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HOUSE BILL 183

**48TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2007**

INTRODUCED BY

Antonio "Moe" Maestas

AN ACT

RELATING TO THE PRACTICE OF LAW; PROHIBITING THE UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICE OF LAW; PROVIDING CIVIL AND CRIMINAL PENALTIES; PROVIDING A PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION; MAKING AN APPROPRIATION.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

Section 1. Section 36-2-27 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1909, Chapter 53, Section 26, as amended) is repealed and a new Section 36-2-27 NMSA 1978 is enacted to read:

"36-2-27. [NEW MATERIAL] PRACTICE OF LAW DEFINED-- UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICE OF LAW PROHIBITED--PENALTY.--

A. The practice of law is the application of legal principles and judgment with regard to the circumstances or objectives of another person that require the skill of a person trained in the law. The practice of law includes:

- (1) giving advice or counsel to another person

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1 as to that person's legal rights or responsibilities;

2 (2) selecting, drafting or preparing any  
3 document in any medium intended to affect or secure legal  
4 rights or incur legal obligations for another person;

5 (3) representing a party in a judicial, quasi-  
6 judicial or administrative proceeding or other dispute  
7 resolution process, including arbitration or mediation; or

8 (4) negotiating legal rights or  
9 responsibilities on behalf of another person.

10 B. Except as provided in Subsection C of this  
11 section, the unauthorized practice of law occurs when a person,  
12 without a certificate of admission to the bar pursuant to the  
13 provisions of Chapter 36, Article 2 NMSA 1978 and the rules of  
14 the supreme court of New Mexico:

15 (1) engages in the practice of law;

16 (2) makes any representation as being an  
17 attorney or counselor at law; or

18 (3) advertises or displays any matter or  
19 medium designed to give the impression that the person is an  
20 attorney or counselor at law.

21 C. The unauthorized practice of law does not  
22 include:

23 (1) the practice of law by a public employee  
24 or law professor holding a limited license issued pursuant to  
25 rules promulgated by the supreme court;

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1 (2) the provision of services by a paralegal  
2 pursuant to rules promulgated by the supreme court;

3 (3) the provision of services as a mediator,  
4 conciliator or facilitator whether in a neutral,  
5 non-adjudicative capacity or in an adjudicative capacity;

6 (4) the participation in a labor negotiation,  
7 administrative hearing, arbitration or conciliation arising  
8 under collective bargaining rights or agreements, the School  
9 Personnel Act, the Personnel Act or other statutes, rules or  
10 policies governing labor and employment;

11 (5) the participation in an administrative  
12 hearing, arbitration or mediation arising under the Workers'  
13 Compensation Act and in accordance with the rules and policies  
14 of the workers' compensation administration;

15 (6) the provision of services related to  
16 intellectual property transactions by a registered patent agent  
17 who is generally under the supervision of an attorney and who  
18 is reasonably familiar with similar transactions;

19 (7) the provision of services by an advocate  
20 working in a nonprofit capacity, in a pro se clinic or  
21 otherwise working for no monetary gain and in the public  
22 interest, provided that the advocate is supervised by an  
23 attorney licensed in New Mexico;

24 (8) the provision of a professional service,  
25 or preparation of a document, by a certified public accountant

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1 or firm of certified public accountants, customarily provided  
2 or prepared by a certified public accountant in connection with  
3 the certified public accountant's professional work;

4 (9) the completion by a person holding a valid  
5 real estate license pursuant to Chapter 61, Article 29 NMSA  
6 1978 of a legal form prepared by, prepared under the  
7 supervision of or reviewed by an attorney licensed in New  
8 Mexico;

9 (10) the participation in an arbitration or  
10 mediation arising under the bylaws of a board or association of  
11 persons holding valid real estate licenses pursuant to Chapter  
12 61, Article 29 NMSA 1978;

13 (11) the provision of services by a person  
14 holding a valid real estate license pursuant to Chapter 61,  
15 Article 29 NMSA 1978 if the services are within the scope of  
16 the person's license;

17 (12) the provision of services performed  
18 pursuant to Chapter 59A, Article 13 NMSA 1978 by persons  
19 licensed pursuant to that article;

20 (13) the negotiation and sale of a motor  
21 vehicle by a licensed motor vehicle dealer pursuant to Chapter  
22 66, Article 4 NMSA 1978 and the sale of products and services  
23 in connection with the negotiation and sale of a motor vehicle  
24 by a licensed motor vehicle dealer and its authorized  
25 employees;

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1 (14) the preparation of trust instruments or  
2 documents for, or the closing of, a loan transaction by a party  
3 thereto, or its agent, if the preparation or closing is  
4 ordinarily incidental to the loan transaction, notwithstanding  
5 any fee charged for document preparation by the party or its  
6 agent;

7 (15) the completion of a legal form prepared  
8 by, prepared under the supervision of or reviewed by an  
9 attorney licensed in New Mexico;

10 (16) lobbying activities conducted by a  
11 lobbyist registered pursuant to the Lobbyist Regulation Act;

12 (17) the practice of law before a court or  
13 administrative body pursuant to pro hac vice rules of the  
14 supreme court; or

15 (18) the provision of any other service  
16 expressly allowed by a law, court rule or federal or state  
17 administrative rule or policy.

18 D. Any person who willfully engages in the  
19 unauthorized practice of law is guilty of a misdemeanor and  
20 shall be fined an amount not to exceed five hundred dollars  
21 (\$500) or imprisoned for a period not to exceed six months, or  
22 both."

23 Section 2. A new section of Chapter 36, Article 2 NMSA  
24 1978 is enacted to read:

25 "[NEW MATERIAL] UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICE OF LAW--PRIVATE

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1 REMEDIES.--

2 A. A person likely to be damaged by an unauthorized  
3 practice of law in violation of Section 36-2-27 NMSA 1978 may  
4 bring an action for an injunction against the alleged violator.  
5 An injunction granted shall be pursuant to the principles of  
6 equity and on terms that the court considers reasonable. Proof  
7 of monetary damage or loss of profit is not required for an  
8 injunction to be granted pursuant to this subsection.

9 B. A person who suffers a loss of money or other  
10 property as a result of an unauthorized practice of law in  
11 violation of Section 36-2-27 NMSA 1978 may bring an action for  
12 the greater of actual damages or one thousand dollars (\$1,000)  
13 and the restitution of any money or property received by the  
14 alleged violator; provided that, if the court finds that the  
15 alleged violator willfully engaged in the unauthorized practice  
16 of law, the court may award up to three times the actual  
17 damages or three thousand dollars (\$3,000), whichever is  
18 greater.

19 C. A person bringing an action pursuant to  
20 Subsection A or B of this section shall, if the person  
21 prevails, also be awarded attorney fees and costs.

22 D. The relief provided by this section is in  
23 addition to other remedies available at law or equity."

24 Section 3. A new section of Chapter 36, Article 2 NMSA  
25 1978 is enacted to read:

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1            "[NEW MATERIAL] UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICE OF LAW--ACTION BY  
2 ATTORNEY GENERAL.--

3            A. Whenever the attorney general has reason to  
4 believe that a person has engaged in the unauthorized practice  
5 of law in violation of Section 36-2-27 NMSA 1978 or has aided  
6 or abetted another person in the unauthorized practice of law  
7 and that proceedings would be in the public interest, the  
8 attorney general may bring an action in the name of the state  
9 against the alleged violator. The action may be brought in the  
10 district court for the county in which the alleged violator  
11 resides or has a principal place of business or in the district  
12 court for a county in which the alleged violation took place.  
13 In an action brought pursuant to this section, in addition to  
14 civil penalties, the attorney general may petition the court  
15 for a temporary or permanent injunction and restitution, and,  
16 if seeking a temporary or permanent injunction, the attorney  
17 general shall not be required to post bond.

18            B. In lieu of filing or continuing an action  
19 pursuant to this section, the attorney general may accept a  
20 written assurance of discontinuance of the unauthorized  
21 practice of law from the alleged violator. The assurance may  
22 contain an agreement by the alleged violator that restitution  
23 will be made to all persons of money or property received from  
24 them in any transaction related to the unauthorized practice,  
25 provided that a person harmed by the unauthorized practice is

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1 not required to accept restitution but, if the restitution is  
2 accepted, the person accepting the restitution is barred from  
3 recovering damages from the alleged violator in an action based  
4 upon the same unauthorized practice.

5 C. In an action brought by the attorney general  
6 pursuant to this section, if the court finds that the alleged  
7 violator engaged in the unauthorized practice of law, the court  
8 may impose a civil penalty not to exceed five thousand dollars  
9 (\$5,000) per violation. In addition, if the court finds that a  
10 person has aided or abetted another to engage in the  
11 unauthorized practice of law, the court may impose a civil  
12 penalty not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for the  
13 first violation and a civil penalty not to exceed five thousand  
14 dollars (\$5,000) for each subsequent violation."

15 Section 4. APPROPRIATION.--Ten thousand dollars (\$10,000)  
16 is appropriated from the general fund to the corrections  
17 department for expenditure in fiscal year 2008 to fund any  
18 increase in prison populations or probation caseloads resulting  
19 from the creation of a new misdemeanor known as the  
20 unauthorized practice of law. Any unexpended or unencumbered  
21 balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2008 shall revert  
22 to the general fund.

23 Section 5. REPEAL.--Section 36-2-28 NMSA 1978 (being Laws  
24 1925, Chapter 100, Section 12) is repealed.

25 Section 6. EFFECTIVE DATE.--The effective date of the



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provisions of this act is July 1, 2007.

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