§ 412. Registration as prerequisite to certain remedies for infringement

In any action under this title, other than an action brought for a violation of the rights of the author under section 106(a), an action for infringement of the copyright of a work that has been preregistered under section 408(b) before the commencement of the infringement and that has an effective date of registration not later than the earlier of 3 months after publication of the work or 1 month after the copyright owner has learned of the infringement, or an action instituted under section 411(c), no award of statutory damages or of attorney’s fees where infringement of copyright in an unpublished work began before registration or where, in the case of a published work, infringement commenced after publication and before registration (unless registration has been made within a grace period of three months after publication). These provisions would be applicable to works of foreign and domestic origin alike.

In providing that statutory damages and attorney’s fees are not recoverable for infringement of unpublished, unregistered works, clause (1) of section 412 in no way narrows the remedies available under the present law. With respect to published works, clause (2) would generally deny an award of the special or “extraordinary” remedies of statutory damages or attorney’s fees where infringement of copyright in an unpublished work began before registration or where, in the case of a published work, infringement commenced after publication and before registration, unless the infringement has been made within a grace period of three months after publication. These provisions would be applicable to works of foreign and domestic origin alike.

(1) Copyright registration for published works, which is useful and important to users and the public at large, would no longer be compulsory, and should therefore be in some more practical way.

(2) The great body of unpublished works now protected at common law would automatically be brought under copyright and given statutory protection. The remedies for infringement presently available at common law should continue to apply to these works under the statute, but they should not be given special statutory remedies unless the owner has, by registration, made a public record of his copyright claim.

Under the general scheme of the bill, a copyright owner whose work has been infringed before registration would be entitled to the remedies ordinarily available in infringement cases: an injunction on terms the court considers fair, and his actual damages plus any applicable profits not used as a measure of damages. However, section 412 would deny any award of the special or “extraordinary” remedies of statutory damages or attorney’s fees where infringement of copyright in an unpublished work began before registration or where, in the case of a published work, infringement commenced after publication and before registration.

In providing that statutory damages and attorney’s fees are not recoverable for infringement of unpublished, unregistered works, clause (1) of section 412 in no way narrows the remedies available under the present law. With respect to published works, clause (2) would generally deny an award of the special remedies where infringement takes place before registration. As an exception, however, the clause provides a grace period of three months after publication during which registration can be made without loss of remedies; full remedies could be recovered for any infringement begun during the three months after publication if registration is made before that period has ended. This exception is needed to take care of newsworthy or suddenly popular works which may be infringed almost as soon as they are published, before the copyright owner has had a reasonable opportunity to record his claim.

AMENDMENTS

2008—Pub. L. 110–403 substituted “"section 411(c)"” for “"section 411(b)"” in introductory provisions.

2005—Pub. L. 109–9 inserted “", an action for infringement of the copyright of a work that has been preregistered under section 408(b) before the commencement of the infringement and that has an effective date of registration not later than the earlier of 3 months after the first publication of the work or 1 month after the copyright owner has learned of the infringement," after “"section 106A(a)"” in introductory provisions.

1990—Pub. L. 101–650 inserted “an action brought for a violation of the rights of the author under section 106A(a) or" after “"other than"” in introductory provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1990 AMENDMENT


CHAPTER 5—COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT AND REMEDIES

Sec. 501. Infringement of copyright.


503. Remedies for infringement: Impounding and disposition of infringing articles.

504. Remedies for infringement: Damages and profits.