent if the decedent had not died.

Comment. Section 13156 is amended for consistency with the general one-year limitation period for commencement of an action on a cause of action against a decedent under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353.

Probate Code § 13204 (amended). Liability for decedent's unsecured debts

SEC. 13. Section 13204 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

13204. Each person who is designated as a successor of the decedent in a certified copy of an affidavit issued under Section 13202 is personally liable to the extent provided in Section 13207 for the unsecured debts of the decedent. Any such debt may be enforced against the person in the same manner as it could have been enforced against the decedent if the decedent had not died. In Subject to Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure, in any action based upon the debt, the person may assert any defense, cross-complaint, or setoff that would have been available to the decedent if the decedent had not died.

Comment. Section 13204 is amended for consistency with the general one-year limitation period for commencement of an action on a cause of action against a decedent under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353.

Probate Code § 13554 (amended). Enforcement of liability

SEC. 14. Section 13554 of the Probate Code is amended to read:

13554. (a) Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, any debt described in Section 13550 may be enforced against the surviving spouse in the same manner as it could have been enforced against the deceased spouse if the deceased spouse had not died.

(b) In Subject to Section 353 of the Code of Civil Procedure, in any action based upon the debt, the surviving spouse may assert any defense, cross-complaint, or setoff which would have been available to the deceased spouse if the deceased spouse had not died.

Comment. Section 13554 is amended for consistency with the general one-year limitation period for commencement of an action on a cause of action against a decedent under Code of Civil Procedure Section 353. Cf. former Code Civ. Proc. § 353.5 and Comment thereto.

Urgency Clause

SEC. 15. This act is an urgency statute necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety within the meaning of Article IV of the Constitution and shall go into immediate effect. The facts constituting the necessity are:

The existing California statute governing creditor claims in probate does not satisfy constitutional standards announced by the United States Supreme Court in Tulsa Professional Collection Services, Inc. v. Pope, 108 S. Ct. 1340 (1988). This act revises the California statute consistent with the standards announced by the court. In order to resolve the present confusion among lawyers, courts, personal representatives, creditors, and others involved in the probate process who must work with the existing unconstitutional statute, it is necessary that this act take effect immediately.