

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee

BILL: CS/SB 708

INTRODUCER: Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee and Senator Baker and others

SUBJECT: Disposition of Human Remains

DATE: March 17, 2010 **REVISED:** _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Snider	Burgess	BI	Fav/1 amendment
2.	Pardue	Pardue	MS	Fav/CS
3.			GA	
4.				
5.				
6.				

Please see Section VIII. for Additional Information:

A. COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE..... Statement of Substantial Changes

B. AMENDMENTS..... Technical amendments were recommended

Amendments were recommended

Significant amendments were recommended

I. Summary:

Committee substitute for Senate Bill 708 amends current law to recognize a Department of Defense form which is used for the purpose of designating persons authorized to handle the disposition of service members' remains if deceased while in military service as defined by federal law.¹

This bill substantially amends section 497.005(37) of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Prior to a funeral, the survivors of the deceased are faced with difficult decisions regarding the funeral arrangements. Florida law dictates the preferential order to select a person responsible for determining the disposition of human remains. The Florida Funeral, Cemetery, and Consumer Services Act² provides that a "legally authorized individual" shall have the power to make this

¹ The armed forces of the United States are the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard. 10 U.S.C. § 101(a)(4).

² Ch. 497, F.S.

decision.³ The statute provides that the preferential order for choosing the person responsible for directing disposition is (in descending order):

- An *inter vivos* authorization⁴ made by the deceased
- The surviving spouse
- A son or daughter of majority age
- A parent
- A sibling of majority age
- A grandchild of majority age
- A grandparent
- Another person in the next degree of kinship.

During their period of military service, all service members in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps are required to complete the Department of Defense Form 93 (DD Form 93).⁵ The form is also applicable to members of the Coast Guard when operating as a service within the Department of the Navy.⁶

The DD Form 93 relates to emergency data as well as the death benefits of service members. The form allows service members to designate the spouse or a relative to be the person authorized to dispose of the service member's remains if the service member dies during military service (regardless of deployment status).⁷ At present, Florida law does not explicitly recognize the DD Form 93 as a method for determining the legally authorized person to direct disposition of remains. However, Florida law would likely treat the form as an *inter vivos* authorization and give effect to it as such.⁸

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1. Committee substitute for Senate Bill 708 specifically recognizes the DD Form 93 or its successor form as a valid method for determining the person legally authorized to dispose of a service member's remains. The bill places the DD Form 93 subordinate to an *inter vivos* authorization made by the service member, but superior to any statutorily specified relatives

³ S. 497.005(37), F.S.

⁴ An *inter vivos* authorization is one made during the life of the decedent (deceased). See Black's Law Dictionary; It is unclear whether this provision includes a will, which is considered testamentary in nature. See James W. Martin, *Is the Law of the Body a Body of Law*, Lawyers.com (discussing whether a will is valid for determining the disposition of the body under this statute). Available at: <http://wills-probate.lawyers.com/blogs/archives/789-Is-the-Law-of-the-Body-a-Body-of-Law.html>.

⁵ Military service members were authorized by Public Law 109-163, 119 Stat. 3270, to designate a person authorized to direct disposition of remains. Additionally, the execution of the DD Form 93 is required to be witnessed by a disinterested party.

⁶ Department of Defense Instruction 1300.18.

⁷ However, the proposed language of the bill will only give effect to the DD Form 93 if the service member is killed while on active duty.

⁸ See *Arthur v. Milstein*, 949 So.2d 1163, 1166 (Fla. 4th DCA 1163) (noting that the statute first gives effect to the wishes of the decedent through an *inter vivos* authorization); See also *Cohen v. Guardianship of Cohen*, 896 So.2d 950, 952-53 (Fla. 4th DCA 2005) (finding that an oral *inter vivos* declaration of burial disposition can overcome the written terms of a will and resulting in a conclusion that effect should be given to the desires of the decedent).

including the spouse.⁹ The Department of Defense has indicated that, in the Department's view, this placement ensures that a military service member's wishes are best carried out.¹⁰

The DD Form 93 is most likely an *inter vivos* authorization from a legal standpoint, and thus is duplicative of current law. However, the Department of Defense reports that there has been litigation over this subject between relatives of deceased service members. Thus, the goal of this legislation is to ensure that the DD Form 93 is explicitly accepted by all parties involved in the disposition process.¹¹ The Department believes this will save considerable grief and money for the families of deceased service members, because it has received expressions of concern from military families about whether the DD Form 93 will be honored by the courts.¹² However, the Department has been unable to cite a specific case where the DD Form 93 has not been honored,¹³ and the Professional Staff of the Committee on Banking and Insurance has been unable to locate such a case.¹⁴

Section 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

⁹ The DD Form 93 permits only a surviving spouse, blood relative of legal age, adoptive relatives, or if none of these can be found, a person standing in loco parentis, to be selected as the person authorized to direct disposition.

¹⁰ Telephone conversation with Eric Sherman, Regional Liaison for the Undersecretary of Defense, Jan. 6, 2010.

¹¹ Telephone conversation with Eric Sherman.

¹² Email from Eric Sherman, Feb. 25, 2010.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Research has uncovered a number of national cases involving Form DD 93 however. None of these cases concern the disposition of remains but instead generally concern insurance benefits. There is no clear rule of law that may be drawn from these cases, as each case seems to turn on the unique factual situations. However, most courts have found the DD Form 93 persuasive regardless of the statutory authority. *See e.g., Lanier v. Traub*, 734 F.Supp. 463 (S.D. Fla. 1990); *Ward v. U.S.*, 371 F.2d 108 (7th Cir. 1966); *Bew v. U.S.*, 286 F.2d 570, 572 (4th Cir. 1961) (holding that the DD Form 93 is persuasive to effectuating the intent of the decedent); *Contra Lanier v. Traub*, 934 F.2d 287 (11th Cir. 1991) (finding that the DD Form 93 cannot overcome statutory definitions as to the meaning of "parent").

B. Private Sector Impact:

There does not appear to be a financial impact on the private sector. The present statute is being amended to include the DD Form 93 in the order of prioritization. However, the statute does not impose a due diligence requirement on funeral homes, and the courts have declined to read such a requirement into the statute. As a result, it is possible that an *inter vivos* authorization, the DD Form 93, or even a relative of higher priority under the statute could fail to direct the disposition of remains.¹⁵

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

The amendment adopted by the Banking and Insurance Committee on March 3, 2010, and engrossed in this committee substitute, conforms the bill to federal law. As such the bill applies to members of the United States Coast Guard when the Coast Guard is operating as a service within the Department of the Navy. However, the Coast Guard during peacetime normally operates within the Department of Homeland Security¹⁶ and during such time uses a separate emergency data form.¹⁷ This difference is likely not significant.

VIII. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS by Military Affairs and Domestic Security on March 17, 2010.

This committee substitute conforms the bill to federal law by recognizing the use of the DD Form 93 for military members on active duty as well as for members conducting certain duties while not on active-duty. This revision ensures that the bill covers National Guard members, Reserve members, and the US Coast Guard when operating as a service within the Department of the Navy.

¹⁵ *Matsumoto v. American Burial and Cremation Svcs., Inc.*, 949 So.2d 1054, 1057-58. (Fla. 2nd DCA 2006) (finding that a funeral home did not have a duty to conduct due diligence to contact a relative higher in the statutory hierarchy despite knowing of the relative's existence and when cremation was authorized by another relative lower in the hierarchy). *But cf. Andrews v. McGowan*, 739 So.2d 132 (Fla. 5th DCA 1999) (construing strictly the order of priority).

¹⁶ 14 U.S.C. §1. Additionally, there are two uniformed services that are not armed services: the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service. 10 U.S.C. §101(a)(5)(b). These services are within the Department of Commerce and the Department of Health & Human Services respectively and are also not covered by this legislation.

¹⁷ The Coast Guard equivalent to the DD Form 93 is the Dept. of Homeland Security Form CG PPC-2020D "Designation of Beneficiaries & Record of Emergency Data."

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
