WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §56-3-34

§56-3-34. Actions by or against nonresident bail bond enforcement agents or bail bondsmen; appointment of Secretary of State as agents; service of process.

(a) Every nonresident bail bond enforcer or bail bondsman, for the privilege of entering this state to act in the capacity of a bail bond enforcer, either personally or through an agent, appoints the Secretary of State, or his or her successor in office, to be his or her agent or attorney-in-fact upon whom may be served all lawful process in any action or proceeding against him or her in any court of record in this state for any act occurring within this state resulting in injury arising out of any breach of the applicable standard of care with respect to any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure, or with respect to the property of any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure; or for enforcement of any civil penalty for breach of a duty imposed by this code with respect to bail bondsmen employing or contracting with bail bond enforcers: Provided, That in the event process against a nonresident defendant cannot be effected through the Secretary of State, as provided by this section, for the purpose only of service of process, the nonresident bail bond enforcer or bondsman shall be deemed to have appointed as his or her agent or attorney-in-fact any insurance company which has a contract of liability insurance for his or her activities.

(b) For purposes of service of process as provided in this section, every insurance company shall be deemed the agent or attorney-in-fact of every nonresident bail bond enforcer or bondsman insured by the company if the insured nonresident bail bond enforcer or bondsman is involved in any bail bond enforcement activity occurring within this state resulting in injury arising out of any breach of the applicable standard of care with respect to any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure, or with respect to the property of any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure and service of process cannot be effected upon the nonresident through the office of the Secretary of State. Upon receipt of process as hereinafter provided, the insurance company may, within thirty days, file an answer or other pleading or take any action allowed by law on behalf of the defendant.

(c) A nonresident bail bond enforcer or bail bondsman entering this state, either personally or through an agent, is deemed to acknowledge the appointment of the Secretary of State, or, as the case may be, his or her liability insurance company, as his or her agent or attorney-in-fact, or the agent or attorney-in-fact of his or her administrator, administratrix, executor or executrix in the event the nonresident dies, and furthermore is deemed to agree that any process against him or her or against his or her administrator, administratrix, executor or executrix, which is served in the manner hereinafter provided, shall be of the same legal force and validity as though said nonresident or his or her administrator,

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administratrix, executor or executrix were personally served with a summons and complaint within this state.

Any action or proceeding may be instituted, continued or maintained on behalf of or against the administrator, administratrix, executor or executrix of any nonresident who dies subsequent to bail bond enforcement activity in this state by the nonresident or his or her duly authorized agent.

(d) At the time of filing a complaint against a nonresident bail bond enforcer or bondsman who has been involved in bail bond enforcement activity in the State of West Virginia and before a summons is issued thereon, the plaintiff, or someone for him or her, shall execute a bond in the sum of $100 before the clerk of the court in which the action is filed, with surety to be approved by said clerk, conditioned that on failure of the plaintiff to prevail in the action he or she will reimburse the defendant, or cause the defendant to be reimbursed, the necessary expense incurred in the defense of the action in this state. Upon the issue of a summons the clerk will certify thereon that the bond has been given and approved.

(e) Service of process upon a nonresident defendant shall be made by leaving the original and two copies of both the summons and complaint, together with the bond certificate of the clerk, and the fee required by section two, article one, chapter fifty-nine of this code with the Secretary of State, or in his or her office, and said service shall be sufficient upon the nonresident defendant or, if a natural person, his or her administrator, administratrix, executor or executrix: Provided, That notice of service and a copy of the summons and complaint shall be sent by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, by the Secretary of State to the nonresident defendant. The return receipt signed by the defendant or his or her duly authorized agent shall be attached to the original summons and complaint and filed in the office of the clerk of the court from which the process is issued. In the event the registered or certified mail sent by the Secretary of State is refused or unclaimed by the addressee or if the addressee has moved without any forwarding address, the registered or certified mail returned to the Secretary of State, or to his or her office, showing thereon the stamp of the post-office department that delivery has been refused or not claimed or that the addressee has moved without any forwarding address, the Secretary of State shall create a preservation duplicate from which a reproduction of the stored record may be retrieved which truly and accurately depicts the image of the original record. The Secretary of State may destroy or otherwise dispose of the original returned or undeliverable mail. Written notice of the action by the Secretary of State must then be provided by certified mail, return receipt requested, facsimile, or by electronic mail, to the clerk's office of the court from which the process, notice or demand was issued. The court may order such continuances as may be reasonable to afford the defendant opportunity to defend the action.

(f) The fee remitted to the Secretary of State at the time of service, shall be taxed in the costs of the proceeding and the Secretary of State shall pay into the State Treasury all funds so coming into his or her hands from the service. The Secretary of State shall keep a record in his or her office of all service of process and the day and hour of service thereof.

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(g) In the event service of process upon a nonresident defendant cannot be effected through the Secretary of State as provided by this section, service may be made upon the defendant's insurance company. The plaintiff must file with the clerk of the circuit court an affidavit alleging that the defendant is not a resident of this state; that process directed to the Secretary of State was sent by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested; that the registered or certified mail was returned to the office of the Secretary of State showing the stamp of the post-office department that delivery was refused or that the notice was unclaimed or that the defendant addressee moved without any forwarding address; and that the Secretary of State has complied with the provisions of subsection (e) of this section. Upon receipt of process the insurance company may, within thirty days, file an answer or other pleading and take any action allowed by law in the name of the defendant.

(h) The following words and phrases, when used in this article, shall, for the purpose of this article and unless a different intent on the part of the Legislature is apparent from the context, have the following meanings:

(1) "Agent" or "duly authorized agent" means and includes, among others, a bail bond enforcer who, on behalf of a bail bondsman, is involved in any bail bond enforcement activity occurring within this state resulting in injury arising out of any breach of the applicable standard of care with respect to any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure, or with respect to the property of any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure;

(2) "Nonresident" means any person who is not a resident of this state or a resident who has moved from the state subsequent to bail bond enforcement activity within this state, and among others includes a nonresident firm, partnership, corporation or voluntary association, or a firm, partnership, corporation or voluntary association that has moved from the state subsequent to bail bond enforcement activity;

(3) "Nonresident defendant or defendants" means a nonresident bail bond enforcer or bondsman who, either personally or through his or her agent, is involved in any bail bond enforcement activity occurring within this state resulting in injury arising out of any breach of the applicable standard of care with respect to any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure, or with respect to the property of any person other than a defendant whose custody or appearance the bail bond enforcer secures or attempts to secure, which has given rise to a civil action filed in any court in this state;

(4) "Insurance company" means any firm, corporation, partnership or other organization which issues liability insurance.

(i) The provision for service of process herein is cumulative and nothing herein contained shall be construed as a bar to the plaintiff in any action from having process in the action served in any other mode and manner provided by law.

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(j) This section is not retroactive and its provisions are not available to a plaintiff in a cause of action arising out of acts occurring prior to the effective date of this section.

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