

3028 CONTRACTS IMPLIED IN LAW (UNJUST ENRICHMENT)

This case involves a claim based upon alleged unjust enrichment.

The elements of unjust enrichment are: (1) a benefit conferred upon the defendant by the plaintiff; (2) knowledge or appreciation of the benefit by the defendant; and (3) acceptance and retention by the defendant of such benefit under such circumstances that it would be unfair for him or her to retain it without paying the value thereof.

A claim of unjust enrichment does not arise out of an agreement entered into by the parties.

It is not necessary to prove that the recipient of the benefit was at fault or guilty of wrongdoing in any way, but it must be established that as between the parties it would be unfair for the recipient to retain the benefit without paying the reasonable value of the benefit.

A benefit to the defendant may be (services rendered for (defendant)) (goods or merchandise received by (defendant)) (improvements to (defendant)'s real estate) (money paid to (defendant) or someone else on (defendant)'s behalf).

A loss to the plaintiff without an actual benefit to the defendant is not recoverable as unjust enrichment.

If a person declines in advance a benefit to be conferred by another, then the person conferring the benefit may not recover for unjust enrichment.

[It is not a defense to the action that (defendant) is a minor or otherwise incompetent to make a contract, but a minor may show that in equity and good conscience, (plaintiff) is not entitled to recover in whole or in part.]

[In this case, (plaintiff) has alleged fault or wrongdoing on the part of (defendant) (fraud) (duress) (nonperformance or breach of contract) which is elsewhere in these instructions defined for you. The burden of proof is on (plaintiff) to establish wrongdoing by (defendant).]

COMMENT

This instruction was originally approved by the Committee in 1979. Editorial changes were made in 2015. This revision of the instruction and comment were approved by the Committee in 2020.

In cases where an unjust enrichment claim is based on contributions made by one party for the benefit of another, the unjust enrichment claim must demonstrate that, viewed in their entirety, the contributions were made to a “joint enterprise” in which the parties were mutually engaged, and which resulted in an accumulation of wealth that a party had unfairly retained. See Sands v. Menard, 2017 WI 110 at pg. 23.

“A claim for unjust enrichment may exist when two people work together or when two people combine assets for defendant’s benefit.” See Lawlis v. Thompson, 137 Wis.2d 490 at pg. 493.