

(Pub. L. 95-598, Nov. 6, 1978, 92 Stat. 2558.)

HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

SENATE REPORT NO. 95-989

A joint case is a voluntary bankruptcy case concerning a wife and husband. Under current law, there is no explicit provision for joint cases. Very often, however, in the consumer debtor context, a husband and wife are jointly liable on their debts, and jointly hold most of their property. A joint case will facilitate consolidation of their estates, to the benefit of both the debtors and their creditors, because the cost of administration will be reduced, and there will be only one filing fee.

Section 302 specifies that a joint case is commenced by the filing of a petition under an appropriate chapter by an individual and that individual's spouse. Thus, one spouse cannot take the other into bankruptcy without the other's knowledge or consent. The filing of the petition constitutes an order for relief under the chapter selected.

Subsection (b) requires the court to determine the extent, if any, to which the estates of the two debtors will be consolidated; that is, assets and liabilities combined in a single pool to pay creditors. Factors that will be relevant in the court's determination include the extent of jointly held property and the amount of jointly-owned debts. The section, of course, is not license to consolidate in order to avoid other provisions of the title to the detriment of either the debtors or their creditors. It is designed mainly for ease of administration.

§ 303. Involuntary cases

(a) An involuntary case may be commenced only under chapter 7 or 11 of this title, and only against a person, except a farmer, family farmer, or a corporation that is not a moneyed, business, or commercial corporation, that may be a debtor under the chapter under which such case is commenced.

(b) An involuntary case against a person is commenced by the filing with the bankruptcy court of a petition under chapter 7 or 11 of this title—

(1) by three or more entities, each of which is either a holder of a claim against such person that is not contingent as to liability or the subject of a bona fide dispute as to liability or amount, or an indenture trustee representing such a holder, if such noncontingent, undisputed claims aggregate at least \$10,000¹ more than the value of any lien on property of the debtor securing such claims held by the holders of such claims;

(2) if there are fewer than 12 such holders, excluding any employee or insider of such person and any transferee of a transfer that is voidable under section 544, 545, 547, 548, 549, or 724(a) of this title, by one or more of such holders that hold in the aggregate at least \$10,000¹ of such claims;

(3) if such person is a partnership—

(A) by fewer than all of the general partners in such partnership; or

(B) if relief has been ordered under this title with respect to all of the general partners in such partnership, by a general partner in such partnership, the trustee of such a general partner, or a holder of a claim against such partnership; or

(4) by a foreign representative of the estate in a foreign proceeding concerning such person.

(c) After the filing of a petition under this section but before the case is dismissed or relief is ordered, a creditor holding an unsecured claim that is not contingent, other than a creditor filing under subsection (b) of this section, may join in the petition with the same effect as if such joining creditor were a petitioning creditor under subsection (b) of this section.

(d) The debtor, or a general partner in a partnership debtor that did not join in the petition, may file an answer to a petition under this section.

(e) After notice and a hearing, and for cause, the court may require the petitioners under this section to file a bond to indemnify the debtor for such amounts as the court may later allow under subsection (i) of this section.

(f) Notwithstanding section 363 of this title, except to the extent that the court orders otherwise, and until an order for relief in the case, any business of the debtor may continue to operate, and the debtor may continue to use, acquire, or dispose of property as if an involuntary case concerning the debtor had not been commenced.

(g) At any time after the commencement of an involuntary case under chapter 7 of this title but before an order for relief in the case, the court, on request of a party in interest, after notice to the debtor and a hearing, and if necessary to preserve the property of the estate or to prevent loss to the estate, may order the United States trustee to appoint an interim trustee under section 701 of this title to take possession of the property of the estate and to operate any business of the debtor. Before an order for relief, the debtor may regain possession of property in the possession of a trustee ordered appointed under this subsection if the debtor files such bond as the court requires, conditioned on the debtor's accounting for and delivering to the trustee, if there is an order for relief in the case, such property, or the value, as of the date the debtor regains possession, of such property.

(h) If the petition is not timely controverted, the court shall order relief against the debtor in an involuntary case under the chapter under which the petition was filed. Otherwise, after trial, the court shall order relief against the debtor in an involuntary case under the chapter under which the petition was filed, only if—

(1) the debtor is generally not paying such debtor's debts as such debts become due unless such debts are the subject of a bona fide dispute as to liability or amount; or

(2) within 120 days before the date of the filing of the petition, a custodian, other than a trustee, receiver, or agent appointed or authorized to take charge of less than substantially all of the property of the debtor for the purpose of enforcing a lien against such property, was appointed or took possession.

(i) If the court dismisses a petition under this section other than on consent of all petitioners and the debtor, and if the debtor does not waive the right to judgment under this subsection, the court may grant judgment—

¹ See Adjustment of Dollar Amounts notes below.

(1) against the petitioners and in favor of the debtor for—

- (A) costs; or
- (B) a reasonable attorney's fee; or

(2) against any petitioner that filed the petition in bad faith, for—

- (A) any damages proximately caused by such filing; or
- (B) punitive damages.

(j) Only after notice to all creditors and a hearing may the court dismiss a petition filed under this section—

- (1) on the motion of a petitioner;
- (2) on consent of all petitioners and the debtor; or
- (3) for want of prosecution.

(k)(1) If—

- (A) the petition under this section is false or contains any materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement;
- (B) the debtor is an individual; and
- (C) the court dismisses such petition,

the court, upon the motion of the debtor, shall seal all the records of the court relating to such petition, and all references to such petition.

(2) If the debtor is an individual and the court dismisses a petition under this section, the court may enter an order prohibiting all consumer reporting agencies (as defined in section 603(f) of the Fair Credit Reporting Act (15 U.S.C. 1681a(f))) from making any consumer report (as defined in section 603(d) of that Act) that contains any information relating to such petition or to the case commenced by the filing of such petition.

(3) Upon the expiration of the statute of limitations described in section 3282 of title 18, for a violation of section 152 or 157 of such title, the court, upon the motion of the debtor and for good cause, may expunge any records relating to a petition filed under this section.

(Pub. L. 95-598, Nov. 6, 1978, 92 Stat. 2559; Pub. L. 98-353, title III, §§426, 427, July 10, 1984, 98 Stat. 369; Pub. L. 99-554, title II, §§204, 254, 283(b), Oct. 27, 1986, 100 Stat. 3097, 3105, 3116; Pub. L. 103-394, title I, §108(b), Oct. 22, 1994, 108 Stat. 4112; Pub. L. 109-8, title III, §332(b), title VIII, §802(d)(2), title XII, §1234(a), Apr. 20, 2005, 119 Stat. 103, 146, 204; Pub. L. 111-327, §2(a)(9), Dec. 22, 2010, 124 Stat. 3558.)

HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

LEGISLATIVE STATEMENTS

Section 303(b)(1) is modified to make clear that unsecured claims against the debtor must be determined by taking into account liens securing property held by third parties.

Section 303(b)(3) adopts a provision contained in the Senate amendment indicating that an involuntary petition may be commenced against a partnership by fewer than all of the general partners in such partnership. Such action may be taken by fewer than all of the general partners notwithstanding a contrary agreement between the partners or State or local law.

Section 303(h)(1) in the House amendment is a compromise of standards found in H.R. 8200 as passed by the House and the Senate amendment pertaining to the standards that must be met in order to obtain an order for relief in an involuntary case under title 11. The language specifies that the court will order such relief

only if the debtor is generally not paying debtor's debts as they become due.

Section 303(h)(2) reflects a compromise pertaining to section 543 of title 11 relating to turnover of property by a custodian. It provides an alternative test to support an order for relief in an involuntary case. If a custodian, other than a trustee, receiver, or agent appointed or authorized to take charge of less than substantially all of the property of the debtor for the purpose of enforcing a lien against such property, was appointed or took possession within 120 days before the date of the filing of the petition, then the court may order relief in the involuntary case. The test under section 303(h)(2) differs from section 3a(5) of the Bankruptcy Act [section 21(a)(5) of former title 11], which requires an involuntary case to be commenced before the earlier of time such custodian was appointed or took possession. The test in section 303(h)(2) authorizes an order for relief to be entered in an involuntary case from the later date on which the custodian was appointed or took possession.

SENATE REPORT NO. 95-989

Section 303 governs the commencement of involuntary cases under title 11. An involuntary case may be commenced only under chapter 7, Liquidation, or chapter 11, Reorganization. Involuntary cases are not permitted for municipalities, because to do so may constitute an invasion of State sovereignty contrary to the 10th amendment, and would constitute bad policy, by permitting the fate of a municipality, governed by officials elected by the people of the municipality, to be determined by a small number of creditors of the municipality. Involuntary chapter 13 cases are not permitted either. To do so would constitute bad policy, because chapter 13 only works when there is a willing debtor that wants to repay his creditors. Short of involuntary servitude, it is difficult to keep a debtor working for his creditors when he does not want to pay them back. See chapter 3, *supra*.

The exceptions contained in current law that prohibit involuntary cases against farmers, ranchers and eleemosynary institutions are continued. Farmers and ranchers are excepted because of the cyclical nature of their business. One drought year or one year of low prices, as a result of which a farmer is temporarily unable to pay his creditors, should not subject him to involuntary bankruptcy. Eleemosynary institutions, such as churches, schools, and charitable organizations and foundations, likewise are exempt from involuntary bankruptcy.

The provisions for involuntary chapter 11 cases is a slight change from present law, based on the proposed consolidation of the reorganization chapters. Currently, involuntary cases are permitted under chapters X and XII [chapters 10 and 12 of former title 11] but not under chapter XI [chapter 11 of former title 11]. The consolidation requires a single rule for all kinds of reorganization proceedings. Because the assets of an insolvent debtor belong equitably to his creditors, the bill permits involuntary cases in order that creditors may realize on their assets through reorganization as well as through liquidation.

Subsection (b) of the section specifies who may file an involuntary petition. As under current law, if the debtor has more than 12 creditors, three creditors must join in the involuntary petition. The dollar amount limitation is changed from current law to \$5,000. The new amount applies both to liquidation and reorganization cases in order that there not be an artificial difference between the two chapters that would provide an incentive for one or the other. Subsection (b)(1) makes explicit the right of an indenture trustee to be one of the three petitioning creditors on behalf of the creditors the trustee represents under the indenture. If all of the general partners in a partnership are in bankruptcy, then the trustee of a single general partner may file an involuntary petition against the partnership. Finally, a foreign representative may file an involuntary case concerning the debtor in the foreign

proceeding, in order to administer assets in this country. This subsection is not intended to overrule Bankruptcy Rule 104(d), which places certain restrictions on the transfer of claims for the purpose of commencing an involuntary case. That Rule will be continued under section 405(d) of this bill.

Subsection (c) permits creditors other than the original petitioning creditors to join in the petition with the same effect as if the joining creditor had been one of the original petitioning creditors. Thus, if the claim of one of the original petitioning creditors is disallowed, the case will not be dismissed for want of three creditors or want of \$5,000 in petitioning claims if the joining creditor suffices to fulfill the statutory requirements.

Subsection (d) permits the debtor to file an answer to an involuntary petition. The subsection also permits a general partner in a partnership debtor to answer an involuntary petition against the partnership if he did not join in the petition. Thus, a partnership petition by less than all of the general partners is treated as an involuntary, not a voluntary, petition.

The court may, under subsection (e), require the petitioners to file a bond to indemnify the debtor for such amounts as the court may later allow under subsection (i). Subsection (i) provides for costs, attorneys fees, and damages in certain circumstances. The bonding requirement will discourage frivolous petitions as well as spiteful petitions based on a desire to embarrass the debtor (who may be a competitor of a petitioning creditor) or to put the debtor out of business without good cause. An involuntary petition may put a debtor out of business even if it is without foundation and is later dismissed.

Subsection (f) is both a clarification and a change from existing law. It permits the debtor to continue to operate any business of the debtor and to dispose of property as if the case had not been commenced. The court is permitted, however, to control the debtor's powers under this subsection by appropriate orders, such as where there is a fear that the debtor may attempt to abscond with assets, dispose of them at less than their fair value, or dismantle his business, all to the detriment of the debtor's creditors.

The court may also, under subsection (g), appoint an interim trustee to take possession of the debtor's property and to operate any business of the debtor, pending trial on the involuntary petition. The court may make such an order only on the request of a party in interest, and after notice to the debtor and a hearing. There must be a showing that a trustee is necessary to preserve the property of the estate or to prevent loss to the estate. The debtor may regain possession by posting a sufficient bond.

Subsection (h) provides the standard for an order for relief on an involuntary petition. If the petition is not timely controverted (the Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure will fix time limits), the court orders relief after a trial, only if the debtor is generally unable to pay its debts as they mature, or if the debtor has failed to pay a major portion of his debts as they become due, or if a custodian was appointed during the 90-day period preceding the filing of the petition. The first two tests are variations of the equity insolvency test. They represent the most significant departure from present law concerning the grounds for involuntary bankruptcy, which requires an act of bankruptcy. Proof of the commission of an act of bankruptcy has frequently required a showing that the debtor was insolvent on a "balance-sheet" test when the act was committed. This bill abolishes the concept of acts of bankruptcy.

The equity insolvency test has been in equity jurisprudence for hundreds of years, and though it is new in the bankruptcy context (except in chapter X [chapter 10 of former title 11]), the bankruptcy courts should have no difficulty in applying it. The third test, appointment of a custodian within ninety days before the petition, is provided for simplicity. It is not a partial re-enactment of acts of bankruptcy. If a custodian of all or substantially all of the property of the debtor has

been appointed, this paragraph creates an irrebuttable presumption that the debtor is unable to pay its debts as they mature. Moreover, once a proceeding to liquidate assets has been commenced, the debtor's creditors have an absolute right to have the liquidation (or reorganization) proceed in the bankruptcy court and under the bankruptcy laws with all of the appropriate creditor and debtor protections that those laws provide. Ninety days gives creditors ample time in which to seek bankruptcy liquidation after the appointment of a custodian. If they wait beyond the ninety day period, they are not precluded from filing an involuntary petition. They are simply required to prove equity insolvency rather than the more easily provable custodian test.

Subsection (i) permits the court to award costs, reasonable attorney's fees, or damages if an involuntary petition is dismissed other than by consent of all petitioning creditors and the debtor. The damages that the court may award are those that may be caused by the taking of possession of the debtor's property under subsection (g) or section 1104 of the bankruptcy code. In addition, if a petitioning creditor filed the petition in bad faith, the court may award the debtor any damages proximately caused by the filing of the petition. These damages may include such items as loss of business during and after the pendency of the case, and so on. "Or" is not exclusive in this paragraph. The court may grant any or all of the damages provided for under the provision. Dismissal in the best interests of credits under section 305(a)(1) would not give rise to a damages claim.

Under subsection (j), the court may dismiss the petition by consent only after giving notice to all creditors. The purpose of the subsection is to prevent collusive settlements among the debtor and the petitioning creditors while other creditors, that wish to see relief ordered with respect to the debtor but that did not participate in the case, are left without sufficient protection.

Subsection (k) governs involuntary cases against foreign banks that are not engaged in business in the United States but that have assets located here. The subsection prevents a foreign bank from being placed into bankruptcy in this country unless a foreign proceeding against the bank is pending. The special protection afforded by this section is needed to prevent creditors from effectively closing down a foreign bank by the commencement of an involuntary bankruptcy case in this country unless that bank is involved in a proceeding under foreign law. An involuntary case commenced under this subsection gives the foreign representative an alternative to commencing a case ancillary to a foreign proceeding under section 304.

Editorial Notes

AMENDMENTS

2010—Subsecs. (k), (l). Pub. L. 111-327 redesignated subsec. (l) as (k).

2005—Subsec. (b)(1). Pub. L. 109-8, §1234(a)(1), inserted "as to liability or amount" after "bona fide dispute" and substituted "if such noncontingent, undisputed claims" for "if such claims".

Subsec. (h)(1). Pub. L. 109-8, §1234(a)(2), inserted "as to liability or amount" before semicolon.

Subsec. (k). Pub. L. 109-8, §802(d)(2), struck out subsec. (k) which read as follows: "Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section, an involuntary case may be commenced against a foreign bank that is not engaged in such business in the United States only under chapter 7 of this title and only if a foreign proceeding concerning such bank is pending."

Subsec. (l). Pub. L. 109-8, §332(b), added subsec. (l).

1994—Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 103-394 substituted "\$10,000" for "\$5,000" in pars. (1) and (2).

1986—Subsec. (a). Pub. L. 99-554, §254, inserted reference to family farmer.

Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 99-554, §283(b)(1), substituted "subject of" for "subject on".

Subsec. (g). Pub. L. 99-554, §204(1), substituted “may order the United States trustee to appoint” for “may appoint”.

Subsec. (h)(1). Pub. L. 99-554, §283(b)(2), substituted “are the” for “that are the”.

Subsec. (i)(1). Pub. L. 99-554, §204(2), inserted “or” at end of subpar. (A) and struck out subpar. (C) which read as follows: “any damages proximately caused by the taking of possession of the debtor’s property by a trustee appointed under subsection (g) of this section or section 1104 of this title; or”.

1984—Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 98-353, §426(a), inserted “against a person” after “involuntary case”.

Subsec. (b)(1). Pub. L. 98-353, §426(b)(1), inserted “or the subject on a bona fide dispute,”.

Subsec. (h)(1). Pub. L. 98-353, §426(b)(2), inserted “unless such debts that are the subject of a bona fide dispute”.

Subsec. (j)(2). Pub. L. 98-353, §427, substituted “debtor” for “debtors”.

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 2005 AMENDMENT

Pub. L. 109-8, title XII, §1234(b), Apr. 20, 2005, 119 Stat. 204, provided that: “This section [amending this section] and the amendments made by this section shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act [Apr. 20, 2005] and shall apply with respect to cases commenced under title 11 of the United States Code before, on, and after such date.”

Amendment by sections 332(b) and 802(d)(2) of Pub. L. 109-8 effective 180 days after Apr. 20, 2005, and not applicable with respect to cases commenced under this title before such effective date, except as otherwise provided, see section 1501 of Pub. L. 109-8, set out as a note under section 101 of this title.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1994 AMENDMENT

Amendment by Pub. L. 103-394 effective Oct. 22, 1994, and not applicable with respect to cases commenced under this title before Oct. 22, 1994, see section 702 of Pub. L. 103-394, set out as a note under section 101 of this title.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1986 AMENDMENT

Effective date and applicability of amendment by section 204 of Pub. L. 99-554 dependent upon the judicial district involved, see section 302(d), (e) of Pub. L. 99-554, set out as a note under section 581 of Title 28, Judiciary and Judicial Procedure.

Amendment by section 254 of Pub. L. 99-554 effective 30 days after Oct. 27, 1986, but not applicable to cases commenced under this title before that date, see section 302(a), (c)(1) of Pub. L. 99-554.

Amendment by section 283 of Pub. L. 99-554 effective 30 days after Oct. 27, 1986, see section 302(a) of Pub. L. 99-554.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1984 AMENDMENT

Amendment by sections 426(a) and 427 of Pub. L. 98-353 effective with respect to cases filed 90 days after July 10, 1984, and amendment by section 426(b) of Pub. L. 98-353 effective July 10, 1984, see section 552(a), (b) of Pub. L. 98-353, set out as a note under section 101 of this title.

Court Rules and Judicial Documents

ADJUSTMENT OF DOLLAR AMOUNTS

The dollar amounts specified in this section were adjusted by notices of the Judicial Conference of the United States pursuant to section 104 of this title as follows:

By notice dated Jan. 31, 2022, 87 F.R. 6625, effective Apr. 1, 2022, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “16,750” was adjusted to “18,600”. See notice of the Judicial Conference of the United States set out as a note under section 104 of this title.

By notice dated Feb. 5, 2019, 84 F.R. 3488, effective Apr. 1, 2019, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “15,775” was adjusted to “16,750”.

By notice dated Feb. 16, 2016, 81 F.R. 8748, effective Apr. 1, 2016, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “15,325” was adjusted to “15,775”.

By notice dated Feb. 12, 2013, 78 F.R. 12089, effective Apr. 1, 2013, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “14,425” was adjusted to “15,325”.

By notice dated Feb. 19, 2010, 75 F.R. 8747, effective Apr. 1, 2010, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “13,475” was adjusted to “14,425”.

By notice dated Feb. 7, 2007, 72 F.R. 7082, effective Apr. 1, 2007, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “12,300” was adjusted to “13,475”.

By notice dated Feb. 18, 2004, 69 F.R. 8482, effective Apr. 1, 2004, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “11,625” was adjusted to “12,300”.

By notice dated Feb. 13, 2001, 66 F.R. 10910, effective Apr. 1, 2001, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “10,775” was adjusted to “11,625”.

By notice dated Feb. 3, 1998, 63 F.R. 7179, effective Apr. 1, 1998, in subsec. (b)(1), (2), dollar amount “10,000” was adjusted to “10,775”.

[§ 304. Repealed. Pub. L. 109-8, title VIII, § 802(d)(3), Apr. 20, 2005, 119 Stat. 146]

Section, Pub. L. 95-598, Nov. 6, 1978, 92 Stat. 2560, related to cases ancillary to foreign proceedings.

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

EFFECTIVE DATE OF REPEAL

Repeal effective 180 days after Apr. 20, 2005, and not applicable with respect to cases commenced under this title before such effective date, except as otherwise provided, see section 1501 of Pub. L. 109-8, set out as an Effective Date of 2005 Amendment note under section 101 of this title.

§ 305. Abstention

(a) The court, after notice and a hearing, may dismiss a case under this title, or may suspend all proceedings in a case under this title, at any time if—

(1) the interests of creditors and the debtor would be better served by such dismissal or suspension; or

(2)(A) a petition under section 1515 for recognition of a foreign proceeding has been granted; and

(B) the purposes of chapter 15 of this title would be best served by such dismissal or suspension.

(b) A foreign representative may seek dismissal or suspension under subsection (a)(2) of this section.

(c) An order under subsection (a) of this section dismissing a case or suspending all proceedings in a case, or a decision not so to dismiss or suspend, is not reviewable by appeal or otherwise by the court of appeals under section 158(d), 1291, or 1292 of title 28 or by the Supreme Court of the United States under section 1254 of title 28.

(Pub. L. 95-598, Nov. 6, 1978, 92 Stat. 2561; Pub. L. 101-650, title III, §309(a), Dec. 1, 1990, 104 Stat. 5113; Pub. L. 102-198, §5, Dec. 9, 1991, 105 Stat. 1623; Pub. L. 109-8, title VIII, §802(d)(6), Apr. 20, 2005, 119 Stat. 146.)

HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

SENATE REPORT NO. 95-989

A principle of the common law requires a court with jurisdiction over a particular matter to take jurisdic-