

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7818

To amend title 28, United States Code, to strip foreign sovereign immunity of certain foreign states to secure justice for victims of novel coronavirus in the United States.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 29, 2020

Mr. GOODEN (for himself and Mr. BANKS) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

A BILL

To amend title 28, United States Code, to strip foreign sovereign immunity of certain foreign states to secure justice for victims of novel coronavirus in the United States.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Civil Justice for Vic-
5 tims of China-Originated Viral Infections Diseases Act”
6 or the “Civil Justice for Victims of COVID Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. RESPONSIBILITY OF FOREIGN STATES FOR RECK-**
2 **LESS ACTIONS OR OMISSIONS CAUSING THE**
3 **COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC IN THE UNITED**
4 **STATES.**

5 (a) RESPONSIBILITY.—Chapter 97 of title 28, United
6 States Code, is amended by inserting after section 1605B
7 the following:

8 **“§ 1605C. Responsibility of foreign states for reckless**
9 **actions or omissions causing the COVID-**
10 **19 global pandemic in the United States**

11 “(a) RESPONSIBILITY OF FOREIGN STATES.—A for-
12 eign state shall not be immune from the jurisdiction of
13 the courts of the United States in any case in which money
14 damages are sought against a foreign state for death or
15 physical or economic injury to person, property, or busi-
16 ness occurring in the United States following any reckless
17 action or omission (including a conscious disregard of the
18 need to report information promptly or deliberately hiding
19 relevant information) of a foreign state, or of any official,
20 employee, or agent of that foreign state while acting with-
21 in the scope of his or her office, employment, or agency,
22 that caused or substantially contributed to the COVID-
23 19 global pandemic in the United States, regardless of
24 where the action or omission occurred.

25 “(b) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—A foreign state shall
26 not be subject to the jurisdiction of the courts of the

1 United States under subsection (a) on the basis of an
2 omission or act that constitutes mere negligence.

3 “(c) JURISDICTION.—

4 “(1) EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTION.—The courts of
5 the United States shall have exclusive jurisdiction in
6 any action in which a foreign state is subject to the
7 jurisdiction of a court of the United States under
8 subsection (a).

9 “(2) ADDITIONAL AUTHORITY TO ISSUE OR-
10 DERS.—In addition to authority already granted by
11 other laws, the courts of the United States shall
12 have jurisdiction to make and issue any writ or
13 order of injunction necessary or appropriate for the
14 enforcement of this section, including pre-judgment
15 injunctions related to transfer or disposal of assets.

16 “(d) INTERVENTION.—The Attorney General may in-
17 tervene in any action in which a foreign state is subject
18 to the jurisdiction of a court of the United States under
19 subsection (a) for the purpose of seeking a stay of the
20 civil action, in whole or in part.

21 “(e) STAY.—

22 “(1) IN GENERAL.—A court of the United
23 States may stay a proceeding against a foreign state
24 if the Secretary of State certifies that the United
25 States is engaged in good faith discussions with the

1 foreign state defendant concerning the resolution of
2 the claims against the foreign state, or any other
3 parties as to whom a stay of claims is sought. In ex-
4 ercising its discretion under this subsection, the
5 court shall balance the interests of the United States
6 with the interests of the plaintiffs in a timely review
7 of their claims.

8 “(2) DURATION.—

9 “(A) IN GENERAL.—A stay under this sec-
10 tion may be granted for not more than 180
11 days.

12 “(B) EXTENSION.—

13 “(i) IN GENERAL.—The Attorney
14 General may petition the court for an ex-
15 tension of the stay for additional periods
16 not to exceed 180 days.

17 “(ii) RECERTIFICATION.—A court
18 may grant an extension under subpara-
19 graph (A) if the Secretary of State recer-
20 tifies that the United States remains en-
21 gaged in good faith discussions with the
22 foreign state defendant concerning the res-
23 olution of the claims against the foreign
24 state, or any other parties as to whom a
25 stay of claims is sought. In choosing

1 whether to grant an extension, the court
2 shall balance the interests of the United
3 States with the interests of the plaintiffs in
4 a timely review of their claims.”.

5 (b) APPLICABILITY.—The amendment made by sub-
6 section (a) shall apply to any action or omission described
7 in section 1605C of title 28, United States Code, as added
8 by that subsection, that occurred before, on, or after the
9 date of enactment of this Act.

10 (c) REMOVAL OF IMMUNITY FROM ATTACHMENT OR
11 EXECUTION.—Section 1610 of title 28, United States
12 Code, is amended—

13 (1) in subsection (a)(7), by striking “section
14 1605A or section 1605(a)(7) (as such section was in
15 effect on January 27, 2008)” and inserting “section
16 1605A, section 1605(a)(7) (as such section was in
17 effect on January 27, 2008), or section 1605C”;

18 (2) in subsection (b)(2), by striking “or
19 1605(b)” and inserting “, 1605(b), or 1605C”;

20 (3) by striking subsection (d) and inserting the
21 following:

22 “(d) The property of a foreign state, as defined in
23 section 1603(a) of this chapter, used for a commercial ac-
24 tivity in the United States, shall not be immune from at-
25 tachment prior to the entry of judgment in any action

1 brought in a court of the United States or of a State,
2 or prior to the elapse of the period of time provided in
3 subsection (c) of this section, if—

4 “(1) the foreign state has explicitly waived its
5 immunity from attachment prior to judgment, not-
6 withstanding any withdrawal of the waiver the for-
7 eign state may purport to effect except in accord-
8 ance with the terms of the waiver;

9 “(2) the purpose of the attachment is to secure
10 satisfaction of a judgment that has been or may ulti-
11 mately be entered against the foreign state, and not
12 to obtain jurisdiction; or

13 “(3) the attachment relates to a claim for which
14 the foreign state is not immune under section
15 1605C.”; and

16 (4) in subsection (g)(1), in the matter pre-
17 ceding subparagraph (A), by striking “1605A” and
18 inserting “1605A or 1605C”.

19 (d) CAUSE OF ACTION.—Any citizen or resident of
20 the United States injured in his or her person, property,
21 or business by reason of any reckless action or omission
22 (including a conscious disregard of the need to report in-
23 formation promptly or deliberately hiding relevant infor-
24 mation) of a foreign state, or of any official, employee,
25 or agent of that foreign state while acting within the scope

1 of his or her office, employment, or agency, that caused
 2 or substantially contributed to the COVID–19 global pan-
 3 demic in the United States, regardless of where the action
 4 or omission occurred, may sue therefor in any appropriate
 5 district court of the United States and shall recover three-
 6 fold the damages he or she sustains and the cost of the
 7 suit, including attorney’s fees.

8 (e) ENFORCEMENT BY STATE ATTORNEYS GEN-
 9 ERAL.—Any State, on its own behalf or on behalf of the
 10 citizens or residents of the State, may bring a civil action
 11 under subsection (d) in a district court of the United
 12 States. Nothing in this Act may be construed to prevent
 13 a State from exercising its powers under State law.

14 (f) TIME LIMITATION ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF
 15 CIVIL ACTION.—Notwithstanding any other provision of
 16 law, a civil action arising under subsection (d) may be
 17 commenced up to 20 years after the cause of action ac-
 18 crues.

19 (g) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—
 20 The table of sections for chapter 97 of title 28, United
 21 States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relat-
 22 ing to section 1605B the following:

“1605C. Responsibility of foreign states for reckless actions or omissions caus-
 ing the COVID–19 global pandemic in the United States.”.

