

347 Conn. 601	AUGUST, 2023	601
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Escobar-Santana v. State		
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EMMETT ESCOBAR-SANTANA ET AL. v.  
STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
(SC 20772)

Robinson, C. J., and McDonald, D'Auria,  
Mullins, Ecker and Alexander, Js.

*Syllabus*

Pursuant to statute (§ 4-160 (f)), the state's sovereign immunity is waived with respect to qualified medical malpractice actions, and such actions may proceed against the state without the need for prior authorization from the Claims Commissioner, but "[a]ny such action shall be limited to medical malpractice claims only . . . ."

Pursuant further to statute (§ 52-190a (a)), in any "civil action . . . to recover damages resulting from personal injury . . . in which it is alleged that such injury . . . resulted from the negligence of a health care provider," a plaintiff must "obtain a written . . . opinion of a similar health care provider . . . that there appears to be evidence of medical negligence . . . ."

The plaintiffs, C and her minor child, E, sought to recover damages for the alleged medical malpractice of the defendant, the state of Connecticut, through its servants, agents, and employees, that occurred prior to and during the birth of E. C was admitted to a state hospital for an induction of labor. During labor, it was determined that E was malpositioned and that a vaginal delivery would pose risks. C was then counseled on possible delivery options, including a manual rotation of E's head to allow for the potential for a vaginal delivery. C agreed to the manual rotation, which was unsuccessful. At that point, the delivery plan was

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*Escobar-Santana v. State*

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changed to a cesarean section. The cesarean section ultimately took an extended period of time, and E suffered permanent injuries in the process. In the first count of their complaint, the plaintiffs sought to recover for E's physical injuries. In the second count of their complaint, the plaintiffs incorporated by reference most of the allegations set forth in the first count, including all of the various ways in which the state failed to exercise reasonable care and the resulting injuries to E. The plaintiffs also alleged in the second count that C had endured a painful delivery and suffered severe and ongoing psychological, physiological, and emotional distress. The plaintiffs further alleged in the second count that the state knew or should have known that its conduct involved an unreasonable risk of causing emotional distress and that the distress might result in illness or bodily harm. The plaintiffs attached to their complaint, pursuant to § 52-190a (a), a certificate of good faith and a copy of an expert opinion letter from a similar health care provider. The expert opined in that letter, to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, that the state departed from the applicable standard of care in that it, among other things, failed to inform C regarding the risks of attempting a vaginal delivery, to counsel C regarding delivery options prior to inducing labor, and to use the proper technique required to deliver E by cesarean section. The state filed a motion to dismiss the second count of the plaintiffs' complaint, contending that that count stated a claim for negligent infliction of emotional distress or bystander liability, rather than medical malpractice, and, therefore, did not fall within the statutory waiver of the state's sovereign immunity in § 4-160 (f). The trial court denied the motion, concluding that the second count reasonably could be understood to sound in medical malpractice, and the state appealed. *Held:*

1. The term "medical malpractice claims" in § 4-160 (f) is broad enough to encompass a birthing mother's allegation that she suffered emotional distress from physical injuries to her child that had been proximately caused by the negligence of health care providers during the birthing process:

Insofar as neither § 4-160 (f) nor other statutes specifically defined the term "medical malpractice," this court looked to the legislative history of § 4-160 (f) and to other statutes to construe that term, and determined that the universe of medical malpractice actions that fall within § 4-160 (f) is coextensive with those actions subject to the requirement of § 52-190a (a) that an opinion letter from a similar health care provider be filed with the complaint.

This court also determined that, in light of the use of the term "personal injury" in § 52-190a (a) and the legislature's definition of "personal injury" elsewhere in the General Statutes as encompassing emotional distress, the legislature did not categorically preclude medical malpractice claims for purely emotional damages.

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

603

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*Escobar-Santana v. State*

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This court acknowledged a growing trend in the common law of permitting liability for purely emotional distress under circumstances in which the defendant's alleged negligence has placed the plaintiff in danger of immediate bodily harm or has occurred in the course of specified categories of activities, undertakings or relationships in which negligent conduct is especially likely to cause serious emotional harm, such as when a physician negligently causes the loss of a fetus.

Moreover, this court recognized that a number of other state courts and Connecticut Superior Court judges have concluded, under their common-law authority, that a birthing mother may recover damages for the purely emotional distress she experiences as a result of medical malpractice resulting in the physical injury to or death of her fetus or infant during the labor and delivery process.

Consistent with this trend, this court concluded that, when a fetus or infant suffers physical injuries as a result of medical malpractice during the labor and delivery process, the birthing mother is a joint victim of the malpractice and can recover for emotional distress arising from her traumatic experiences during and immediately following that process, and the mother's recovery is not limited to damages arising from her own physical injuries.

Accordingly, C was not precluded from asserting a medical malpractice claim against the state for damages based on purely emotional distress.

2. In light of the plaintiffs' allegations in the second count of the complaint and consistent with the obligation to construe pleadings in the light most favorable to the plaintiffs, this court concluded that the second count could be read to allege a medical malpractice claim on behalf of C, and, accordingly, the trial court properly denied the state's motion to dismiss that count of the complaint:

Although claims for negligent infliction of emotional distress and bystander emotional distress, even in the health care context, are causes of action distinct from medical malpractice, and the waiver of sovereign immunity in § 4-160 (f) does not extend to such claims, to the extent that certain portions of the second count of the complaint could have been read to allege such causes of action exclusively, the elimination of those portions of the complaint could have been accomplished by a request to revise.

To ascertain whether a claim qualifies as a medical malpractice claim, multiple factors are considered, including whether the defendant is being sued in his or her capacity as a medical professional, whether the alleged negligence was of a specified medical nature that arose out of the medical professional-patient relationship, whether the alleged negligence was substantially related to medical diagnosis or treatment, and whether the alleged conduct involved the exercise of medical judgment.

604

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

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*Escobar-Santana v. State*

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In the present case, the second count of the complaint incorporated by reference numerous allegations set forth in the first count, which undisputedly asserted a medical malpractice claim, all of the allegations of negligence arose out of the relationship between C, the patient, and her physicians and health care providers, who were employees or agents of the state, and the allegations involved the alleged breach of the standard of care by hospital staff while they were operating in their professional medical capacities.

Moreover, the second count of the complaint apparently was brought pursuant to § 4-160, the plaintiffs attached to the complaint, in accordance with § 52-190a (a), a certificate indicating that there were grounds for a good faith belief that there had been negligence in the care and treatment of C and included a copy of a similar health care provider's letter addressing the issue of whether the standard of care was breached in the prenatal and intrapartum care of C, and expert testimony likely will be required to establish the state's liability under that count of the complaint.

*(One justice concurring separately)*

Argued February 22—officially released August 22, 2023

*Procedural History*

Action seeking damages for the defendant's alleged medical malpractice, brought to the Superior Court in the judicial district of Hartford, where the court, *Sicilian, J.*, denied the defendant's motion to dismiss, from which the defendant appealed. *Affirmed.*

*Michael G. Rigg*, for the appellant (defendant).

*Alinor C. Sterling*, with whom were *Kathleen Nastri* and, on the brief, *Sarah Steinfeld*, for the appellees (plaintiffs).

*Opinion*

MULLINS, J. General Statutes § 4-160 (f)<sup>1</sup> waives the state's sovereign immunity with respect to qualified

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<sup>1</sup> At the time the present action was commenced, § 4-160 (f) was codified at General Statutes (Rev. to 2021) § 4-160 (b). Subsequently, No. 21-91, § 6, of the 2021 Public Acts redesignated subsection (b) as subsection (f) and made certain other changes to the provision that have no bearing on the merits of this appeal. The provision was also the subject of technical amendments in 2022 and 2023. See Public Acts 2023, No. 23-131, § 10; Public Acts 2022, No. 22-37, § 4. In the interest of simplicity, unless otherwise indicated, we refer to the current version of the statute.

The text of § 4-160 (f) is set forth in part II B of this opinion.

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

605

---

Escobar-Santana v. State

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medical malpractice actions and allows such actions to proceed against the state without the need for prior authorization from the Claims Commissioner. The statute also expressly provides that “[a]ny such action shall be limited to medical malpractice claims only . . . .” General Statutes § 4-160 (f). The primary question presented by this interlocutory appeal is whether the statutory phrase “medical malpractice claims” is broad enough to encompass a mother’s allegation that she suffered emotional distress damages from physical injuries to her child that were proximately caused by the negligence of health care professionals during the birthing process. We hold that claims alleging such damages can qualify as medical malpractice claims for purposes of § 4-160 (f). Accordingly, we conclude that the trial court properly denied the motion of the defendant, the state of Connecticut, to dismiss the second count of the complaint of the plaintiffs, Celine Escobar-Santana (Escobar-Santana) and her son, Emmett Escobar-Santana (Emmett),<sup>2</sup> because the plaintiffs alleged a valid medical malpractice claim in that count.

## I

The complaint and a copy of the expert opinion letter attached thereto alleged the following facts. The state operates the University of Connecticut Health Center/John Dempsey Hospital in Farmington, which provides prenatal care and labor and delivery services through the UConn Health Women’s Center (UConn). Between September 1, 2019, and March 25, 2020, UConn undertook the care and treatment of Escobar-Santana for pregnancy, labor, and delivery.

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<sup>2</sup> Although Emmett, a minor, appears as the named plaintiff in this case, the action was actually brought by Escobar-Santana, both individually and on behalf of Emmett as Emmett’s parent, as the general rule in Connecticut is that “minor children may . . . sue [only] by way of a parent or next friend.” *Mendillo v. Board of Education*, 246 Conn. 456, 460 n.3, 717 A.2d 1177 (1988), overruled in part on other grounds by *Campos v. Coleman*, 319 Conn. 36, 123 A.3d 854 (2015).

606

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

---

*Escobar-Santana v. State*

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During a March 3, 2020 visit to a walk-in clinic, Escobar-Santana was diagnosed with elevated blood pressure, influenza, and proteinuria (the presence of abnormally high levels of protein in the urine). On March 17, during a routine prenatal visit, sonography revealed that the estimated fetal weight was above the ninetieth percentile and the abdominal circumference was above the ninety-fifth percentile. On March 23, Escobar-Santana complained of bilateral leg swelling and continued elevated blood pressure. She was admitted at that time for an induction of labor.

On March 25, 2020, following two days of treatment with oxytocin but relatively minimal progress in her labor, Escobar-Santana developed a fever. By 7:20 p.m., her temperature had risen to 101.8 degrees Fahrenheit. At 8:30 p.m., she began pushing.

At 9:04 p.m., Kristyn Esteves, an obstetrical resident at UConn, conducted a manual exam and, on the basis of palpation, concluded that the fetus could have been in a right occiput transverse position that would make safe vaginal delivery improbable. Two hours later, at approximately 11 p.m., David Park, a board-certified obstetrician at UConn, performed a fetal sonograph and determined that the fetus was, in fact, malpositioned in a occiput posterior presentation.<sup>3</sup> He counseled Escobar-Santana regarding various possible delivery options, including manually rotating the fetus' head so as to proceed with vaginal delivery. She agreed to try manual rotation, but the pain was intolerable. Accordingly, due to maternal exhaustion, the delivery plan was changed to cesarean section (C-section) for failure to progress. Because of the length of labor and the fetal positioning,

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<sup>3</sup> In the occiput posterior position, the baby's head is down but faces the mother's front instead of her back, which makes it more difficult to traverse the pelvis. See generally E. Brunelli et al., "The Role of the Angle of Progression in the Prediction of the Outcome of Occiput Posterior Position in the Second Stage of Labor," 225 *Am. J. Obstetrics & Gynecology* 81.e1 (2021).

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

607

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*Escobar-Santana v. State*

---

however, the fetus' head had become impacted in the maternal pelvis.

During the delivery by C-section, which commenced at 11:51 p.m., at least one health care provider placed a hand into Escobar-Santana's vagina and applied force to push up on the fetal head. Whereas a C-section can normally be accomplished in less than one minute, in this case, twenty-four minutes were required to extract the baby. Emmett suffered serious and permanent injuries in the process.

The plaintiffs brought the present action in two counts. Although the plaintiffs alleged injuries to Emmett in count one and injuries to Escobar-Santana in count two, there is substantial overlap, as the plaintiffs alleged in each count that the state, via UConn and its servants, agents, and employees, including Park and Esteves, was negligent in at least seventeen respects prior to and during the birthing process. Several of these allegations relate specifically to Emmett, such as the contentions that physicians "failed to safely manually rotate the baby's head" and "failed to accurately and timely communicate with staff regarding the disengagement of the fetal head from the pelvis . . . ." The plaintiffs also addressed in each count the state's failure to exercise reasonable care specifically with respect to Escobar-Santana. For example, the plaintiffs alleged that the state "failed to adequately and properly care for . . . Escobar-Santana during labor and delivery," "failed to discuss and offer counsel to . . . Escobar-Santana regarding delivery options," "failed to provide physicians who [possess] the requisite knowledge, skill, and experience to adequately and properly care for, treat, diagnose, monitor, and supervise . . . Escobar-Santana during labor and delivery," and "failed to promulgate and/or enforce rules, regulations, standards, and protocols for the treatment of patients such as . . . Escobar-Santana." Most of the allegations, however,

608

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

---

*Escobar-Santana v. State*

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encompass the state's joint care of Escobar-Santana and Emmett during the birthing process.<sup>4</sup>

The plaintiffs alleged in count one of their complaint that the state's negligence resulted in various severe, painful, and permanent injuries to Emmett. These include respiratory distress, facial bruising, trauma to the soft tissues of the head, multiple intracranial hemorrhages and hematomas, multiple skull fractures requiring surgical repair, scarring, head deformity, permanent brain damage, and other permanent psychological, physiological, and neurological sequelae.

In count two of their complaint, the plaintiffs alleged negligence claims on behalf of Escobar-Santana but incorporated by reference most of the allegations of count one, including all of the various ways in which the state failed to exercise reasonable care, as well as the resulting injuries to Emmett. The plaintiffs then further alleged that Escobar-Santana endured a "traumatic, terrifying and painful" delivery and suffered severe and ongoing psychological, physiological, and emotional distress. These conditions, the plaintiffs alleged, are painful, serious, and permanent in their nature and effects and have impaired Escobar-Santana's ability to carry on and enjoy life's activities. The plaintiffs further contended that the state and its employees "knew or should have known that their conduct involved an unreasonable risk of causing emotional distress and that the distress might result in illness or bodily harm."

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<sup>4</sup>In their complaint, the plaintiffs alleged, for example, that the state "failed to recognize and consider prenatal input from maternal-fetal medicine specialists," "failed to recognize that . . . Escobar-Santana's cervix was unfavorable for induction," "failed to recognize and appreciate the need for early ultrasound imaging to determine the position of the baby during labor," "failed to intervene in a timely manner," "failed to make safe treatment choices for delivery," "failed to perform a timely [C-section]," and "failed to keep proper and adequate medical records . . . ."



347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

609

---

Escobar-Santana v. State

---

The plaintiffs attached to the complaint, per the requirements of General Statutes § 52-190a (a), a certificate of good faith and a copy of an expert opinion letter from a similar health care provider, namely, a board-certified physician who practices, publishes, teaches, and consults in the fields of obstetrics, gynecology, and maternal-fetal medicine. This expert opined, to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, that UConn, Park, and Esteves departed from the applicable standard of care in various respects. Most notably for present purposes, because Escobar-Santana was predisposed to obstructed labor and shoulder dystocia (a complication of vaginal delivery in which the baby's shoulder gets caught above the mother's pubic bone) as a result of her short stature, her obesity, and the disproportionate overgrowth of her fetus, her providers should have been knowledgeable about and informed her regarding the risks to her and the fetus of attempting vaginal delivery. In addition, the plaintiffs' expert opined that Emmett's injuries suggest the use of an inappropriate technique to elevate the fetal head: the head should have been flexed by broadly applied pressure on the fetal cranium during elevation. The expert concluded that UConn, Park, and Esteves departed from the applicable standard of care in that they "(1) failed to recognize the significance of the maternal-fetal medicine physician's prenatal report that documented marked fetal overgrowth, (2) failed to counsel [Escobar-Santana] regarding delivery options prior to labor induction, and (3) failed to use or instruct the use of proper technique required to deliver the baby during delivery by [C-section]." The expert opined that this negligence was a proximate cause of Emmett's injuries.<sup>5</sup>

The state filed a motion to dismiss count two of the complaint, contending that the count states a claim for

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<sup>5</sup> There is no requirement that the expert opine that the negligence was a proximate cause of Escobar-Santana's injuries. See *Dias v. Grady*, 292 Conn. 350, 359–60, 972 A.2d 715 (2009).

610

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

---

Escobar-Santana v. State

---

negligent infliction of emotional distress or bystander liability, rather than medical malpractice, and, therefore, does not fall within the statutory waiver of the state's sovereign immunity in § 4-160 (f). The trial court denied the motion, concluding that, when the complaint is construed in the light most favorable to the plaintiffs, and every reasonable presumption is made in favor of jurisdiction, count two reasonably can be understood to sound in medical malpractice. The state subsequently filed a motion to reargue and to reconsider, which the trial court granted, but, after reargument and reconsideration, the court upheld its prior decision.<sup>6</sup> This appeal followed.<sup>7</sup>

## II

On appeal, the state renews its claim that count two of the complaint sounds in negligent infliction of emo-

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<sup>6</sup> In the motion to reconsider, the state asked the trial court to dismiss, at the very least, those portions of count two in which the plaintiffs alleged causes of action other than medical malpractice. In paragraph 16 of count two of the complaint, for example, the plaintiffs alleged that “[t]he . . . state . . . and its servants, agents, apparent agents and/or employees, knew or should have known that their conduct involved an unreasonable risk of causing emotional distress and that the distress might result in illness or bodily harm.” As we explain in footnote 16 of this opinion, that language states a claim for negligent infliction of emotional distress. In paragraph 17 of count two of the complaint, the plaintiffs also alleged that Escobar-Santana's various injuries were reasonable, which she need not establish to prevail on a medical malpractice claim.

We note that, in their opposition to the state's motion to dismiss, the plaintiffs made clear that (1) count two of their complaint sounds in medical malpractice, rather than bystander liability or negligent infliction of emotional distress, (2) the primary dispute between the parties was whether Escobar-Santana's allegations made out a valid medical malpractice claim predicated on purely emotional damages, and, therefore, (3) the proper vehicle for the state to assert its challenge was a motion to strike count two rather than a motion to dismiss. Nonetheless, the state has continued to characterize the count as something other than a medical malpractice claim, thereby allowing it to take an interlocutory appeal and delay the resolution of the case. “Just because the [s]tate *can* do something does not mean that it *should*.” (Emphasis in original.) *Hall v. Ramirez*, Docket No. 1:18-cv-00218-BLW, 2018 WL 3633916, \*3 (D. Idaho July 31, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> The state appealed to the Appellate Court, and we transferred the appeal to this court pursuant to General Statutes § 51-199 (c) and Practice Book § 65-1.

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

611

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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tional distress or bystander liability, rather than medical malpractice, and, therefore, is barred by the state's sovereign immunity because it was neither authorized by the Claims Commissioner, nor does it fall within the ambit of § 4-160 (f), which provides for a waiver of sovereign immunity without the approval of the Claims Commissioner. The state further contends that, even if the plaintiffs did allege a medical malpractice claim in count two, insofar as count two incorporates by reference the allegations of count one, which relate solely to Emmett, it does not state a colorable medical malpractice claim as to Escobar-Santana specifically. This is true, the state argues, because there is no allegation that Escobar-Santana suffered *physical* injuries as a result of the state's malpractice,<sup>8</sup> and she cannot recover in medical malpractice for purely emotional distress in the absence of physical harm. We disagree.

Consistent with the modern trend and the rule that has been adopted by a majority of our sister states and Superior Court judges who have considered the issue, we hold that, when a fetus or infant suffers physical injuries as a result of medical malpractice during the labor and delivery process, the birthing mother is a joint victim of the malpractice and can recover for emotional distress arising therefrom. We further conclude that count two of the complaint properly stated a cause of action for medical malpractice.

#### A

We begin with the standard of review. “We have long held that because [a] determination regarding a trial

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<sup>8</sup> We note that the plaintiffs alleged that Escobar-Santana endured a painful childbirth, that the failed vaginal delivery involved hospital staff's application of pressure to her vaginal area, and that she has suffered physiological distress. It seems clear, then, that she is alleging her own independent physical injuries and associated pain and suffering. The primary question that we address in this opinion, however, is whether a mother such as Escobar-Santana also can recover emotional distress damages arising from injuries to her fetus or infant during the labor and delivery process.

612

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

---

Escobar-Santana v. State

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court's subject matter jurisdiction is a question of law, our review is plenary." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Levin v. State*, 329 Conn. 701, 706, 189 A.3d 572 (2018). Specifically, because the scope of the waiver of sovereign immunity for medical malpractice claims contained in § 4-160 (f) presents a question of statutory interpretation, we exercise plenary review. See, e.g., *Day v. Seblatnigg*, 341 Conn. 815, 826, 268 A.3d 595 (2022); see also, e.g., 2 Restatement (Third), Torts, Liability for Physical and Emotional Harm § 47, comment (g), p. 179 (2012) (determination of which relationships will support liability for purely emotional harm is matter of law for court).

The following well established principles also guide our analysis. "[W]hen the doctrine of sovereign immunity is applicable, the state must consent to be sued in order for a claimant to pursue any monetary claim against the state." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Levin v. State*, supra, 329 Conn. 709. The Claims Commissioner may waive sovereign immunity and consent to suit pursuant to § 4-160 (a). *Id.* Other statutory waivers are also available, but "[a]ny statutory waiver of immunity must be narrowly construed . . . and its scope must be confined strictly to the extent the statute provides." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.* In the absence of prior authorization by the Claims Commissioner, or some other statutory waiver, the Superior Court has no jurisdiction to hear any monetary claim against the state. *Id.*

## B

Because the scope of the waiver afforded by § 4-160 (f) presents a question of statutory interpretation, our review begins with the language of the statute. See General Statutes § 1-2z. Section 4-160 (f) provides in relevant part: "In any claim alleging malpractice against the state, a state hospital or against a physician, sur-

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

613

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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geon, dentist, podiatrist, chiropractor or other licensed health care provider employed by the state, the attorney or pro se party filing the claim may submit a certificate of good faith to the Office of the Claims Commissioner in accordance with section 52-190a. If such a certificate is submitted, permission to sue the state shall be deemed granted by the Claims Commissioner . . . . In lieu of filing a notice of claim . . . a claimant may commence a medical malpractice action against the state prior to the expiration of the limitation period set forth in section 4-148 and authorization for such action against the state shall be deemed granted. *Any such action shall be limited to medical malpractice claims only* and any such action shall be deemed a suit otherwise authorized by law in accordance with subsection (a) of section 4-142 . . . .” (Emphasis added.)

One thing is clear. The waiver of sovereign immunity afforded by subsection (f) of § 4-160 extends no further than medical malpractice actions. Until 2019, the provision—then codified at General Statutes (Rev. to 2019) § 4-160 (b)—referenced malpractice actions only in the first clause: “In any claim alleging malpractice against the state . . . .” Prior to that time, malpractice actions against the state had to go through the Claims Commissioner, but approval was automatic as long as the plaintiffs satisfied the requirements of § 52-190a. In 2019, the legislature amended the statute to provide an alternative path by which plaintiffs could bypass the Claims Commissioner altogether, and it added the language providing that “[a]ny such action shall be limited to medical malpractice claims only . . . .” Public Acts 2019, No. 19-182, § 4 (P.A. 19-182).

Neither this statute, however, nor any other provision of the General Statutes defines the terms “medical malpractice,” “medical malpractice action,” or “medical malpractice claim.” The precise question presented by this appeal is not addressed on the face of the statute.

614

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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Dictionaries also are of little help in identifying whether and when “medical malpractice” can encompass claims for emotional distress in the absence of physical injury. Black’s Law Dictionary, for example, defines “medical malpractice” as “[a] doctor’s failure to exercise the degree of care and skill that a physician or surgeon of the same medical specialty would use under similar circumstances.” Black’s Law Dictionary (11th Ed. 2019) p. 1148. It adds that, as in any other negligence action, the medical malpractice plaintiff must establish proximate cause and damages, as well as breach of the professional duty of care. See *id.* But this dictionary definition does not speak to whether, and under what circumstances, emotional distress damages in the absence of physical injury are available in such actions.

To ascertain the legislature’s intent with respect to *that* issue, we look, first, to other, related sections of the General Statutes; see General Statutes § 1-2z; and, second, to our common law of negligence, which the legislature is presumed not to have abrogated without a clear statement to that effect. See, e.g., *Pacific Ins. Co., Ltd. v. Champion Steel, LLC*, 323 Conn. 254, 269–70, 146 A.3d 975 (2016). We consider each in turn.<sup>9</sup>

## 1

Although the term “medical malpractice” is not defined in § 4-160 (f), other sections of the General Statutes do help to illuminate the intent of the legislature. Section 4-160 (f) was enacted to address and to help relieve the yearslong case backlog at the Office of the Claims Commissioner. See, e.g., *Matakaetis v. State*,

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<sup>9</sup> Because the statute is ambiguous with respect to the question before us, we also may look to the legislative history of the statute. See, e.g., *Dias v. Grady*, 292 Conn. 350, 356, 972 A.2d 715 (2009); see also General Statutes § 1-2z. We note, however, that the parties have not identified, and our review did not reveal, anything in the legislative history of P.A. 19-182, § 4, that resolves this question.

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

615

---

Escobar-Santana v. State

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Docket No. HHD-CV-21-6144726-S, 2021 WL 6334962, \*4–6 (Conn. Super. December 20, 2021). In 1998, the legislature eliminated the need for the Claims Commissioner to review medical malpractice claims against the state by providing for automatic approval of such claims upon the submission of a certificate of good faith pursuant to General Statutes (Rev. to 1997) § 52-190a (a). See Public Acts 1998, No. 98-76, § 1; see also, e.g., *Matakaetis v. State*, supra, \*4. To show the existence of such good faith, plaintiffs had to obtain a written opinion of a “similar health care provider . . . .” General Statutes (Rev. to 1997) § 52-190a (a). In 2019, the legislature went further, permitting plaintiffs to forgo the Claims Commissioner’s approval entirely by filing a timely medical malpractice action in the Superior Court. See P.A. 19-182, § 4; see also, e.g., *Matakaetis v. State*, supra, \*4–5. Of course, filing a medical malpractice action in the Superior Court directly still requires that the plaintiffs submit a certificate of good faith. See General Statutes § 52-190a (a). It seems clear, then, that the legislature, in enacting § 4-160 (f), substituted one gatekeeper for another. There is no need for the Claims Commissioner, who has no particular expertise in these matters, to expend scarce resources ascertaining whether a plaintiff has a colorable medical malpractice claim when a good faith certificate and expert opinion letter demonstrate as much, or, if challenged, will be subject to the scrutiny of the Superior Court.<sup>10</sup> This suggests that the universe of medical malpractice actions subject to § 4-160 (f) is coextensive with those actions subject to § 52-190a.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Conn. Joint Standing Committee Hearings, Judiciary, Pt. 4, 2019 Sess., p. 3284, remarks of Claims Commissioner Christy Scott (“[b]ecause the [S]uperior [C]ourt . . . is fully capable of determining whether a claimant has satisfied the criteria of § 52-190a . . . there is no particular purpose served in requiring such claims to be filed with the Claims Commissioner and, given the [Claims] Commissioner’s ongoing backlog, there is affirmative harm [in] requiring that such claims continue to be filed there”).

<sup>11</sup> The legislative history confirms as much. See, e.g., Conn. Joint Standing Committee Hearings, Judiciary, Pt. 4, 2019 Sess., pp. 3283–84, remarks of

616

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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Section 52-190a (a) applies to any “civil action or apportionment complaint . . . to recover damages resulting from personal injury or wrongful death . . . whether in tort or in contract, in which it is alleged that such injury or death resulted from the negligence of a health care provider . . . .” It requires, among other things, that “the claimant . . . obtain a written and signed opinion of a similar health care provider, as defined in section 52-184c, which similar health care provider shall be selected pursuant to the provisions of said section, that there appears to be evidence of medical negligence and includes a detailed basis for the formation of such opinion.”<sup>12</sup> General Statutes § 52-190a (a). In *Dias v. Grady*, 292 Conn. 350, 972 A.2d 715 (2009), we concluded that the phrase “medical negligence” in that provision is susceptible to more than one reasonable interpretation, and, having reviewed the legislative history, we treated that phrase as synonymous with “medical malpractice,” meaning “breach of the standard of care . . . .” *Id.*, 356–59.

Section 52-190a (a) expressly addresses the issue of damages, requiring a certificate of good faith in order to bring an action “to recover damages resulting from personal injury or wrongful death . . . .” Although the term “personal injury” also is not defined for purposes of this section, the legislature has defined that phrase elsewhere in the General Statutes. For example, for purposes of chapter 968 of the General Statutes, which

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Claims Commissioner Christy Scott; 41 H.R. Proc., Pt. 8, 1998 Sess., pp. 2695–97, remarks of Representative Richard D. Tulisano.

<sup>12</sup> General Statutes § 52-184c (a) further defines such actions, providing in relevant part that, “[i]n any civil action to recover damages resulting from personal injury or wrongful death . . . in which it is alleged that such injury or death resulted from the negligence of a health care provider . . . the claimant shall have the burden of proving by the preponderance of the evidence that the alleged actions of the health care provider represented a breach of the prevailing professional standard of care for that health care provider. . . .”



347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

617

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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provides services for crime victims, “[p]ersonal injury” means . . . actual bodily harm or *emotional harm* . . .” (Emphasis added.) General Statutes § 54-201 (2). Other statutes also suggest that, under at least some circumstances, “personal injury” can encompass purely emotional distress. See, e.g., General Statutes § 52-231b (“[i]n any action to recover damages for personal injury to a minor, including emotional distress, caused by sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual assault”); General Statutes § 52-577d (“[n]otwithstanding the provisions of section 52-577, no action to recover damages for personal injury to a person under twenty-one years of age, including emotional distress, caused by sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual assault may be brought”); General Statutes § 54-211 (d) (1) (C) (crime victim may receive compensation for personal injury “in cases of emotional harm only”). At the very least, then, the legislature has not categorically precluded medical malpractice claims for purely emotional damages.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, our review of related statutes does not answer the question of whether the legislature intended to allow medical malpractice claims alleging solely emotional distress damages to proceed under § 4-160 (f).

## 2

Because the legislature has not directly addressed the question of whether and when a claim for purely

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<sup>13</sup> The state relies on *Maloney v. Conroy*, 208 Conn. 392, 545 A.2d 1059 (1988), and *Montinieri v. Southern New England Telephone Co.*, 175 Conn. 337, 398 A.2d 1180 (1978), for the proposition that a medical malpractice claim for solely emotional damages will not lie. Neither case supports that broad conclusion, however. *Maloney*, in which the alleged injuries did not occur in the neonatal context, stood for the proposition that a *bystander* to medical malpractice may not recover for emotional distress. *Maloney v. Conroy*, *supra*, 393, 402. This court recognized the overruling of *Maloney* in *Squeo v. Norwalk Hospital Assn.*, 316 Conn. 558, 570, 574, 113 A.3d 932 (2015). *Montinieri* established the rules for negligent infliction of emotional distress claims and did not address medical malpractice. See *Montinieri v. Southern New England Telephone Co.*, *supra*, 340–46.

618

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

---

Escobar-Santana v. State

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emotional damages can qualify as a medical malpractice claim for purposes of § 4-160 (f), we look for additional guidance to our state's common law of tort. See, e.g., *Dias v. Grady*, supra, 292 Conn. 356 (when text of statute is ambiguous, we may look for interpretive guidance to common-law principles governing same general subject matter); J. Lagnese et al., *Connecticut Medical Malpractice: A Manual of Practice and Procedure* (5th Ed. 2019) § 1-3, p. 3 (legislature largely codified common law of medical malpractice when it defined “standard of care”).

As we explained in *Squeo v. Norwalk Hospital Assn.*, 316 Conn. 558, 113 A.3d 932 (2015), the common law traditionally was loathe to afford recovery for purely emotional injuries. See *id.*, 564. This reflected concerns about “the potential for trivial, frivolous or fraudulent claims,” as well as “the difficulties involved in tracing the etiology of psychological harms . . . .” *Id.*; see also, e.g., 2 Restatement (Third), supra, p. 132 (scope note accompanying chapter 8, §§ 45 through 48).

This hesitation has waned, however, as our understanding of emotional trauma has evolved. See, e.g., *Squeo v. Norwalk Hospital Assn.*, supra, 316 Conn. 565; see also, e.g., *LaBieniec v. Baker*, 11 Conn. App. 199, 206, 526 A.2d 1341 (1987) (“medical science has unquestionably become sophisticated enough to provide reliable and accurate evidence on the causes of mental trauma” (emphasis omitted; internal quotation marks omitted)); 2 Restatement (Third), supra, pp. 132–33 (discussing modern trend and courts’ increasing openness to allowing recovery for purely emotional harm when traditional reasons given for restricting it do not apply); J. Lagnese et al., supra, § 3-2:3, p. 31 (“[r]ecoverly for unintentionally caused emotional distress does not depend on proof of physical injury or risk of physical harm”).

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

619

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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Accordingly, § 47 of the Restatement (Third) of Torts, Liability for Physical and Emotional Harm, recognizes that courts have begun to permit the imposition of liability for purely emotional distress when, among other things, the defendant's alleged negligence (1) has placed the plaintiff in danger of immediate bodily harm (§ 47 (a)), or (2) "occurs in the course of specified categories of activities, undertakings, or relationships in which negligent conduct is especially likely to cause serious emotional harm" (§ 47 (b)). 2 Restatement (Third), supra, § 47, p. 175. Among the specific examples given of the types of special relationship injuries envisioned by § 47 (b) are medical malpractice cases in which "a physician negligently diagnoses a patient with a dreaded or serious disease; a physician negligently causes the loss of a fetus; [or] a hospital loses a newborn infant . . . ." Id., § 47, comment (f), pp. 178–79.

Consistent with this modern trend, this court has recognized a cause of action for bystander emotional distress arising out of medical malpractice. See, e.g., *Squeo v. Norwalk Hospital Assn.*, supra, 316 Conn. 568; see also, e.g., 2 Restatement (Third), supra, § 48, pp. 199–200. In addition, the Appellate Court has left open the possibility that a medical malpractice cause of action will lie when a patient suffers purely emotional distress after having been misdiagnosed with a serious illness. See, e.g., *Esposito v. Schiff*, 38 Conn. App. 726, 729–30, 662 A.2d 1337 (1995); *LaBieniec v. Baker*, supra, 11 Conn. App. 200–201, 205–206; see also, e.g., *Miles v. Barajas*, Docket No. NNH-CV-12-6030919-S, 2015 WL 6237934, \*3–4 (Conn. Super. September 22, 2015) (relying on *LaBieniec* and allowing medical malpractice action to proceed when plaintiff claimed purely emotional injuries arising from physician's allegedly negligent delay in diagnosing her breast cancer).

Neither this court nor the Appellate Court has spoken to the specific issue of whether a birthing mother can

620

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

---

Escobar-Santana v. State

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recover for purely emotional injuries suffered as a result of medical negligence causing injury to the fetus or infant during the labor and delivery process. Consistent with the modern trend, however, a number of our sister state courts have concluded, under their common-law authority, that a birthing mother may recover for the purely emotional distress she experiences as a result of medical malpractice resulting in physical injury to or death of her fetus or infant during the labor and delivery process. See, e.g., *Burgess v. Superior Court*, 2 Cal. 4th 1064, 1076, 831 P.2d 1197, 9 Cal. Rptr. 2d 615 (1992) (“during pregnancy and delivery it is axiomatic that any treatment for [the fetus] necessarily implicated [the mother’s] participation [because] access to [the fetus] could . . . be accomplished [only] with [the mother’s] consent and with impact to her body”); *Carey v. Lovett*, 132 N.J. 44, 59, 622 A.2d 1279 (1993) (“[T]he physical and emotional ties between mother and fetus so unite them that a physician should anticipate that any malpractice that adversely affects the fetus will cause emotional distress to the mother. . . . In effect, the connection between a mother and her baby so merges direct and indirect claims that the distinction disappears.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.)); *Modaber v. Kelley*, 232 Va. 60, 66, 348 S.E.2d 233 (1986) (“injury to an unborn child constitutes injury to the mother and . . . she may recover for such physical injury and mental suffering associated with a still-birth”); see also, e.g., D. Dobbs, “Undertakings and Special Relationships in Claims for Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress,” 50 Ariz. L. Rev. 49, 55 (2008) (“[O]bviously, an obstetrician undertakes to care for both [the] mother and [the] unborn child. His negligent delivery of the child that . . . harms the child violates his duty to the child and also to the mother. Consequently, he is liable to the mother for her emotional distress . . .”). But see, e.g., *Prado v. Catholic Medi-*

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

621

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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*cal Center of Brooklyn & Queens, Inc.*, 145 App. Div. 2d 614, 615, 536 N.Y.S.2d 474 (1988) (“[in the absence of] independent physical injuries [beyond those naturally associated with the childbirth process], a mother may not recover for emotional and psychic harm as a result of a stillbirth”).

Most of these courts have adopted this rule on the theory that the mother and fetus are physically and emotionally inseparable prior to birth, and, therefore, a physical injury to the child during the birthing process is, in effect, a bodily injury to the mother as well. The mother and the child are, in effect, joint victims of the medical malpractice. Courts allowing recovery of such damages also have recognized the unique expectancies that attend the birthing process. See, e.g., *Burgess v. Superior Court*, supra, 2 Cal. 4th 1076 (“[t]he birth of a child is a miraculous occasion which is almost always eagerly anticipated and which is invested with hopes, dreams, anxiety, and fears”).

Some courts also have adopted the rule on public policy grounds. See, e.g., *Tanner v. Hartog*, 696 So. 2d 705, 708 (Fla. 1997) (“it is difficult to justify the outright denial of a claim for the mental pain and anguish which is so likely to be experienced . . . as a result of the birth of a stillborn child caused by the negligence of another”). Still others have permitted the mother to recover under the so-called “impact” or “zone of danger” rules. See, e.g., *Vaillancourt v. Medical Center Hospital of Vermont, Inc.*, 139 Vt. 138, 143, 425 A.2d 92 (1980). In any event, we are persuaded that a majority of the state courts to have considered the question have concluded that emotional distress damages resulting from an injury to a fetus or infant during the birthing process are recoverable by the mother.<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *Smith v.*

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<sup>14</sup> At the same time, many of those courts have sought to cabin the potential liability arising from this rule, for reasons of law or public policy. Although “[t]he demarcation lines drawn by the courts are not always consistent and . . . are not always clearly articulated”; *Smith v. Borello*, 370 Md. 227, 241,

622

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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*Borello*, 370 Md. 227, 241, 246, 804 A.2d 1151 (2002);  
*Fehely v. Senders*, 170 Or. 457, 460, 135 P.2d 283 (1943).

This is also the prevailing view among the judges of the Superior Court. As one court explained, “[n]umerous Superior Court [judges] have considered whether a mother may recover emotional distress damages for the injury or death of a child resulting from medical malpractice in the prenatal and delivery periods. . . . The majority of the Superior Court [judges who] have considered the issue have ruled that a mother is not a bystander [with respect to matters] that are incident to prenatal care and the delivery of her child. . . . The very term delivery presupposes that the mother is an active participant in the birthing of a child. To hold otherwise would be to reject the entire human experience, everywhere and at all times. . . . [W]hen a child is injured due to negligent obstetrical care, the mother and child are joint victims of malpractice, not separable entities.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Leoma v. OB-GYN Services, P.C.*, Docket No. KNL-CV-11-6011571-S, 2012 WL 4040464, \*2 (Conn. Super. August 28, 2012); see also, e.g., *Gambacorta v. Williams*, Docket No. HHD-CV-17-6077609-S, 2021 WL 402053, \*3 (Conn. Super. January 8, 2021) (“the majority of the judges of the Superior Court who have considered the . . . issue [have] concluded that obstetricians owe a duty to the mother to exercise reasonable care in the treatment of her child and are answerable in damages

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804 A.2d 1151 (2002); courts generally have limited the emotional distress damages that the mother can recover to those arising from the traumas she suffered during and immediately following the birthing process, up to and including her realization of her child’s injuries; emotional distress damages for ongoing emotional distress arising from a loss of the child’s consortium, coping with the child’s ongoing injuries or with the ongoing loss of the child, or disruptions to the ordinary routines of life generally have been permitted only when authorized by statute. See, e.g., *id.*, 241, 244, 247–48; see also, e.g., *Burgess v. Superior Court*, *supra*, 2 Cal. 4th 1084; *Mehigan v. Sheehan*, 94 N.H. 274, 278, 51 A.2d 632 (1947); *Modaber v. Kelley*, *supra*, 232 Va. 66–67.

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

623

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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for the emotional distress suffered by the mother therefrom” (emphasis omitted); J. Lagnese et al., *supra*, § 3-2:3.1, p. 34 (observing that this is probably majority position in Connecticut).<sup>15</sup>

In *Gambacorta*, for example, the court, following § 47 (b) of the Restatement (Third) of Torts, Liability for Physical and Emotional Harm, adopted what it took to be the majority view. See *Gambacorta v. Williams*, *supra*, 2021 WL 402053, \*3, \*5. The court concluded that holding a physician liable for such eminently foreseeable damages is consonant with the “preexisting physician-patient relationship between both mother and child”; *id.*, \*5; comports with the normal expectations of the mother; *id.*; and, from a public policy standpoint, does not unduly “enlarge the common law [by extending] the duty of health care providers to nonpatients.” *Id.*, \*3.

## 3

We cannot know whether the legislature had this body of common law and these modern trends in mind when it enacted § 4-160 (f). In the absence of any clear legislative statement to the contrary, however, it remains the proper role of this court to define the scope and nature of a medical malpractice action. See, e.g., *In re Ava W.*, 336 Conn. 545, 579, 248 A.3d 675 (2020) (“[Although] the legislature’s authority to abrogate the common law is undeniable, we will not lightly impute such an intent to the legislature. . . . In determining whether . . . a statute abrogates or modifies a [common-law] rule the construction must be strict, and the

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<sup>15</sup> Because the state was not the defendant and the sovereign immunity statute was not at issue, the courts in these cases generally did not have cause to distinguish between medical malpractice and related causes of action, such as negligent infliction of emotional distress. Thus, although some of them determined that the allegations qualified as negligent infliction of emotional distress, they provide little support for the state’s position that the plaintiffs’ claims in the present case do not also sound in medical malpractice. See part II C of this opinion.

624

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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operation of a statute in derogation of the common law is to be limited to matters clearly brought within its scope.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.); *Greenwald v. Van Handel*, 311 Conn. 370, 383, 88 A.3d 467 (2014) (“although procedurally circumscribed by statute, medical malpractice claims are [still] brought pursuant to the common law”); *Neuhaus v. DeCholnoky*, 280 Conn. 190, 221, 905 A.2d 1135 (2006) (explaining that, notwithstanding restrictions on medical malpractice actions adopted during tort reform process, “our courts routinely examine whether to extend a duty to a particular defendant . . . in light of the policy considerations at play in the case”).

Accordingly, we agree with the majority position and hold, under our common-law authority, that a birthing mother may recover for emotional distress arising from her traumatic experiences during and immediately following the birthing process, up to and including her realization of her child’s injuries, when those injuries are proximately caused by the defendant’s medical malpractice while the child was in utero. Insofar as § 4-160 (f) incorporates Connecticut’s common law of tort, we interpret the term “medical malpractice claims” in that light.

### C

With these principles in mind, we return our attention to the present case. As we explained in part II B of this opinion, a birthing mother who alleges that she suffered emotional distress as a result of medical malpractice during the labor and delivery process is not limited in her recovery to damages arising from her own physical injuries. She also may recover for emotional distress arising from her awareness of the damage wrought by the malpractice on the child. To the extent that Escobar-Santana is claiming purely emotional damages arising from such injuries, then, she is not precluded from



347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

625

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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bringing a medical malpractice claim against the state on that basis.

The final question is whether count two of the complaint does in fact state a medical malpractice claim within the terms just described. The state argues that count two must be dismissed because Escobar-Santana's claim sounds either in negligent infliction of emotional distress or in bystander emotional distress, rather than medical malpractice. Neither of those causes of action has the same essential elements as a medical malpractice claim, the state contends, and, therefore, they are not encompassed by the legislative waiver of sovereign immunity for medical malpractice actions in § 4-160 (f).

The state is correct that, even in the health care context, both negligent infliction of emotional distress and bystander emotional distress are causes of action distinct from medical malpractice.<sup>16</sup> The state also is correct that the waiver of sovereign immunity in § 4-160 (f), which is limited to medical malpractice actions, does not extend to such claims. Insofar as certain paragraphs of the complaint or portions thereof can be

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<sup>16</sup> To prove bystander emotional distress, the plaintiff must establish that “(1) the bystander is closely related to the primary victim of the accident or injury, (2) the bystander’s emotional distress is caused by the contemporaneous sensory perception of the event or conduct that causes the accident or injury, or by arriving on the scene soon thereafter and before substantial change has occurred in the primary victim’s condition or location, (3) the primary victim dies or sustains serious physical injury, and (4) the bystander experiences serious emotional distress as a result.” *Squeo v. Norwalk Hospital Assn.*, supra, 316 Conn. 582. None of those elements is an essential element of a medical malpractice claim. Similarly, to prove negligent infliction of emotional distress, the plaintiff must specifically establish that “the defendant should have realized that its conduct involved an unreasonable risk of causing emotional distress and that that distress, if it were caused, might result in illness or bodily harm.” *Montinieri v. Southern New England Telephone Co.*, 175 Conn. 337, 345, 398 A.2d 1180 (1978); see also *Wood v. Rutherford*, 187 Conn. App. 61, 79–80, 201 A.3d 1025 (2019) (applying similar standard in health care context).

626

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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read to allege such causes of action exclusively, the elimination of those portions of the complaint could have been accomplished by a request to revise. See Practice Book § 10-35; see also footnote 6 of this opinion.

The state is incorrect, however, that count two of the complaint cannot also be read to allege a medical malpractice claim on behalf of Escobar-Santana. “Under modern pleading practice, pleadings must be construed broadly and realistically, rather than narrowly and technically.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Williams v. Housing Authority*, 327 Conn. 338, 372, 174 A.3d 137 (2017). Moreover, “[i]n ruling on a motion to dismiss for lack of subject matter jurisdiction, the trial court must consider the allegations of the complaint in their most favorable light . . . including those facts necessarily implied from the allegations . . . .” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Giannoni v. Commissioner of Transportation*, 322 Conn. 344, 349, 141 A.3d 784 (2016).

In borderline cases, we have indicated that, to ascertain whether a claim qualifies as a medical malpractice claim, we ask the following three questions: (1) are the defendants being “sued in their capacities as medical professionals,” (2) is the alleged negligence “of a specialized medical nature that arises out of the medical professional-patient relationship,” and (3) is the alleged negligence “substantially related to medical diagnosis or treatment” and does it “[involve] the exercise of medical judgment?” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Doe v. Cochran*, 332 Conn. 325, 335, 210 A.3d 469 (2019). In the case of Escobar-Santana’s claim, the answer to all three questions is clearly yes.

Count two of the complaint incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 13 of count one, which undisputedly make out a medical malpractice claim. The con-

347 Conn. 601

AUGUST, 2023

627

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*Escobar-Santana v. State*

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tention is that the state, via a state hospital and two of its physicians, among other professional staff, undertook to provide pregnancy, labor, and delivery services for Escobar-Santana after having admitted her as a patient. All of the allegations of negligence arise out of that physician-patient relationship. The allegations all involve the breach of the standard of care by the hospital staff while operating in their professional medical capacities: things like misdiagnosing the nature of the pregnancy, misassessing the risks of labor and delivery, failing to use proper imaging techniques and to consider input from other medical specialists, failing to recommend the correct delivery method, failing to use proper delivery technique, failing to properly care for Escobar-Santana during labor and delivery, and failing to maintain appropriate medical records, staffing, and treatment protocols.

In addition, count two purports to be brought pursuant to § 4-160. The plaintiffs attached to the complaint a good faith certificate, compliant with § 52-190a (a), certifying that there are grounds for a good faith belief that there had been negligence in the care and treatment of Escobar-Santana. They included a copy of a physician's letter addressing the question of "whether the standard of care on the part of board-certified obstetricians and obstetrics and gynecology residents was breached in the prenatal and intrapartum care of . . . Escobar-Santana . . ." In the letter, the plaintiffs' expert ultimately concluded that the state breached the standard of care by, among other things, not informing Escobar-Santana of the risks associated with vaginal delivery and counseling her regarding her delivery options prior to labor induction, as well as failing to use proper delivery technique. The fact that expert testimony likely will be required to establish the state's liability also counsels in favor of construing count two

628

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 601

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Escobar-Santana v. State

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as one for medical malpractice. See *Shortell v. Cavanagh*, 300 Conn. 383, 388, 393, 15 A.3d 1042 (2011).

In light of these allegations, and consistent with our obligation to construe the pleadings in the light most favorable to the plaintiffs, we understand Escobar-Santana's allegation that she suffered a "traumatic, terrifying and painful" delivery, followed by "severe psychological, physiological and emotional distress," as inextricably connected to her allegations of medical malpractice. We thus conclude that the trial court properly denied the state's motion to dismiss the second count of the plaintiffs' complaint.

The decision of the trial court is affirmed.

In this opinion the other justices concurred.

ROBINSON, C. J., concurring. I agree with the majority's conclusion that, for purposes of General Statutes § 4-160 (f),<sup>1</sup> the plaintiffs, Celine Escobar-Santana (Escobar-Santana) and her infant son, Emmett Escobar-Santana, have pleaded a colorable medical malpractice claim with respect to count two of their complaint. As the majority aptly concludes, § 4-160 (f) waives sovereign immunity for " 'medical malpractice claims only' " and affords a mechanism by which plaintiffs can bypass the Claims Commissioner upon the filing of a timely medical malpractice action in the Superior Court. Part II B of the majority opinion. Given our mandate to construe pleadings broadly; see, e.g., *Carpenter v. Daar*, 346 Conn. 80, 127, 287 A.3d 1027 (2023); and the legislative purpose of § 4-160 (f) as explained by the majority; see part II B 1 and 2 of the majority opinion; I agree with the majority's conclusion that count two can be read to allege a medical malpractice claim by Escobar-Santana for purposes of the sovereign immunity waiver provided by that statute. Not only does count two sound in medical malpractice, but the plaintiffs also attached a good faith certificate and opinion letter that alleged

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<sup>1</sup> See footnote 1 of the majority opinion.

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

629

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State *v.* Avoletta

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that the defendant, the state of Connecticut, had breached the standard of care during the labor and delivery process. See General Statutes § 52-190a (a). Given the common-law trend of recognizing emotional distress damages in medical malpractice actions, I agree with the majority's conclusion that, to the extent that Escobar-Santana alleged only damages caused by emotional distress, in the absence of her own physical injury, she is not precluded from bypassing the Claims Commissioner under § 4-160 (f).

I write separately, however, to emphasize that the dispositive issue in this case is limited to whether there has been a waiver of sovereign immunity for purposes of § 4-160 (f) as a matter of construction of that statute, thus affording the trial court subject matter jurisdiction over the claims pleaded in count two of the plaintiffs' complaint. Because, as was highlighted at oral argument before this court, the state assumes for purposes of this motion to dismiss that there was a duty of care owed to Escobar-Santana, I, too, assume that such duty existed given the procedural posture of this case. Given that assumption, I leave to another day a comprehensive examination of whether there was, in fact, a duty of care owed to Escobar-Santana and whether she ultimately will prevail on her emotional distress claim.

Accordingly, I join the majority opinion affirming the decision of the trial court to deny the state's motion to dismiss count two of the complaint.

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STATE OF CONNECTICUT *v.* MATTHEW  
AVOLETTA ET AL.  
(SC 20723)

Robinson, C. J., and McDonald, Mullins, Ecker and Alexander, Js.

*Syllabus*

In 2007, the defendants, a parent and her two children, filed notice of a claim with the Claims Commissioner, seeking reimbursement from the

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*State v. Avoletta*

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plaintiff, the state of Connecticut, for tuition and costs that they incurred as a result of the enrollment of the children in private school due to allegedly unsafe and unsanitary conditions in certain of the Torrington public school buildings, where the children had been students. The commissioner dismissed the claim as untimely because it was not filed within the one year statute of limitations (§ 4-148 (a)) applicable to claims against the state. The defendants sought legislative review of the commissioner's ruling pursuant to § 4-148 (b), and the General Assembly passed a joint resolution in which it vacated that ruling and authorizing the defendants to file an action for damages against the state in the Superior Court. The defendants commenced such an action in 2012, but the court dismissed it, finding that the claim was untimely and that the joint resolution was an unconstitutional public emolument that violated article first, § 1, of the Connecticut constitution insofar as it granted the defendants a right that was unavailable to other individuals and failed to identify any public purpose. In 2013, the defendants filed a second claim with the commissioner, alleging, inter alia, that they were harmed by the General Assembly's failure to articulate a public purpose in the joint resolution and seeking to revive their 2007 claim. The commissioner dismissed the defendants' second claim, as well. The defendants subsequently returned to the General Assembly, which ultimately passed No. 17-4, § 1, of the 2017 Special Acts (S.A. 17-4). Special Act 17-4 authorized the defendants to file a late claim for injuries "alleged to have accrued on September 15, 2006," and expressly recognized that "a public purpose [was] served by encouraging accountable state government through the full adjudication of cases involving persons who claim to have been injured by the conduct of state actors." Thereafter, the state initiated the present action, seeking a judgment declaring that S.A. 17-4 constituted an unconstitutional public emolument that violated article first, § 1, of the state constitution. The trial court granted the state's motion for summary judgment and rendered judgment thereon, concluding, inter alia, that the defendants had failed to demonstrate a genuine issue of material fact as to whether S.A. 17-4 served a legitimate public purpose. The Appellate Court affirmed the trial court's judgment, and the defendants, on the granting of certification, appealed to this court.

*Held* that S.A. 17-4 conferred an exclusive public emolument on the defendants for which the state bore no responsibility and, accordingly, the Appellate Court correctly determined that S.A. 17-4 violated article first, § 1, of the state constitution insofar as it served no public purpose:

A legislative enactment will withstand a challenge under article first, § 1, of the Connecticut constitution only if it serves a legitimate public purpose, and, although a special act enacted pursuant to § 4-148 (b) will undoubtedly confer a direct benefit on a particular claimant, a public purpose may exist if the special act remedies an injustice to that individ-

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

631

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*State v. Avoletta*

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ual for which the state itself bears responsibility because, in those circumstances, the benefit conferred on the private individual may be viewed as incidental to the overarching public interest that is served in remedying the injustice caused by the state.

Moreover, if the enactment seeks to remedy a procedural default for which the state is not responsible, it does not serve a public purpose, and, when a special act allows a person named therein to bring a lawsuit based on a statutory cause of action that would otherwise have been barred for failure to comply with a time limit specified in the statute, this court ordinarily has been unable to discern any public purpose sufficient to sustain the enactment.

Although, in the present case, the defendants identified certain public purposes behind S.A. 17-4, such as ensuring a safe and healthy school setting for all children and holding government officials accountable, and S.A. 17-4 itself included express language identifying an ostensible public purpose, the legislature could not by mere fiat or finding make public a truly private purpose, and S.A. 17-4 did not excuse other similarly situated persons, such as other students in the same or different school districts, from complying with the applicable statutory limitations for claims or provide circumstances under which such persons could be excused from compliance therewith.

Furthermore, S.A. 17-4 sought to remedy only the defendants' procedural default insofar as it authorized them, and only them, to present their untimely claim against the state to the commissioner, and the defendants sought reimbursement from the state only for the private school tuition costs that they incurred without naming any other schoolchildren or without seeking any injunctive relief with respect to the conditions in the public school buildings.

In addition, although the defendants claimed that the state was ultimately responsible for the health complications of the defendant children caused by the poor conditions in the school buildings, the defendants did not contend that the state was responsible for the procedural lapses attendant to the untimely filing of their claim, there was nothing in the record that distinguished the facts of the present case from the ordinary case in which a litigant fails to take timely action, and S.A. 17-4 essentially eliminated for the defendants alone the consequences of their litigation choice of pursuing their claim against the state only through administrative and judicial proceedings, rather than by filing a claim with the commissioner in the first instance, without affording relief to anyone else.

Argued February 15—officially released August 22, 2023

*Procedural History*

Action for a judgment declaring unconstitutional a special act of the legislature that permitted the refiling

632

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

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State *v.* Avoletta

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of a certain claim by the defendants that previously had been dismissed, and for other relief, brought to the Superior Court in the judicial district of Hartford, where the defendants filed a counterclaim; thereafter, the court, *Hon. Robert B. Shapiro*, judge trial referee, granted the plaintiff's motions for summary judgment and to dismiss the defendants' counterclaim and rendered judgment thereon, from which the defendants appealed to the Appellate Court, *Bright, C. J.*, and *Cradle and DiPentima, Js.*, which affirmed the trial court's judgment, and the defendants, on the granting of certification, appealed to this court. *Affirmed.*

*Deborah G. Stevenson*, for the appellants (defendants).

*Michael K. Skold*, deputy solicitor general, with whom, on the brief, was *William Tong*, attorney general, for the appellee (plaintiff).

*Opinion*

ROBINSON, C. J. The sole issue in this certified appeal is whether No. 17-4, § 1, of the 2017 Special Acts (S.A. 17-4)<sup>1</sup> is an unconstitutional public emolument in viola-

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<sup>1</sup> No. 17-4, § 1, of the 2017 Special Acts provides: "(a) Notwithstanding the failure to file a proper notice of a claim against the state with the clerk of the Office of the Claims Commissioner, within the time limitations specified by subsection (a) of section 4-148 of the general statutes, Joanne Avoletta, Peter Avoletta and Matthew Avoletta are authorized pursuant to the provisions of subsection (b) of section 4-148 of the general statutes to present their respective claims against the state to the Claims Commissioner. The General Assembly finds that there is a public purpose served by encouraging accountable state government through the full adjudication of cases involving persons who claim to have been injured by the conduct of state actors. The General Assembly further finds it just and equitable that the time limitations provided for in subsection (a) of section 4-148 of the general statutes be tolled in a case such as this, involving claimants who initially filed notice of their claims against the state with the Claims Commissioner on May 2, 2007, for injuries that are alleged to have accrued on September 15, 2006, which allegations, if viewed in a light most favorable to the claimants, provide notice to the state of their claims within the statute of limitations for injuries to their person. The General Assembly deems such authorization to be just and equitable and finds that such authorization is supported by



347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

633

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State v. Avoletta

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tion of article first, § 1, of the Connecticut constitution.<sup>2</sup> The defendants, Joanne Avoletta, Peter Avoletta, and Matthew Avoletta, appeal, upon our grant of their petition for certification,<sup>3</sup> from the judgment of the Appellate Court affirming the trial court's judgment in favor of the plaintiff, the state of Connecticut. See *State v. Avoletta*, 212 Conn. App. 309, 312, 339, 275 A.3d 716 (2022). On appeal, the defendants claim that the Appellate Court incorrectly concluded that S.A. 17-4, pursuant to which the General Assembly extended the time limitation under General Statutes § 4-148<sup>4</sup> for the defen-

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compelling equitable circumstances and would serve a public purpose. Such claims shall be presented to the Claims Commissioner not later than one year after the effective date of this section.

“(b) The state shall be barred from setting up the failure to comply with the provisions of sections 4-147 and 4-148 of the general statutes, from denying that notice of the claims was properly and timely given pursuant to sections 4-147 and 4-148 of the general statutes and from setting up the fact that the claims had previously been considered by the Claims Commissioner, by the General Assembly or in a judicial proceeding as defenses to such claims.”

<sup>2</sup> Article first, § 1, of the constitution of Connecticut provides: “All men when they form a social compact, are equal in rights; and no man or set of men are entitled to exclusive public emoluments or privileges from the community.”

<sup>3</sup> We granted the defendants' petition for certification to appeal from the judgment of the Appellate Court, limited to the following issue: “Did the Appellate Court correctly determine that [S.A. 17-4] is an unconstitutional public emolument?” *State v. Avoletta*, 343 Conn. 931, 276 A.3d 433 (2022).

<sup>4</sup> General Statutes § 4-148 provides: “(a) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section and section 4-165b, no claim shall be presented under this chapter but within one year after it accrues. Claims for injury to person or damage to property shall be deemed to accrue on the date when the damage or injury is sustained or discovered or in the exercise of reasonable care should have been discovered, provided no claim shall be presented more than three years from the date of the act or event complained of.

“(b) The General Assembly may, by special act, authorize a person to present a claim to the Office of the Claims Commissioner after the time limitations set forth in subsection (a) of this section have expired if it deems such authorization to be just and equitable and makes an express finding that such authorization is supported by compelling equitable circumstances and would serve a public purpose. Such finding shall not be subject to review by the Superior Court.

“(c) No claim cognizable by the Office of the Claims Commissioner shall

634

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

---

State v. Avoletta

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dants to bring their claim against the state for injuries arising from poor indoor air quality at certain public schools, constitutes an unconstitutional public emolument because it does not serve a legitimate public purpose. We disagree with the defendants and, accordingly, affirm the judgment of the Appellate Court.

The record reveals the following facts and procedural history, much of which is aptly set forth in the opinion of the Appellate Court.<sup>5</sup> In May, 2007, “the defendants filed a claim with the [Claims] [C]ommissioner [commissioner], alleging that the state [had] failed to maintain the Torrington public schools in a safe and sanitary condition (2007 claim). Specifically, the defendants alleged that the middle and high school buildings contained water leaks, bacteria, mold, dampness, and poor indoor air quality, which caused and exacerbated Peter Avoletta’s and Matthew Avoletta’s respiratory diseases and conditions. As a result of the poor building conditions, Joanne Avoletta enrolled Peter Avoletta and Matthew Avoletta in private schools and filed a claim with the commissioner seeking reimbursement from the state for the tuition and costs of their private education. Because the defendants’ claim was not timely filed within the one year statute of limitations set forth in . . . § 4-148 (a), the commissioner dismissed the claim for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.” (Footnotes omitted.) *State v. Avoletta*, supra, 212 Conn. App. 313.

“The defendants subsequently sought legislative review of the commissioner’s decision pursuant to § 4-

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be presented against the state except under the provisions of this chapter. Except as provided in section 4-156, no claim once considered by the Office of the Claims Commissioner, by the General Assembly or in a judicial proceeding shall again be presented against the state in any manner.”

<sup>5</sup> For the sake of brevity, we mention only the facts and procedural history relevant to the certified issue in this appeal. For a full recitation of the facts and procedural history of this case, see *State v. Avoletta*, supra, 212 Conn. App. 313–20.

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

635

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State v. Avoletta

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148 (b). In response, the General Assembly passed Substitute House Joint Resolution No. 11-34<sup>6</sup> (joint resolution), which vacated the commissioner's ruling and authorized the defendants to file a damages claim against the state in the Superior Court. Pursuant to the joint resolution, the defendants commenced an action against the state [in May, 2012]. See *Avoletta v. State*, Docket No. HHD-CV-12-5036221-S, 2013 WL 2350751 (Conn. Super. May 6, 2013) . . . . The state subsequently filed a motion to dismiss. . . .

“The [trial] court, *Sheridan, J.*, granted the state's motion to dismiss on the ground that the joint resolution was an unconstitutional public emolument [that violated] article first, § 1, of the Connecticut constitution. . . . The court found that the defendants' claim was untimely, noting that the defendants ‘were clearly aware of the school conditions far [longer] than [one] year before the . . . 2007 filing with the . . . commissioner.’ . . . Accordingly, the court [concluded] that allowing the defendants ‘to file suit directly in this matter, when [the trial court had] determined that their action was untimely provides them a right unavailable to other parties. [Although] the legislature need not enact a special act when vacating the . . . commissioner's dismissal of the matter, allowing a plaintiff with an untimely claim to circumvent § 4-148 (b) without any explanation or public purpose, constitutes a public emolument when the action is untimely.’” (Citations omitted; footnote in original.) *State v. Avoletta*, supra, 212 Conn. App. 313–14.

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<sup>6</sup> “Substitute House Joint Resolution No. 11-34, § 2, provides in relevant part that ‘the decision of the . . . [c]ommissioner . . . ordering the dismissal of the claims against the state in excess of seven thousand five hundred dollars of [the defendants], is vacated and the [defendants] are authorized to institute and prosecute to final judgment an action against the state to recover damages as compensation for injury to person or damage to property, or both, allegedly suffered by the claimants as set forth in said claims.’” *State v. Avoletta*, supra, 212 Conn. App. 314 n.5.

636

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

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State v. Avoletta

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The defendants then appealed to the Appellate Court, which, in *Avoletta v. State*, 152 Conn. App. 177, 192–95, 98 A.3d 839, cert. denied, 314 Conn. 944, 102 A.3d 1116 (2014), “affirmed the judgment of the trial court, holding that the defendants’ claim was time barred by the one year statute of limitations set forth in § 4-148 (a), and that the joint resolution had failed to identify any compelling equitable circumstances or a public purpose served by permitting the defendants to bring an untimely claim against the state. . . . Accordingly, [the Appellate Court] held that the joint resolution was an unconstitutional public emolument.” (Citations omitted.) *State v. Avoletta*, supra, 212 Conn. App. 315.

In August, 2013, “the defendants filed a second claim with the commissioner . . . seeking relief on two distinct grounds. First, the defendants sought to revive their 2007 claim for damages stemming from unsafe conditions at the Torrington public schools (Torrington schools claim). Second, the defendants alleged that they were harmed by the legislature’s ‘gross negligence’ in failing to articulate a public purpose in the joint resolution and neglecting to appropriately follow the statutory procedure to authorize such a claim . . . . The state moved to dismiss both claims, arguing that [they] were barred by *res judicata*, collateral estoppel, and legislative immunity. The commissioner granted the state’s motion to dismiss [in May, 2015].

“Following the commissioner’s order, the defendants again appealed to the General Assembly for legislative review. [In June, 2017], the General Assembly passed [S.A. 17-4], authorizing the defendants to proceed before the commissioner ‘for injuries . . . alleged to have accrued on September 15, 2006 . . . .’ The commissioner subsequently issued a scheduling order requiring that the parties engage in discovery, file dispositive motions, and participate in a hearing on the merits of the defendants’ claims.

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

637

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State v. Avoletta

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“[In September, 2017], the state instituted the present action . . . [in] the Superior Court, seeking a [judgment declaring] that [S.A. 17-4] constituted an unconstitutional public emolument in violation of article first, § 1, of the Connecticut constitution. . . .

“[In May, 2018], the state filed a motion for summary judgment. In its accompanying memorandum of law, the state claimed that (1) [S.A. 17-4] constituted an unconstitutional public emolument, and (2) the defendants were collaterally estopped from arguing that their claims were timely or that there was a legitimate public purpose for permitting their untimely claims to proceed.” (Footnotes omitted.) *Id.*, 315–17.

In October, 2019, “the court, *Hon. Robert B. Shapiro*, judge trial referee, heard argument on the state’s motion for summary judgment [which it subsequently granted] . . . . [The court concluded] that the issue of whether the Torrington schools claim was timely filed was barred by the doctrine of collateral estoppel. Because the claim previously was [found to be] untimely, the court clarified that the claim could . . . proceed [only] via special legislation passed pursuant to § 4-148 (b). The court then . . . determined that the defendants had failed to demonstrate a genuine issue of material fact [as to whether S.A. 17-4] served a legitimate public purpose . . . [or as to whether S.A. 17-4] constituted an unconstitutional public emolument.” *Id.*, 319.

The defendants subsequently appealed from the judgment of the trial court to the Appellate Court, claiming, *inter alia*, that the trial court improperly had granted the state’s motion summary judgment on the ground that S.A. 17-4 was an unconstitutional public emolument. See *id.*, 320, 325. Relying on this court’s decisions in *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, 290 Conn. 245, 963 A.2d 1 (2009), and *Kinney v. State*, 285 Conn. 700, 941 A.2d 907 (2008), the Appellate Court

638

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

---

State v. Avoletta

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concluded that the trial court correctly had determined that S.A. 17-4 does not serve a legitimate public purpose and, therefore, is an unconstitutional public emolument. See *State v. Avoletta*, supra, 212 Conn. App. 325–28. This certified appeal followed. See footnote 3 of this opinion.

On appeal, the defendants claim that the Appellate Court incorrectly concluded that S.A. 17-4 does not serve a legitimate public purpose and is an unconstitutional public emolument under the public emoluments clause of the state constitution. See Conn. Const., art. I, § 1. The defendants argue that the Appellate Court failed to consider whether the state met its burden of proving, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the General Assembly’s “sole objective” in enacting S.A. 17-4 was to grant a personal gain or advantage to the defendants. (Internal quotation marks omitted.) The defendants contend that “the legislature had multiple, valid public policy purposes in adopting” S.A. 17-4, namely, providing compensation for the defendants, ensuring a safe and healthy school setting for all children, holding government officials accountable, and ensuring that similar claims receive a full adjudication on the merits.

In response, the state argues that a special act that purports to authorize a party to present an untimely claim to the commissioner will have a legitimate public purpose only when the state bears responsibility for the untimely filing. Because no state actor caused the defendants’ procedural default, the state contends that the public purposes identified by the language of S.A. 17-4 and the defendants are not legitimate public purposes and, therefore, that S.A. 17-4 provides an exclusive, private benefit to the defendants that no other similarly situated litigant may enjoy, in violation of the public emoluments clause. We agree with the state and, accordingly, conclude that S.A. 17-4 is an unconstitutional public emolument.

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

639

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State v. Avoletta

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We first address the applicable standard of review and governing legal principles. “It is well established that the state cannot be sued without its consent. . . . This doctrine of sovereign immunity implicates subject matter jurisdiction and is therefore a basis for granting a motion to dismiss. . . . A determination regarding a trial court’s subject matter jurisdiction is a question of law. When . . . the trial court draws conclusions of law, our review is plenary and we must decide whether its conclusions are legally and logically correct and find support in the facts that appear in the record.” (Citations omitted; internal quotation marks omitted.) *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 252. “Moreover, [t]his court has long held that every presumption will be made in favor of the constitutionality of a legislative act. . . . Parties challenging the constitutionality of an act in a proceeding seeking declaratory relief have the [heavy] burden of showing its invalidity beyond a reasonable doubt.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, 257. “Although [w]e have taken a broad view of the legislative goals that may constitute a public purpose . . . [b]ecause the elements of a public purpose vary as much as the circumstance in which the term is appropriate, each case must be determined on its own peculiar facts.” (Citation omitted; internal quotation marks omitted.) *Chotkowski v. State*, 240 Conn. 246, 259–60, 690 A.2d 368 (1997).

It is well established that, “[t]o prevail under article first, § 1, of our constitution, the state must demonstrate that the sole objective of the General Assembly is to grant personal gain or advantage to an individual. . . . If, however, an enactment serves a legitimate *public* purpose, then it will withstand a challenge under article first, § 1. . . . The scope of our review as to whether an enactment serves a public purpose is limited. [W]hat constitutes a public purpose is primarily a question

640

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

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State v. Avoletta

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for the legislature, and its determination should not be reversed by the court unless it is manifestly and palpably incorrect. . . . In determining whether a special act serves a public purpose, a court must uphold it unless there is no reasonable ground [on] which it can be sustained. . . . Thus, if there [is] the least possibility that [the special act] will be promotive in any degree of the public welfare . . . we are bound to uphold it against a constitutional challenge predicated on article first, § 1 [of the state constitution]. . . .

“In this regard, although a special act passed under § 4-148 (b) will undoubtedly confer a direct benefit [on] a particular claimant, we have found a public purpose if it remedies an injustice done to that individual *for which the state itself bears responsibility*. . . . In such circumstances, the benefit conferred [on] a private party by the legislature may be viewed as incidental to the overarching public interest that is served in remedying an injustice caused by the state. . . .

“By contrast, we have consistently held that legislation seeking to remedy a procedural default for which the state is not responsible does not serve a public purpose and, accordingly, runs afoul of article first, § 1, of the state constitution. . . . Thus, legislation cannot survive a constitutional challenge under article first, § 1, if it excuses a party’s failure to comply with a statutory notice requirement simply because the non-compliance precludes consideration of the merits of the party’s claim. . . . Similarly, [when] a special act has allowed a person named therein to bring a suit based [on] a statutory cause of action that would otherwise be barred for failure to comply with a time limit specified in the statute, we have ordinarily been unable to discern any public purpose sufficient to sustain the enactment.” (Citations omitted; emphasis in original; internal quotation marks omitted.) *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 257–59.



347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

641

State v. Avoletta

Our conclusion in the present case is guided by our decisions in *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 713, and *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 259, in which we concluded that the respective special acts at issue were unconstitutional public emoluments because they served no public purpose.<sup>7</sup> In *Kinney*, this court held that No. 94-13, § 1, of the 1994 Special Acts (S.A. 94-13),<sup>8</sup> which authorized

<sup>7</sup> We are unpersuaded by the defendants' repeated assertions that the Appellate Court "ignored" and "disregard[ed]" relevant legal precedent in concluding that S.A. 17-4 is an unconstitutional public emolument. Although the defendants contend that the Appellate Court "failed" to analyze or apply numerous "highly relevant and controlling" decisions of this court, the Appellate Court properly analyzed and applied *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 700, and *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 245, which encompass the current state of our public emolument jurisprudence, to the present case. Many of the decisions cited by the defendants are not relevant because they do not address the constitutionality of public emoluments enacted to cure a litigant's procedural default. See, e.g., *Honulik v. Greenwich*, 293 Conn. 641, 643-46, 980 A.2d 845 (2009) (whether participation in appeal by Connecticut Supreme Court justice who had reached constitutionally mandated age of retirement affected court's subject matter jurisdiction); *Serrano v. Aetna Ins. Co.*, 233 Conn. 437, 447, 664 A.2d 279 (1995) (whether legislative enactment ran afoul of contract clause of United States constitution); *State v. Ross*, 230 Conn. 183, 187, 646 A.2d 1318 (1994) (consolidated criminal appeals from imposition of death penalty on defendant), cert. denied, 513 U.S. 1165, 115 S. Ct. 1133, 130 L. Ed. 2d 1095 (1995); *State v. Indrisano*, 228 Conn. 795, 796-97, 640 A.2d 986 (1994) (facial vagueness claim under fourteenth amendment to United States constitution); *State v. Floyd*, 217 Conn. 73, 74-75, 89-90, 584 A.2d 1157 (1991) (fourth amendment and fourteenth amendment due process clause claims and constitutional avoidance); *Adams v. Rubinow*, 157 Conn. 150, 169-80, 251 A.2d 49 (1968) (numerous constitutional challenges but not under public emoluments clause); *Snyder v. Newtown*, 147 Conn. 374, 381, 161 A.2d 770 (1960) (discrimination claim for use of public funds for private purpose), appeal dismissed, 365 U.S. 299, 81 S. Ct. 692, 5 L. Ed. 2d 688 (1961).

<sup>8</sup> No. 94-13, § 1, of the 1994 Special Acts provides in relevant part: "(a) Notwithstanding the failure to file a proper notice of a claim against the state with the clerk of the office of the claims commissioner . . . within the time limitations specified by subsection (a) of section 4-148 of the general statutes . . . Joan A. Kinney is authorized pursuant to the provisions of subsection (b) of said section 4-148 to present her claim against the state to the claims commissioner . . . .

"(b) The general assembly finds . . . [that] it would be just and equitable to authorize Joan A. Kinney to present her claim against the state to the claims commissioner, that there are compelling equitable circumstances to

642

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

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State v. Avoletta

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the plaintiff, Joan A. Kinney, as administratrix of the estate of her husband, who was a Superior Court judge, to present her claim against the state to the commissioner despite her untimely filing, conferred an unconstitutional public emolument on Kinney. See *Kinney v. State*, supra, 716; see also *id.*, 704–706. In so concluding, the court rejected Kinney’s argument that S.A. 94-13 served a public purpose “by encouraging a work ethic of a judge, indeed, any employee of the [s]tate of Connecticut.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, 708. Rather, we concluded that, “although well intentioned, S.A. 94-13 [benefited] no member of the public other than [Kinney] and remedie[d] a procedural default arising from [Kinney’s] failure to [timely] file a claim with the . . . commissioner . . . for which the state itself bore no responsibility.” (Citation omitted; internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, 708–709.

Subsequently, in *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 245, this court held that No. 05-4, § 1, of the 2005 Special Acts (S.A. 05-4),<sup>9</sup> which specifically authorized “the plaintiff, and only the plaintiff,” to present his claim against the state to the commissioner despite his untimely filing, was an unconstitutional public emolument because it served no public purpose. *Id.*, 259. The court in *Kelly* disagreed with the plaintiff’s argument that, by lengthening the

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support such authorization and that such authorization would serve a public purpose by not penalizing a person who exhausts his or her administrative and judicial remedies before filing a claim against the state with the claims commissioner. . . .”

<sup>9</sup> No. 05-4, § 1, of the 2005 Special Acts provides in relevant part: “(a) Notwithstanding the failure to file a proper notice of a claim against the state with the clerk of the Office of the Claims Commissioner . . . within the time limitations specified by subsection (a) of section 4-148 of the general statutes . . . Robert J. Kelly is authorized . . . to present his claim against the state to the Claims Commissioner. The General Assembly deems such authorization to be just and equitable and finds that such authorization is supported by compelling equitable circumstances and would serve a public purpose. . . .”

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

643

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State v. Avoletta

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limitation period within which a medical malpractice claim [could] be filed against a state hospital, S.A. 05-4 served the public purpose of remedying the injustice created by the establishment of different statutes of limitations for state and private hospitals. *Id.*, 256. The court’s review of the legislative history of S.A. 05-4 demonstrated that it was enacted to benefit only the plaintiff. *Id.*, 259. Relying on the then recent decision in *Kinney*, the court recognized that “a mere declaration within a particular special act that it serves the public interest is not enough” to overcome the emolument analysis; *id.*, 259–60; and that “[t]he fact that the legislature stated that the special act served a public purpose does not change the pertinent inquiry for the court.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.*, 260.

Guided by *Kinney* and *Kelly*, we now consider whether S.A. 17-4 serves a legitimate public purpose, which would save it from unconstitutionality as a public emolument. We also are mindful that a “legislative enactment need not contain a specific statement of the public purpose sought to be achieved by it. . . . Legislative findings, however, purporting to establish the existence of a public purpose should be considered when the text of the act itself incorporates these findings . . . .” (Citation omitted; internal quotation marks omitted.) *Wilson v. Connecticut Product Development Corp.*, 167 Conn. 111, 116 n.2, 355 A.2d 72 (1974). In enacting S.A. 17-4, the General Assembly expressly found that “there is a public purpose served by encouraging accountable state government through the full adjudication of cases involving persons who claim to have been injured by the conduct of state actors.” S.A. 17-4, § 1. To the extent that S.A. 17-4, § 1, is ambiguous with respect to the meaning of the phrase “encouraging accountable state government,” or as to whether it benefits only the defendants, we are guided by our previous decisions considering the legislative history of special

644

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

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State v. Avoletta

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acts for purposes of the emolument analysis, as well as General Statutes § 1-2z. See, e.g., *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 259; *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 713–14 and n.10.

The defendants contend that the General Assembly “had multiple, valid public policy purposes” for adopting S.A. 17-4, such as furnishing them compensation for their injuries, ensuring a safe and healthy school setting for all children, holding government officials accountable, and providing a full adjudication on the merits for similar claims. Indeed, the defendants contended that S.A. 17-4 was consistent with these public policy goals in their advocacy to the attorney general and before the Judiciary Committee of the General Assembly. Senator John A. Kissel acknowledged that the information that the defendants’ counsel had “put on the public record [would] help [the legislature] craft something that hopefully [could] withstand the emolument analysis . . . ” Conn. Joint Standing Committee Hearings, Judiciary, Pt. 2, 2017 Sess., p. 1041. Representative Bruce V. Morris acknowledged that “this is an issue—maybe not just in [Torrington] and [other districts] where we do have kids at our moldy buildings or whatever, and districts do not act soon enough . . . and something needs to be done to remedy that.” *Id.*, p. 1055; cf. *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 259 (legislative history of S.A. 05-4 revealed that those in favor of passing act believed that “ ‘what [they were] doing . . . [was] changing the rules for one individual in a specific act’ ”); *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 713 (legislative history of S.A. 94-13 failed to support plaintiff’s contention that that special act “was based on the public purpose of encouraging a work ethic by sending a message ‘to all government employees . . . to work above and beyond the norm’ ”).

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

645

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State v. Avoletta

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Despite these remarks, the “legislature cannot by mere fiat or finding, make public a truly private purpose . . . . Its findings and statements about what is or is not public cannot be binding [on] the court.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 712. Although the language of the special act in *Kinney* expressly declared that the authorization “would serve a public purpose by not penalizing a person who exhausts his or her administrative and judicial remedies before filing a claim against the state”; S.A. 94-13, § 1; see footnote 8 of this opinion; we nevertheless were “hard pressed to conclude that there [was] a legitimate public purpose when the beneficial effect of the special act applie[d] to *no member of the public other than [Kinney]* for whom it grant[ed] a personal privilege.” (Emphasis added.) *Kinney v. State*, supra, 714. Likewise, S.A. 17-4 neither excuses other similarly situated persons—such as other Torrington public school students or students in other school districts—from complying with the statutory limitations nor provides circumstances under which such persons may be excused. See *id.*

In the present case, S.A. 17-4 seeks only to remedy the defendants’ procedural default, namely, their untimely filing with the commissioner of their claim against the state. See footnote 1 of this opinion. Entitled “An Act Concerning the Claims Against the State of Joanne Avoletta, Peter Avoletta and Matthew Avoletta,” S.A. 17-4 authorizes the defendants, and only the defendants, “who initially filed notice of their claims against the state . . . on May 2, 2007, for injuries that are alleged to have accrued on September 15, 2006,” to present their respective claims for money damages against the state to the commissioner. S.A. 17-4, § 1; see *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 259. Although the defendants claim that they are seeking justice not only for themselves, but also for

646

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

---

State v. Avoletta

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other similarly situated school children, they seek reimbursement from the state for the tuition costs of their private education, no other children were named in the underlying action against the state, and no injunctive relief was sought with respect to the conditions of the public school buildings. It is well established that, when “a special act has allowed a person named therein to bring a suit based [on] a statutory cause of action that would otherwise be barred for failure to comply with a time limit specified in the statute, we have ordinarily been unable to discern any public purpose sufficient to sustain the enactment.” (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 713; see *Merly v. State*, 211 Conn. 199, 213, 558 A.2d 977 (1989).

Furthermore, “we consistently have determined that legislation seeking to remedy a procedural default for which the state is not responsible does not serve a public purpose and, accordingly, runs afoul of article first, § 1, of the state constitution.” *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 715–16 n.11. Although the defendants argue that the state is ultimately responsible for the health complications caused by the poor school building conditions, they do *not* contend in their brief that the state is responsible for the procedural lapses attendant to the untimely filing of their claim as a factual matter.<sup>10</sup> See *Kelly v. University of Connecticut Health*

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<sup>10</sup> The trial court rejected the defendants’ argument, which they renewed at oral argument before this court, that the state was responsible for their untimely filing because they detrimentally relied on promises made by the attorney general relating to the conditions of the school and appropriate corrective action, stating that “the attorney general’s statements . . . [did] not justify the defendants’ decision to wait years to file a claim to recover damages . . . . Rather, these statements should have indicated to the defendants that they may have had a cause of action, at that time, for negligence.” (Footnote omitted.) To the extent that the defendants challenge the correctness of this finding, we consider this claim to be inadequately briefed for failure to provide any meaningful analysis, and we therefore decline to address it. See, e.g., *Burton v. Dept. of Environmental Protection*, 337 Conn. 781, 804–805, 256 A.3d 655 (2021) (courts do not reach inadequately briefed claims); see also, e.g., *id.*, 797 n.12 (courts do not reach claims raised for first time at oral argument).

347 Conn. 629

AUGUST, 2023

647

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State v. Avoletta

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*Center*, supra, 290 Conn. 258–59 (“legislation cannot survive a constitutional challenge . . . if it excuses a party’s failure to comply with a statutory notice requirement simply because the noncompliance precludes consideration of the merits of the party’s claim” (internal quotation marks omitted)). As in *Kinney*, “nothing in the record of the present case distinguishes its facts from the ordinary case in which a litigant fails to take timely action. Rather than filing a claim with the . . . commissioner as [their] first course of action or concurrently with [their] pursuit of administrative and judicial remedies, the [defendants] chose to pursue [their] claim against the state only through administrative and judicial proceedings. [S.A. 17-4] essentially would eliminate for [them] alone the consequences of [their] litigation choice and would provide no relief to anyone else who either made a similar erroneous litigation choice or who mistakenly believed that exhaustion of administrative and judicial remedies was required before filing a claim with the . . . commissioner.” *Kinney v. State*, supra, 715; cf. *Merly v. State*, supra, 211 Conn. 213–15 (special act did not serve public purpose because it benefited only plaintiff, and he could not explain how *state employee caused his untimely claim*). But see *Chotkowski v. State*, supra, 240 Conn. 261 (special act was not exclusive public emolument because legislature expressly found that plaintiff had failed to file timely claim as result of being *misinformed and misled by state official*); *Sanger v. Bridgeport*, 124 Conn. 183, 185, 198 A. 746 (1938) (plaintiff alleged that statutorily defective notice “was prepared by an assistant to the city clerk . . . [on] whom the plaintiff relied for its preparation and to whom was given all essential facts [that] were necessary for” sufficient notice (emphasis added)).

Accordingly, because “we see no basis for sustaining the validity of a special act creating a privilege for a

648

AUGUST, 2023

347 Conn. 629

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*State v. Avoletta*

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particular individual”; *Kinney v. State*, supra, 285 Conn. 713; and because it is clear that S.A. 17-4 confers an exclusive public emolument on the defendants for which the state bears no responsibility, we conclude that the Appellate Court correctly determined that S.A. 17-4 violates article first, §1, of the state constitution insofar as it serves no public purpose. The Appellate Court, therefore, properly upheld the trial court’s granting of summary judgment in favor of the state.

The judgment of the Appellate Court is affirmed.

In this opinion the other justices concurred.

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