

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 Committee on Judiciary

BILL: SB 530

INTRODUCER: Senator Thrasher

SUBJECT: Dispute Resolution

DATE: February 18, 2013 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Munroe	Cibula	JU	Pre-meeting
2.			RC	
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

SB 530 creates the Revised Florida Arbitration Act based on a 2000 model act. The original act, the Florida Arbitration Code (FAC) was passed in 1957 and subsequently revised in 1967. Since 1967, the FAC has gone mostly unchanged. The bill includes concepts that were not included in the original act, such as the ability of arbitrators to issue provisional remedies, challenges based on notice, consolidation of separate arbitration proceedings, required conflict disclosures by arbitrators, immunity of arbitrators, and other substantive changes to the law. The bill lays out a detailed framework for arbitration conducted under Florida law and repeals sections of the existing FAC, the substantive concepts of which are subsumed by the revised act.

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 682.01, 682.02, 682.03, 682.04, 682.05, 682.06, 682.07, 682.08, 682.09, 682.10, 682.11, 682.12, 682.13, 682.14, 682.15, 682.19, 682.20, 440.1926, 489.1402, and 731.401.

This bill creates the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 682.011, 682.012, 682.013, 682.014, 682.015, 682.031, 682.032, 682.033, 682.041, 682.051, 682.081, 682.181, 682.23, and 682.25.

This bill repeals the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 682.16, 682.17, 682.18, 682.21, and 682.22.

II. Present Situation:

Florida traditionally has favored arbitration. In 1957, the Legislature enacted the Florida Arbitration Code (FAC),¹ which prescribes a framework governing the rights and procedures under arbitration agreements, including the enforceability of arbitration agreements. It was subsequently amended in 1967,² but remains largely unchanged. The FAC is based on the 1955 Uniform Arbitration Act (UAA). Alternative dispute resolution has been recognized as a viable alternative to litigation in a court or jury trial, and it historically has been attractive for the resolution of commercial business disputes.

Florida Arbitration Code

The FAC governs agreements to arbitrate where interstate commerce is not implicated.³ The FAC governs the arbitration process in its entirety, including, but not limited to the scope and enforceability of arbitration agreements, appointment of arbitrators, arbitration hearing process and procedure, entry and enforcement of arbitration awards, and appeals.

Under the FAC, Florida courts have held that the determination of whether any dispute is subject to arbitration should be resolved in favor of arbitration.⁴ A court's role in deciding whether to compel arbitration is limited to three gateway issues to determine the enforceability of an arbitration agreement: (1) whether a valid written agreement to arbitrate exists; (2) whether an arbitrable issue exists; and (3) whether the right to arbitration has been waived.⁵ The FAC applies in arbitration cases only to the extent that it is not in conflict with federal law.⁶

Arbitration Generally

Arbitration is an alternative dispute resolution process in which parties "subm[it] a dispute to one or more impartial persons for a final and binding decision."⁷ Arbitration is intended to be a speedy and economical alternative to court litigation, which is often slow, time-consuming, and expensive.⁸ Parties to arbitration voluntarily give up substantial safeguards that litigants in court proceedings enjoy, which may include the discovery process where parties obtain information from one another.⁹

¹ See ch. 682, F.S., and chapter 57-402, Laws of Fla.

² Chapter 67-254, Laws of Fla.

³ *O'Keefe Architects, Inc. v. CED Construction Partners, Ltd.*, 944 So. 2d 181, 184 (Fla. 2006).

⁴ Michael Cavendish, *The Concept of Arbitrability Under the Florida Arbitration Code*, 82 FLA. B.J. 18, 20 (Nov. 2008) (citing *Waterhouse Constr. Group, Inc. v. 5891 S.W. 64th Street, LLC*, 949 So. 2d 1095, 1099 (Fla. 3d DCA 2007)).

⁵ *Seifert v. U.S. Home Corp.*, 750 So. 2d 633, 636 (Fla. 1999).

⁶ *PowerTel, Inc. v. Bexley*, 743 So. 2d 570, 573 (Fla. 1st DCA 1999), *review denied*, 763 So. 2d 1044 (Fla. 2000), and *Florida Power Corp. v. Casselberry*, 793 So. 2d 1174, 1179 (Fla. 5th DCA 2001).

⁷ See the definition of "arbitration" at the website of the American Arbitration Association,

http://www.adr.org/aaa/faces/services/disputeresolutionservices/arbitration.jsessionid=2jX0RZLCyKPV4wMPSrcvCkSmCLsbXCtLZvRsLrhVNnhFChmSSnKj!-1600829671?_afLoop=832669183421451&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null

(last visited Jan. 11, 2013).

⁸ *ManorCare Health Services, Inc. v. Stiehl*, 22 So. 3d 96, 105 (Fla. 2d DCA 2009).

⁹ Amanda Perwin, *Mandatory Binding Arbitration: Civil Injustice By Corporate America*, White Paper for the Center for Justice & Democracy, No. 13 (August 2005), available at <http://centerjd.org/content/white-paper-mandatory-binding-arbitration-civil-injustice-corporate-america> (last visited Jan. 11, 2013).

Federal Arbitration Act

Congress enacted the Federal Arbitration Act (FAA) in 1925 to establish, in part, the enforceability of pre-dispute arbitration agreements involving interstate commerce.¹⁰ The United States Supreme Court has recognized that with the passage of the FAA, Congress expressed intent for courts to enforce arbitration agreements and to place these agreements on an equal footing with other contracts.¹¹ The FAA established a federal policy that favors and encourages the use of arbitration to resolve disputes. Due to this federal policy, the use of pre-dispute arbitration agreements has expanded beyond use in commercial contexts between large businesses and those with equal bargaining power to use in noncommercial consumer contracts.¹²

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill largely adopts the provisions of the 2000 revision of the Uniform Arbitration Act, as approved by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws.¹³ The bill significantly amends or repeals each section of the existing Florida Arbitration Code, and amends s. 682.01, F.S., to rename the chapter as the "Revised Florida Arbitration Code." This bill also creates s. 682.011, F.S., to provide definitions.

Notice

The bill creates s. 682.012, F.S., to provide notice requirements. Notice is provided by taking reasonable action to inform the other person, regardless of actual knowledge. Actual knowledge or receipt of notice is sufficient. Additionally, the delivery of a notice to the person's residence or place of business, or another location held out by the person as a place of delivery, is sufficient to provide notice.

Applicability

The bill creates s. 682.013, F.S., providing applicability of the revised act. The revised act applies prospectively for agreements to arbitrate made on or after the effective date. It also applies retroactively if all parties agree to apply the revised act. The Revised Florida Arbitration Code does not affect an action or proceeding commenced or right accrued before the effective date of the act, July 1, 2013. Beginning July 1, 2016, an agreement to arbitrate will be subject to the Revised Florida Arbitration Act.

Effect of Agreement to Arbitrate

The bill creates s. 682.014, F.S., to indicate that although the revised act is a default statute, "the parties' autonomy as expressed in their agreements concerning an arbitration normally should

¹⁰ See 9 U.S.C.A. ss. 1-16.

¹¹ *Allied-Bruce Terminix Cos, Inc. v. Dobson*, 513 U.S. 265, 270-271 (1995).

¹² Shelley McGill, *Consumer Arbitration Clause Enforcement: A Balanced Legislative Response*, 47 AM. BUS. L.J. 361, 366 (Fall 2010).

¹³ See Business Law Section of The Florida Bar, *Analysis of Proposed Revisions to the Florida Arbitration Code* (2012) (on file with the Senate Committee on Judiciary).

control the arbitration.”¹⁴ However, there are some provisions that the parties cannot waive before a dispute arises or cannot waive at any point.¹⁵ Parties may not waive the right to judicial relief, the right to a provisional remedy, jurisdiction of the courts, the right to appeal, the right to notice, the right to disclosure, or the right to an attorney, before a controversy arises. Parties may not waive other requirements at any time which would fundamentally undermine the arbitration agreement.

Judicial Relief

The bill creates s. 682.015, F.S., providing that a petition for judicial relief must be made to the court in a manner provided by law or by the rules of court. Notice of an initial petition to the court must be provided in a manner consistent with the service of a summons in a civil action. Other motions must be made in the manner provided by law or by the rules of court for serving motions in pending cases.

Nature of Arbitration Agreements

The bill amends s. 682.02, F.S., providing that an agreement to submit to arbitration is valid, enforceable, and irrevocable except upon grounds that exist at law or in equity for the revocation of a contract. The court decides whether an agreement to arbitrate is valid, while an arbitrator decides whether a condition precedent to arbitrability has been fulfilled and whether the contract containing the agreement to arbitrate is enforceable. Arbitration may continue during a court challenge of the arbitration agreement pending final resolution unless the court orders otherwise.

Compelling or Staying Arbitration

The bill amends s. 682.03, F.S., providing that if a party with a valid agreement to arbitrate fails to appear or does not oppose a motion to compel arbitration, the court must order the arbitration. If the refusing party opposes the motion, the court must decide the issue and order arbitration unless it finds that there is no enforceable agreement to arbitrate the matter. If the court finds that there is no enforceable agreement to arbitrate, then it may not order the parties to arbitrate. However, the court may not refuse to order arbitration on the merits of the claim.

The motion to compel arbitration may be made in any court having jurisdiction. However, if the controversy is already pending in court, the motion to compel arbitration must be made in the court where the controversy is pending. If a pending case exists, the court must halt the judicial proceeding until it renders a final decision regarding arbitrability. If the court orders arbitration, the judicial proceeding must be stayed pending arbitration.

Provisional Remedies

The bill creates s. 682.031, F.S., providing for conditions of provisional remedies. Before an arbitrator is appointed, the court may enter an order for provisional remedies to protect the effectiveness of the arbitration proceeding to the same extent and under the same conditions as if the controversy were the subject of a civil action.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 9.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 9.

After an arbitrator is appointed, the arbitrator may issue provisional remedies to the same extent that a court could in a civil action. After an arbitrator is appointed, a party may move for a court order for provisional remedies only if the matter is urgent and the arbitrator cannot act in a timely manner or provide an adequate remedy.

If an arbitrator awards a provisional remedy for injunctive or equitable relief, the arbitrator must state the factual findings and legal basis for the award. A party may seek to confirm or vacate a provisional remedy for injunctive or equitable relief in a court

Initiation of Arbitration

The bill creates s. 682.032, F.S., providing that a person initiates arbitration by providing notice by the manner agreed to by the parties, or by certified mail if the agreement does not provide for a method of notice, or by a method allowed by law or rules of court for the commencement of a civil action. The notice must describe the nature of the controversy and the remedy sought. Unless a party objects for lack of notice by the beginning of the arbitration hearing, notice challenges are waived if the party appears at the hearing.

Consolidation of Separate Arbitration Proceedings

The bill creates s. 682.033, F.S., providing several conditions upon which a court may consolidate separate arbitration proceedings:

- Separate agreements and proceedings exist between the same parties or one party is a party to a separate agreement to arbitrate or a separate arbitration proceeding with a third person;
- The claims subject to the agreements to arbitrate arise in substantial part from the same transaction or series of transactions;
- The existence of a common issue of law or fact creates the possibility of conflicting decisions if separate arbitration proceedings occur; and
- Prejudice resulting from a failure to consolidate is not outweighed by the risk of undue delay or prejudice to the rights of or hardship to parties opposing consolidation.

The court may consolidate some claims while allowing other claims to be resolved separately. However, the court may not order consolidation if the agreement to arbitrate prohibits consolidation.

Appointment of Arbitrators by the Court

The bill amends s. 682.04, F.S., to provide conditions for the court to appoint arbitrators. The court, on motion, must appoint one or more arbitrators if the parties have not agreed on a method or the agreed upon method fails, or one or more parties failed to respond to the demand for arbitration or an arbitrator fails to act and a successor has not been appointed. The court must not appoint an arbitrator with a known, direct, and material interest in the outcome of the arbitration or a relationship to a party if the agreement calls for a neutral arbitrator.

Disclosure by Arbitrator

The bill amends s. 682.041, F.S., providing that before accepting appointment, an arbitrator must disclose potential conflicts or impartiality including financial or relationship conflicts. The arbitrator must continue to disclose any facts that may affect the arbitrator's impartiality that the arbitrator learns after accepting the appointment. Upon disclosure, if a party objects to the appointment or continued service, the objection may be grounds for vacating an award. If the arbitrator did not disclose a fact as required, the court may vacate an award upon timely objection by a party. An arbitrator who does not disclose an interest in the outcome of the arbitration is presumed to act with evident partiality. Substantial compliance with agreed upon procedures is a condition precedent to a motion to vacate an award on these grounds.

Majority Action by Arbitrators

The bill amends s. 682.05, F.S., providing that if there is more than one arbitrator; powers of the arbitrator must be exercised by a majority of the arbitrators.

Immunity of Arbitrator

The bill creates s. 682.051, F.S., granting arbitrators immunity from civil liability to the same extent as judges acting in a judicial capacity. Failure of an arbitrator to disclose conflicts does not waive immunity. Arbitrators cannot be compelled to testify about occurrences during arbitration except to determine the claim of an arbitrator against a party or to a hearing on a motion to vacate an award if the moving party establishes prima facie that a ground for vacating the award exists. An arbitrator sued by a party must be awarded attorney fees and other reasonable expenses of litigation if the court decides that the arbitrator has immunity.

Hearing

The bill amends s. 682.06, F.S., granting broad authority to an arbitrator to conduct the arbitration as the arbitrator considers appropriate. An arbitrator may decide a request for summary disposition if the parties agree, or if a party gives notice of the request to the other parties and they have an opportunity to respond. The arbitrator must provide at least five days notice prior to the beginning of the hearing. The arbitrator then may control the hearing, including adjourning the hearing from time to time as necessary. Each party has the right to be heard, to present material evidence, and to cross-examine witnesses. If an arbitrator is unable to act during the proceeding, a replacement arbitrator must be appointed.

Representation by Attorney

The bill amends s. 682.07, F.S., providing that a party to an arbitration proceeding may be represented by an attorney.

Witnesses, Subpoenas, and Depositions

The bill amends s. 682.08, F.S., providing that an arbitrator has the authority to issue a subpoena in the same manner as a court in a civil action. Arbitrators may allow discovery and depositions of witnesses and may determine the conditions under which discovery and depositions may be

taken. An arbitrator may also issue a protective order to prevent disclosure of privileged or confidential information, trade secrets, or other protected information, to the same extent as a court could in a civil action. Subpoena laws apply to arbitration proceedings, and out of state subpoenas are treated like they would be in a civil action.

Judicial Enforcement of Preaward Ruling by Arbitrator

The bill creates s. 682.081, F.S., to establish that preaward rulings by an arbitrator may be incorporated into the ruling on motion by the prevailing party, and the court must then summarily decide the motion and issue an order.

A party to a provisional remedy for injunctive or equitable relief issued by an arbitrator may motion a court to confirm or vacate the remedy. The court must confirm an award of a provisional remedy if the award satisfies the legal standards for awarding a party injunctive or equitable relief. If the award for injunctive or equitable relief fails to satisfy such legal standards, the court must vacate the provisional remedy.

Award

The bill amends s. 682.09, F.S., to provide that an arbitrator must make a signed record of an award and provide a copy to each party. The award must be made within the time specified by the agreement to arbitrate or within the time ordered by the court. The time may be extended by a court order or by agreement of the parties to the arbitration.

Change of Award by Arbitrator

The bill amends s. 682.10, F.S., to provide conditions to modify or correct an award. The arbitrator may correct an award when a miscalculation or problem of form, but not substance, results in an incorrect initial award. The arbitrator may also modify the award if the arbitrator has not yet made a final and definite award, or to clarify the award. A motion to change or modify an award must be made and notice provided within 20 days of the moving party receiving notice of the award. A motion to object to the award on any other basis must be made within 10 days of receipt of the notice of the award.

Remedies, Fees, and Expenses of Arbitration Proceeding

The bill amends s. 682.11, F.S., providing that arbitrators may award punitive damages and attorney fees to the same extent they would be available in a civil action, but the arbitrator must justify such damages in the award. An arbitrator has broad authority to impose all other remedies, regardless of whether a court would provide similar remedies in a civil action.

Confirming or Vacating an Award

The bill amends s. 682.12, F.S., providing that after an award is granted, a party may make a motion to the court for an order to confirm the award.

The bill amends s. 682.13, F.S., providing conditions upon which a court may vacate an award:

- Evident partiality by an arbitrator appointed as a neutral arbitrator;
- Corruption by an arbitrator;
- Misconduct by an arbitrator prejudicing the rights of a party to the arbitration proceeding;
- An arbitrator refused to postpone the hearing upon showing of sufficient cause of postponement;
- An arbitrator refused to consider material evidence;
- An arbitrator conducted the hearing contrary to the act so as to substantially prejudice the rights of a party to the arbitration proceeding;
- An arbitrator exceeded his or her powers;
- There was no agreement to arbitrate, unless the moving party participated in the hearing without objection; or
- The arbitration was conducted without proper notice so as to substantially prejudice the rights of a party to the arbitration proceeding.

A motion to vacate an award must be filed within 90 days of the award, or within 90 days of the finding of corruption, fraud, or other undue means, or within 90 days of when the party knew or should have known of such a finding. If the court vacates an award for any reason other than the lack of an agreement to arbitrate, the court may order a rehearing. If a motion to vacate is denied, the court must confirm the award.

Modification or Correction of Award

The bill amends s. 682.14, F.S., providing the court must modify or correct an award if:

- A miscalculation of figures or mistake in the description of any person, thing, or property referred to in the award is evident;
- The arbitrator awarded something not submitted in the arbitration and making such a correction will not affect the merits of the decision; or
- The award is imperfect as a matter of form, not substance.

If the application is granted, the court must modify and correct the award. If not, the court must confirm the award.

Judgment or Decree on Award

The bill amends s. 682.15, F.S., requiring the court, upon granting an order confirming, vacating, modifying, or correcting an award, to enter an order as if for a civil judgment. The court may allow reasonable costs of the motion and subsequent judicial proceedings. On motion by the prevailing party, the court may add reasonable attorney fees and expenses.

Jurisdiction

The bill creates s. 682.181, F.S., providing a court with jurisdiction over the controversy has the right to enforce an agreement to arbitrate. An agreement to arbitrate in this state confers exclusive jurisdiction on the court to enter judgment on an award.

Venue

The bill amends s. 682.19, F.S., providing that a petition for judicial relief under this act must be filed in the county specified in the agreement to arbitrate, unless a hearing has already been held, in which case the petition must be filed in that court. Otherwise, the petition may be filed in any Florida county in which an adverse party has a residence or a place of business. If no adverse party has a residence or place of business in Florida, the petition may be filed in any Florida county.

Appeals

The bill amends s. 682.20, F.S., providing for appeals from:

- An order denying an application to compel arbitration;
- An order granting a motion to stay arbitration;
- An order confirming an award;
- An order denying confirmation of an award except in certain circumstances;
- An order modifying or correcting an award;
- An order vacating an award without directing a rehearing; or
- A judgment or decree entered pursuant to this act.

Appeals are taken in the same manner and to the same extent as from orders or judgments in a civil action.

Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act

The bill creates s. 682.23, F.S., providing that the revised act conforms to the requirements of s. 102 of the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act.¹⁶

Disputes Excluded

The bill creates s. 682.25, F.S., providing that the revised act does not apply to any dispute involving child custody, visitation, or child support.

Repeal of Provisions in Florida Arbitration Code

The bill repeals s. 682.16, F.S., providing for the docketing of certain arbitration documents filed with the clerks of court.

The bill repeals s. 682.17, F.S., providing for certain motions to a court under the Florida Arbitration Code.

The bill repeals s. 682.18, F.S., specifying the jurisdiction of courts for certain arbitration matters under the Florida Arbitration Code and providing a definition of “court.”

¹⁶ 15 U.S.C. s. 7002.

The bill repeals s. 682.21, F.S., providing that the Florida Arbitration Code applies only to agreements made subsequent to the effective date of the code.

The bill repeals s. 682.22, F.S., which provides a severability clause for the application of the Florida Arbitration Code.

Statutory Cross-references

The bill amends ss. 440.1926, 489.144, and 731.401, F.S., to correct cross-references to the revised act.

Effective Date

The bill takes effect July 1, 2013.

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.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) completed a fiscal impact on the bill. According to OSCA, the fiscal impact on the courts cannot be precisely quantified, but OSCA anticipates judicial workload will not increase as a result of the bill if a corresponding increase in the use of arbitration proceedings results in fewer cases going to trial.¹⁷

¹⁷ Office of the State Courts Administrator, 2013 Judicial Impact Statement SB 530 (Feb. 14, 2013) (on file with the Senate Committee on Judiciary).

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

On lines 307 and 309 of the bill, the bill's references to "motions" should be corrected to refer to "applications," and similarly, on lines 469, 971, 976, 977, and 1035, the bill's references to "application" should be corrected to refer to "motion."

Lines 206-208 of the bill provide that "[b]eginning July 1, 2016, an agreement to arbitrate shall be subject to the then-applicable law governing agreements to arbitrate." A more direct way of stating this is suggested: Beginning July 1, 2016, an agreement to arbitrate shall be subject to the requirements of this chapter notwithstanding any agreement to the contrary or the date the agreement was executed.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.