

JUDGE LYDON'S PREFERENCES & REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBMITTING PROPOSED JURY INSTRUCTIONS

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO COUNSEL

A copy of Judge Lydon's standard ("boilerplate") jury instructions follow. These instructions deal with frequently recurring issues that come up in most cases (burden of proof, circumstantial evidence, duty to deliberate, etc.).

Generally speaking, counsel should not submit proposed jury instructions on those issues already covered in the boilerplate instructions. Nonetheless, if in good faith you believe that these standard instructions could be improved or need to be tailored for the trial in your case, you may propose alternative instructions.

Regarding the substantive part of the jury charge (i.e., elements of the causes of action, defenses, etc.) not covered in the boilerplate instructions, please submit the proposed instructions with the pretrial brief in the following format:

Each instruction must identify the submitting party and be numbered. Only one idea or concept should be expressed on each numbered page. The procedure of settling the jury charge during the charge conference is greatly simplified if all counsel and the court work from the same stack of numbered instruction proposals, with each proposal being contained on a separate sheet. Do not submit requests with blanks for insertion of numbers.

Each requested instruction should contain a citation to authority. In accordance with the Local Civil Rules, if unpublished decisions not readily available online or decisions published in a specialized reporting service are relied upon for support, copies of these decisions must be attached to the jury charge request.

Frequently, attorneys submit numerous variations of the same legal principle. While in some cases it may be appropriate and desirable to restate a doctrine of law using slightly different language to be sure the jury understands it, it is generally not helpful (and may be confusing) to repeat the same idea to the jury five or six times in different ways. Therefore, do not submit repetitive requests for the same legal concept. If you submit good faith jury instruction requests—tailored to the case, without undue repetition—the court will give conscientious consideration to your request.

Principal trial attorneys sometimes delegate the task of jury instruction preparation to law clerks, new associates, or other attorneys who are not actively involved in the case. This sometimes results in a flood of jury instruction requests, some of which have no direct relationship to the issues. In some cases, after the court has laboriously tried to determine how the requested charge fits into the case, counsel will concede that the request was submitted in error.

JUDGE LYDON'S PREFERENCES & REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBMITTING PROPOSED JURY INSTRUCTIONS

Some attorneys incorrectly assume that the only way to charge a jury is to quote directly from reported appellate decisions. Appellate judges do not write opinions with jury instructions in mind. Sometimes quotes from appellate opinions need to be reworded to make them more understandable to a jury. Restatements, hornbooks, treatises and similar sources may also be used. You may quote and cite authorities such as these in your jury charge requests.

These boilerplate instructions should not be construed as any attempt by the court to discourage counsel from submitting jury charge requests. Frequently, these submissions are helpful to the court and, in many cases, are adopted and incorporated into the final charge. By submitting separate legal principles on separately numbered pages, without undue repetition, attorneys can be of great assistance to the court in attempting to fashion a thorough and understandable jury charge.

JUDGE LYDON'S
BOILERPLATE JURY INSTRUCTIONS

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

V.) C/A No.: _____
)
) COURT'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE JURY
)
_____)

DUTIES OF JURY TO FIND FACTS & FOLLOW LAW

Members of the jury, now that you have heard all the evidence and the arguments of the lawyers, it is my duty to instruct you on the law which applies to this case. These instructions will be in three parts: first, the instructions on general rules that define and control the jury's duties; second, the instructions that state the rules of law you must apply, i.e., what the plaintiff must prove to make the case; and third, some rules for your deliberations. It is your duty to find the facts from all the evidence in the case. To those facts you must apply the law as I give it to you. You are bound to accept the rules of law as I give them to you whether you agree with them or not. And you must not be influenced by any personal likes or dislikes, opinions, prejudices or sympathy. That means that you must decide the case solely on the evidence before you and according to the law. You will recall that you took an oath promising to do so at the beginning of the case. In following my instructions, you must follow all of them and not single out some and ignore others; they are all equally important. And you must not read into these instructions or into anything I may have said or done any suggestion as to what verdict you should return—that is a matter entirely for you to decide.

BURDEN OF PROOF

At the beginning of the case, I told you that the plaintiff has the burden of proving the case by a preponderance of the evidence. That means that the plaintiff has to produce evidence which, considered in the light of all the facts, leads you to believe that what the plaintiff claims is more likely true than not. To put it differently, if you were to put plaintiff's and defendant's evidence on opposite sides of the scales, the plaintiff would have to make the scales tip slightly on that side. If the plaintiff fails to meet this burden, the verdict must be for the defendant. Those of you who have sat on criminal cases will have heard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt. That is a stricter standard, i.e., it requires more proof than a preponderance of evidence. The reasonable doubt standard does not apply to a civil case and you should therefore put it out of your mind.

JUDGE LYDON'S BOILERPLATE JURY INSTRUCTIONS

EVIDENCE

The evidence from which you are to decide what the facts are consists of: (1) the sworn testimony of witnesses, both on direct and cross-examination, regardless of who called the witness; (2) the exhibits which have been received into evidence; and (3) any facts to which all the lawyers have agreed to stipulate.

WHAT IS NOT EVIDENCE

In reaching your verdict, you may consider only the testimony and exhibits received into evidence. Certain things are not evidence and you may not consider them in deciding what the facts are. I will list them for you: (1) Arguments and statements by lawyers are not evidence. The lawyers are not witnesses. What they have said in their opening statements, closing arguments and at other times is intended to help you interpret the evidence, but it is not evidence. If the facts as you remember them differ from the way the lawyers have stated them, your memory of them controls. (2) Questions and objections by lawyers are not evidence. Attorneys have a duty to their clients to object when they believe a question is improper under the rules of evidence. You should not be influenced by the objection or by the court's ruling on it. (3) Testimony that has been excluded or stricken, or that you have been instructed to disregard, is not evidence and must not be considered. In addition, if testimony or exhibits have been received only for a limited purpose, you must follow the limiting instructions I have given. (4) Anything you may have seen or heard when the court was not in session is not evidence. You are to decide the case solely on the evidence received at the trial.

DIRECT & CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

There are two kinds of evidence: direct and circumstantial. Direct evidence is direct proof of a fact, such as testimony of an eyewitness. Circumstantial evidence is indirect evidence, that is, proof of a chain of facts from which you could find that another fact exists, even though it has not been proved directly. You are entitled to consider both kinds of evidence. The law permits you to give equal weight to both, but it is for you to decide how much weight to give to any evidence. It is for you to decide whether a fact has been proved by circumstantial evidence. In making that decision, you must consider all the evidence in the light of reason, common sense, and experience.

JUDGE LYDON'S BOILERPLATE JURY INSTRUCTIONS

CREDIBILITY OF WITNESSES

In deciding what the facts are, you must consider all the evidence. In doing this, you must decide which testimony to believe and which testimony not to believe. You may disbelieve all or any part of any witness's testimony. In making that decision, you may take into account a number of factors including the following: (1) Was the witness able to see, or hear, or know the things about which that witness testified? (2) How well was the witness able to recall and describe those things? (3) What was the witness's manner while testifying? (4) Did the witness have an interest in the outcome of this case or any bias or prejudice concerning any party or any matter involved in the case? (5) How reasonable was the witness's testimony considered in light of all the evidence in the case? (6) Was the witness's testimony contradicted by what that witness has said or done at another time, or by the testimony of other witnesses, or by other evidence? In deciding whether or not to believe a witness, keep in mind that people sometimes forget things. You need to consider therefore whether a contradiction is an innocent lapse of memory or an intentional falsehood, and that may depend on whether it has to do with an important fact or with only a small detail. These are some of the factors you may consider in deciding whether to believe testimony. The weight of the evidence presented by each side does not necessarily depend on the number of witnesses testifying on one side or the other. You must consider all the evidence in the case, and you may decide that the testimony of a smaller number of witnesses on one side has greater weight than that of a larger number on the other. All of these are matters for you to consider in finding the facts.

SUMMARIES NOT RECEIVED IN EVIDENCE (if needed)

Certain charts and summaries have been shown to you in order to help explain the facts disclosed by the books, records, and other documents which are in evidence in the case. Such charts or summaries are used for convenience. They are not themselves evidence or proof of any facts. If they do not correctly reflect the facts or figures shown by the evidence in the case, you should disregard these charts and summaries and determine the facts from the underlying evidence.

CHARTS & SUMMARIES RECEIVED IN EVIDENCE (if needed)

Certain charts and summaries have been received into evidence to illustrate facts brought out in the testimony of some witnesses. Charts and summaries are only as good as the underlying evidence that supports them. You should therefore give them only such weight as you think the underlying evidence deserves.

JUDGE LYDON'S BOILERPLATE JURY INSTRUCTIONS

USE OF DEPOSITIONS (if needed)

During the trial of this case, certain testimony has been read to you by way of deposition or shown to you by way of videotape. The deposition or videotape testimony of a witness who, for some reason, cannot be present to testify from the witness stand is usually presented in writing under oath in the form of a deposition or videotape. Such testimony is entitled to the same consideration, and, insofar as possible, is to be judged as to credibility and weighed by you in the same manner as if the witness had been present.

OPINION EVIDENCE, EXPERT WITNESS (if needed)

You have heard testimony from persons described as experts. Persons who, by education and experience, have become expert in some field may state their opinion on matters in that field and may also state their reasons for the opinion. Expert opinion testimony should be judged just as any other testimony. You may accept it or reject it, and give it as much weight as you think it deserves, considering the witness's education and experience, the reasons given for the opinion, and all the other evidence in the case.

SEPARATE CONSIDERATION OF EACH DEFENDANT (if needed)

Although there is more than one defendant in this action, it does not follow that if one is liable, all are liable. Each defendant is entitled to a fair consideration of that defendant's own defense, and is not to be prejudiced by the fact, if it should become a fact, that you find against another. Unless otherwise stated, all instructions given apply to the case against each defendant.

JOINT CONSIDERATION OF BOTH DEFENDANTS (if needed)

In this case, the two defendants are related corporations. Their positions in this lawsuit are identical. This means that they are both either liable or not liable. In other words, even though there are actually two defendants in the case, you should consider them as one unit in your deliberations.

CORPORATIONS (if needed)

The fact that a plaintiff or defendant is a corporation should not affect your decision. All persons are equal before the law, and corporations, whether large or small, are entitled to the same fair and conscientious consideration by you as any other person.

JUDGE LYDON'S BOILERPLATE JURY INSTRUCTIONS

LIABILITY OF CORPORATIONS (if needed)

A corporation under the law is a person, but it can only act through its employees, agents, directors, or officers. The law therefore holds a corporation responsible for the acts of its employees, agent, directors, and officers, if but only if those acts are authorized. An act is authorized if it is a part of the ordinary course of employment of the person doing it. Whether a particular act was authorized is a question you must decide on the evidence. The fact that a plaintiff or defendant is a corporation should not affect your decision. All persons are equal before the law, and corporations, whether large or small, are entitled to the same fair and conscientious consideration by you as any other person.

TRANSITION TO LIABILITY

The plaintiff's claim in this case is based upon ___ alternative or concurrent theories. I will first identify these theories for you and then we'll go back and discuss each one with you in detail. The ___ theories are: _____. The plaintiff is not required to prove all of these theories in order for it to recover. Proof of its claim under any one of these theories would enable you to find that it is entitled to a verdict in its favor.

GENERAL DENIAL

The defendant has offered several defenses. The first is what is known as the defense of general denial. By this, the defendant simply says that it denies the material allegations of the complaint. The defendant denies that it [made or breached any warranties]* to the plaintiff, and contends that [even if warranties were made, the plaintiff did not rely on these representations.] The general denial places the burden of proof upon the plaintiff to come forward with evidence to prove these material allegations. *Alternative Form: [was negligent and further denies that its negligence, if any, was the proximate cause of the plaintiff's injuries.]

AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSES — BURDEN OF PROOF (if needed)

In addition to denying all of the material allegations of plaintiff's complaint, the defendant has asserted two affirmative defenses. These are the defenses of contributory negligence and assumption of the risk. Just as the plaintiff has the burden of proving his case by a preponderance of the evidence, the defendant has the burden of proving that one or both of these affirmative defenses apply to it by a preponderance of the evidence. In other words, the burden of proof with regard to these two affirmative defenses rests with the defendant. Contributory negligence, if established, provides a complete defense to the negligence claim. Assumption of the risk, if established, provides a complete defense to both the negligence claim and the implied warranty claim.

JUDGE LYDON'S BOILERPLATE JURY INSTRUCTIONS

TRANSITION TO DAMAGES

If you should find in accordance with these instructions that the plaintiff has failed to establish the essential elements of any of his causes of action by a preponderance of the evidence then your verdict should be for the defendant. If, on the other hand you find that the plaintiff has established the essential elements of one or more of his causes of action by a preponderance of the evidence your verdict should be for the plaintiff and you should next consider the question of damages.

DAMAGES — CAUTIONARY INSTRUCTION

The fact that I have instructed you on the proper measure of damages should not be considered as an indication of any view of mine as to which party is entitled to your verdict in this case. Instructions as to the measure of damages are given only for your guidance, in the event that you should find in favor of plaintiff on the question of liability, by a preponderance of evidence and in accord with the other instructions.

DUTY TO DELIBERATE

When you retire to the jury room, you should first elect one from among you to serve as your foreperson. The foreperson you select will preside over the deliberations and speak for the jury here in court. When you retire to the jury room, you should discuss the case with your fellow jurors to reach agreement if you can do so. Your verdict must be unanimous. Each of you must decide the case for yourself, but you should do so only after you have considered all the evidence, discussed it fully with the other jurors, and listened to the views of your fellow jurors. Do not be afraid to change your opinion if the discussion persuades you that you should. But do not come to a decision simply because other jurors think it is right. It is important that you attempt to reach a unanimous verdict but, of course, only if each of you can do so after having made your own conscientious decision. Do not change an honest belief about the weight and effect of the evidence simply to reach a verdict. Remember at all times that you are not partisans. You are judges—judges of the facts. Your sole interest is to seek the truth from the evidence in the case.

CONSIDERATION OF EVIDENCE

Your verdict must be based solely on the evidence and on the law as I have given it to you in these instructions. However, nothing that I have said or done is intended to suggest what your verdict should be—that is entirely for you to decide. The arguments and statements of the attorneys are not evidence. If you remember the facts differently from the way the attorneys have stated them, you should base your decision on what you remember.

JUDGE LYDON'S BOILERPLATE JURY INSTRUCTIONS

RETURN OF VERDICT

After you have reached unanimous agreement on a verdict, your foreperson will fill in the form that has been given to you, sign and date it, and advise the marshal (or bailiff) outside your door that you are ready to return to the courtroom.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE COURT

If it becomes necessary during your deliberations to communicate with me, you may send a note through the marshal (or bailiff), signed by your foreperson or by one or more members of the jury. No member of the jury should ever attempt to communicate with me except by a signed writing; and I will communicate with any member of the jury on anything concerning the case only in writing, or orally here in open court. Remember that you are not to tell anyone, including me, how the jury stands, numerically or otherwise, until after you have reached a unanimous verdict or have been discharged.