

HOUSE No.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Lori Ehrlich

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the passage of the accompanying bill:

An Act to Establish a Claimant’s Trust Act.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:
Lori Ehrlich	8th Essex
James B. Eldridge	

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand and Nine

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A CLAIMANT'S TRUST ACT.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 The General Laws are hereby amended by inserting after chapter 203D the following chapter:-

2 Chapter 203E

3 SECTION 1. Citation and Purpose

4 This section shall be known as and may be cited as the Massachusetts Claimant's Trust Act. It is the
5 express purpose of this chapter to allow for the use of the "Claimant's Trust" to encourage the early
6 aggregation of Claims arising out of the same transaction, resolution of Claims on a pre-suit basis or
7 through alternative dispute resolution, the efficient litigation and administration of such aggregated
8 Claims, and the sound financial and tax planning and fiscal management of settlement funds for the
9 Beneficiary's benefit.

10 SECTION 2. Definitions

11 For the purposes of this chapter the following words shall have the following meanings unless the
12 context otherwise requires:

13 "Administrative Trustee", an institution identified in the Trust Instrument who has executed the Trust
14 Instrument and is approved by the Court to act as the "Administrative Trustee" to manage, invest, and
15 report on the Trust's assets and income.

16 "Benefits Plan", a plan for the long term management, investment, and distribution of the Trust Corpus
17 approved by the Court.

18 "Beneficiary", a person identified as a "Beneficiary" in the Trust Instrument and who is a Claimant, or in
19 the case of multiple "Beneficiaries" are Claimants whose claims arise out of the same transaction; and

20 who has or have executed the Trust Instrument, complied with its terms, and assigned to the Trust any
21 claims they may have arising out of the allegedly wrongful conduct. The Beneficiary is entitled to and
22 has an interest in the Trust Corpus.

23 “Claim”, a claim or potential claim for damages for personal injury or property damage or the claim of
24 an estate of a person or persons that has or may have a claim for wrongful death, arising out of the
25 allegedly wrongful conduct of another or others.

26 “Claimant”, a person who has a claim or in the case of multiple Claimants, persons whose claims arise
27 out of the same transaction.

28 “Claimant’s Trust”, a Trust approved by the Court under this chapter as having met the statutory
29 requirements for such a Trust.

30 “Organizer”, a person or persons who is or are independent from any Transferor or Potentially Liable
31 Party and who has or have executed the Trust Instrument as an “Organizer” and who is or are seeking
32 Court approval of the “Claimant’s Trust”.

33 “Potentially Liable Party”, a person or persons who is or are liable or potentially liable to the Beneficiary
34 for damages for personal injury or property damage resulting from the party’s allegedly wrongful
35 conduct and who is or are identified in the Trust Instrument as a “Potentially Liable Party”.

36 “Transferor”, a Potentially Liable Party who has made a payment to the Trust in exchange for a release
37 of liability.

38 “Trust”, the use of the word Trust in this Act refers to a “Claimant’s Trust” unless the context plainly
39 means otherwise.

40 “Trustee”, a person or persons who is or are independent from any Transferor or Potentially Liable
41 Party, any Organizer, or Beneficiary and who has or have executed the Trust Instrument as a “Trustee”
42 and who is or are approved by the Court to act as the “Trustee” to perform the duties and undertake the
43 responsibilities of a Trustee under the Trust Instrument and the requirements of this chapter.

44 “Trust Corpus”, the assets including any real or personal property; account; money; claim or interest
45 assigned, granted, or belonging to the Trust; and any payments or thing of value made to the Trust by
46 the Transferor in settlement of any claims; and the income arising therefrom, to which the Beneficiary is
47 entitled and has an interest.

48 “Trust Instrument”, the written document containing the terms of the Trust submitted by the Organizer
49 to be approved by the Court.

50 SECTION 3. Probate Court Jurisdiction And Venue

51 The Probate Court in the County in which any Beneficiary resides or in the event that no Beneficiary is a
52 Massachusetts resident then in the County in which a Potentially Liable Party resides or has a place of
53 business and if not applicable then any County in which the intended Trustee or Administrative Trustee

54 resides, shall have exclusive jurisdiction to receive an application for approval, approve, supervise, and
55 hear and determine any issue under this chapter relating to the Claimant's Trust. In the event that more
56 than one petition for approval of a Trust Instrument is filed by an Organizer on behalf of a Claimant or
57 Claimants whose claims arise out of the same transaction, the Chief Judge of the Probate Court shall
58 determine the County which shall have exclusive jurisdiction in the matter.

59 SECTION 4. Petition For Approval

60 The Organizer may petition the Probate Court for approval of a Trust Instrument by the filing of
61 a Complaint and motion. The Complaint shall be accompanied by the Trust Instrument executed by the
62 Organizer, intended Trustee, at least one intended Beneficiary, and, if sought, the intended
63 Administrative Trustee. The application shall be heard and ruled on and the Trust approved and
64 supervised on an expedited basis and in a manner intended to carry out the purposes of this chapter.

65

66 SECTION 5. Trust Instrument Requirements

67 The Trust Instrument shall be in writing and contain the following:

- 68 a. The name of the Trust;
- 69 b. The name, address, and signature of the Organizer;
- 70 c. A description of the transaction giving rise to the Claim which is the subject matter of
71 the Trust;
- 72 d. The name, address, and signature of the Beneficiary or Beneficiaries identified on an
73 attached "Beneficiary Schedule". In the event the Organizer intends to include as a
74 Beneficiary an additional Claimant or Claimants not named on the Schedule whose
75 claims arise out of the same transaction then the Instrument shall so indicate;
- 76 e. The Assignment of the Beneficiary's Claim(s) to the Trust;
- 77 f. The name, address, and signature of the Trustee;
- 78 g. If sought, the name, address, and signature of the Administrative Trustee

79 SECTION 6. Trust Instrument Optional Provisions

80 The Trust Instrument may provide the following:

- 81 a. The Trust may be administered and the funds managed, invested, and distributed in
82 accordance with a Benefits Plan approved by the Court for the benefit of the Beneficiary
83 during their lifetime or any part thereof and, if provided in the Instrument, the lifetime
84 or any part thereof of their offspring;

85 b. The Trust Instrument may allow, with the Court’s approval, for a formal method
86 whereby the Beneficiary may indicate, on an advisory basis, their views to the Trustee
87 regarding certain specified major decisions affecting the Trust prior to the decision
88 taking place while at the same time reserving for the Trustee ultimate decision making
89 authority under the supervision of the Court.

90 SECTION 7. Trustee’s Powers

91 Unless the Trust Instrument, with the approval of the Court, provides for more limited powers,
92 the Trustee shall have all of the powers normally attendant to such a position except the powers to
93 manage, invest, and report on the Trust’s assets and income that are the responsibility of the
94 Administrative Trustee, if an Administrative Trustee is sought to be appointed or the Court determines is
95 required. The Trustee shall, in addition, have the powers described in Section 8 regarding the
96 settlement of claims with Potentially Liable Parties and the issuance of appropriate release of claims to
97 Transferors.

98 SECTION 8. Approval Of Settlement And Release Of Claims

99 The Trustee, with the approval of the Court, shall have the power to enter into and execute, in
100 the name of the Trust and on behalf of the Beneficiary or Beneficiaries, a settlement agreement with
101 any Potentially Liable Party and to execute and provide to any Transferor any appropriate release of
102 Claims. The Court in approving any proposed settlement and issuance of release of Claims shall have
103 the authority and shall exercise its power to:

- 104 a. Determine the settlement and release is in the best interests of the Beneficiary or
105 Beneficiaries including any minor Beneficiary. In the case of a Beneficiary who is a
106 minor, such finding shall be accorded the same respect as a finding made by a court
107 approving a settlement respecting a minor under GL c. 231 §140C 1/2;
- 108 b. Determine the settlement and release was entered into by the parties in good faith as
109 that term is used GL c. 231B §4 regarding a release or covenant not to sue one or more
110 tortfeasors.

111 SECTION 9. Administrative Trustee’s Powers

112 The Administrative Trustee in accordance with the terms of the Trust Instrument as approved by
113 the Court shall have all of the powers and duties necessary to manage, invest, and report on the Trust’s
114 assets and income that are attendant to such responsibility as set forth in the Massachusetts Prudent
115 Investor Act G.L. c. 203C including making use, where appropriate, of insurance products and
116 investment vehicles such as are referred to in GL c. 231C regarding Structured Settlement Contracts. In
117 addition, the Administrative Trustee shall be empowered to take all such actions as are necessary to
118 ensure that the Trust is treated as a Designated or Qualified Settlement Fund under the Internal
119 Revenue Code 26 USC §468B and the regulations promulgated pursuant thereto and codified at 26 CFR
120 Section 1.468B-1. It is intended that the Administrative Trustee manage and invest the Trust Corpus to

121 minimize tax consequences to the Trust and Beneficiary. In this regard, the Court shall allow the Trust
122 Instrument to be amended from time to time as is necessary to take into account changes in Federal or
123 State tax laws and regulations that bear on such tax consequences.

124 SECTION 10. Maintenance of Action In Name Of Trust

125 The Trustee may maintain an action in the name of the Trust on behalf of the Beneficiary or
126 Beneficiaries regarding the Claim in any of the Courts of the Commonwealth that the Beneficiary could
127 have maintained such an action.

128 SECTION 11. Distribution And Management Of Funds And Allocation Among Multiple Beneficiaries

129 Any distribution of the Trust Corpus among multiple Beneficiaries whether in accordance with
130 the terms of the Trust, a Benefits Plan, or otherwise shall be made in accordance with principles of
131 fairness and equity. Unless the Trust Instrument, with the approval of the Court, otherwise provides
132 pursuant to a Court approved Benefits Plan, the Trust shall, in accordance with a distribution plan
133 approved by the Court, distribute the Trust Corpus upon the payment into the Trust by a Transferor.

134 SECTION 12. Use of Mediator or Court Appointed Master

135 In the event any dispute arises among or between any of the parties to the Trust Instrument,
136 the Trustee shall have the discretion to engage the services of a recognized mediator or mediation
137 service to aid in the resolution of such dispute. In the event such mediation services are not successful
138 in resolving the dispute, the Trustee may request the Court appoint a Special Master to make findings
139 and propose resolutions to the Trustee for submission to the Court. In any event, the Court shall have
140 ultimate authority to resolve any outstanding dispute regarding the administration of the Trust.