

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/HB 1235 Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund

SPONSOR(S): Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee; Dudley

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** CS/SB 1098

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee	11 Y, 0 N, As CS	Whittier	Luczynski
2) Government Operations Appropriations Subcommittee			
3) Regulatory Affairs Committee			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund (fund) was created in 1993, after Hurricane Andrew, as a fund of last resort to compensate consumers who contracted for construction, repair or improvement of their Florida residence and who suffered monetary damages due to the financial misconduct, abandonment, or fraudulent statement of the licensed contractor, financially responsible officer, or business organization licensed under ch. 489, F.S. A claimant must be a homeowner and, currently, the damage must have been caused by a Division I contractor, which includes general contractors, building contractors, and residential contractors. The fund is not permitted to compensate consumers who contracted with Division II contractors or to compensate consumers who have suffered damages as a result of payments made in violation of the Florida Construction Lien Law.

Each recovery claim is limited to both a per-claim maximum amount and a total life time per-contractor maximum. For contracts entered into prior to July 1, 2004, the fund claims are limited to \$25,000 per claim with a total life time aggregate limit of \$250,000 per licensee. For contracts entered into after July 1, 2004, the per-claim payment limits are increased to \$50,000 with a total life time aggregate of \$500,000 per licensee. Claims are paid in the order that they are filed. The fund must be repaid by the contractor in violation or have their license suspended until the repayment is made.

The fund is financed by a 1.5% surcharge on all building permit fees associated with the enforcement of the Florida Building Code. The proceeds from the surcharge are allocated equally to fund the Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund and the operations of the Building Code Administrators and Inspectors Board.

The bill revises the law to include Division II contractors within the parameters of the Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund. It revises the statutory limits on recovery payments to include Division II contracts beginning January 1, 2015, for any contract entered into after July 1, 2014. The bill limits Division II claims to \$15,000 per claim with a \$150,000 lifetime maximum per licensee. The bill removes the prohibition against paying consumer claims where the damages resulted from payments made in violation of the Florida Construction Lien Law for contracts entered into after July 1, 2014.

The bill revises language for a notice that contractors must give to homeowners informing them of their rights under the recovery fund, to advise that payments from the fund are up to a limited amount.

The bill appears to have no significant fiscal impact on state or local governments.

The bill has an effective date of July 1, 2014.

This document does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill sponsor or House of Representatives.

STORAGE NAME: h1235a.BPRS

DATE: 3/26/2014

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Present Situation

Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund

The Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund (fund) is created in s. 489.140, F.S., as a separate account in the Professional Regulation Trust Fund.

According to the Department of Business and Professional Regulation, the fund was created in 1993, after Hurricane Andrew, as a fund of last resort to compensate consumers who contracted for construction, repair, or improvement of their Florida residence and who suffered monetary damages due to the financial misconduct, abandonment, or fraudulent statement of the licensed contractor,¹ financially responsible officer, or business organization licensed under ch. 489, F.S.²

The fund is financed by a 1.5% surcharge on all building permit fees associated with the enforcement of the Florida Building Code.³ The proceeds from the surcharge are allocated equally to fund the Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund and the operations of the Building Code Administrators and Inspectors Board.^{4, 5}

A claimant must be a homeowner and the damage must have been caused by a Division I contractor.⁶ The fund is not permitted to compensate consumers who contracted with Division II contractors or to compensate consumers who suffered damages as a result of payments made in violation of the Florida Construction Lien Law under part I of ch. 713, F.S.

Division I contractors are listed in s. 489.105(3)(a)-(c), F.S., as:

- General contractors,
- Building contractors, and
- Residential contractors.

¹ Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Agency Analysis for SB 1098 (March 11, 2014) (on file with the Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee).

² Section 489.1402(1)(g), F.S.

³ Section 468.631(1), F.S.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ In 2013, the Legislature gave the department authority to transfer excess cash to the Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund if the department determines it is not needed to fund the operation of the Building Code Administrators and Inspectors Board; however, the department may not transfer excess cash that would exceed the amount appropriated in the General Appropriations Act and any amount approved by the Legislative Budget Commission pursuant to s. 216.181, F.S. See sect. 2, ch. 2013-187, Laws of Fla.

⁶ Section 489.1402(1)(c), (f), and (d), F.S.

Division II contractors are listed in 489.105(3)(d)-(q), F.S., as:

- Sheet metal contractors,
- Roofing contractors,
- Class A air-conditioning contractors,
- Class B air-conditioning contractors,
- Class C air-conditioning contractors,
- Mechanical contractors,
- Commercial pool/spa contractors,
- Residential pool/spa contractors,
- Swimming pool/spa servicing contractors,
- Plumbing contractors,
- Underground utility and excavation contractors,
- Solar contractors,
- Pollutant storage systems contractors, and
- Specialty contractors.

Decisions regarding the fund are made by the Construction Industry Licensing Board which is housed within the department.

Construction Industry Licensing Board

The Construction Industry Licensing Board (board) consists of 18 members who are responsible for licensing and regulating the construction industry in this state.⁷ The board is divided into Division I and Division II members following the definitions of Division I and Division II contractors respectively, jurisdiction falling to each division relative to their scope.⁸ Five members constitute a quorum for each division.

The board meets regularly to consider applications for licensure, to review disciplinary cases, and to conduct informal hearings related to licensure and discipline.⁹ It engages in rulemaking to implement the provisions set forth in its statutes and conducts other general business, as necessary.¹⁰

The board, with respect to actions for recovery from the fund, may “intervene, enter an appearance, file an answer, defend the action, or take any action it deems appropriate and may take recourse through any appropriate method of review” on behalf of the state.¹¹ In accordance with department rules, “The Board shall either authorize payment of the claim in full or in part, or deny the claim in full, by entry of a Final Order in accordance with Section 489.143, F.S. Action by the Board shall be considered final agency action.”¹²

Section 489.129, F.S., grants the board the authority to take actions against any certificate holder or registrant if the contractor, financially responsible officer, or business organization for which the contractor is a primary qualifying agent, a financially responsible officer, or a secondary qualifying agent responsible under s. 489.1195, F.S., is found guilty of certain acts, including the acts that may qualify a claim to the fund. Specifically, these acts are financial misconduct, abandonment, or fraudulent statement of the contractor¹³ and are described in s. 489.129, F.S.

⁷ Section 489.107, F.S.

⁸ Section 489.107(4)(c), F.S.

⁹ Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Construction Industry Licensing Board, *available at* <http://www.myfloridalicense.com/DBPR/pro/cilb/index.html> (Last visited March 18, 2014).

¹⁰ Section 489.108, F.S.

¹¹ Section 489.142(1), F.S.

¹² Rule 61G4-21.004(7), F.A.C.

¹³ Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Agency Analysis for SB 1098 (March 11, 2014) (on file with the Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee).

Financial Misconduct

Section 489.129(1)(g), F.S., allows disciplinary proceedings for committing mismanagement or misconduct in the practice of contracting that causes financial harm to a customer. Financial mismanagement or misconduct occurs when:

- Valid liens have been recorded against the customer's property by the contractor for supplies or services ordered by the contractor for which the customer has paid the contractor, but the contractor has not removed the liens within 75 days of such liens;
- The contractor has abandoned a job and the percentage of completion is less than the percentage of the contract price received by the contractor, unless the contractor is entitled to retain such funds under the terms of the contract or refunds the excess funds within 30 days after abandonment; or
- The contractor's job has been completed, and the customer has been made to pay more than the original contract price, as adjusted for subsequent change orders, unless such increase in cost was the result of circumstances beyond the contractor's control, was caused by the customer, or was otherwise permitted by the terms of the contract between the contractor and the customer.

Abandonment of the Project

Section 489.129(1)(j), F.S., allows disciplinary proceedings for abandoning a construction project, which is presumed after 90 days if the contractor terminates the project without just cause or without proper notification to the owner, including the reason for termination, or fails to perform work without just cause for 90 consecutive days.

Fraudulent Statement by the Contractor

Section 489.129(1)(k), F.S., allows disciplinary proceedings for signing a statement with respect to a project or contract:

- Falsely indicating that the work is bonded;
- Falsely indicating that payment has been made for all subcontracted work, labor, and materials which results in a financial loss to the owner, purchaser, or contractor; or
- Falsely indicating that workers' compensation and public liability insurance are provided.

Claims

Section 489.129, F.S., allows the board to take the following actions given the circumstances above:

- Place on probation or reprimand the licensee;
- Revoke, suspend, or deny the issuance or renewal of the certificate or registration;
- Require financial restitution to a consumer for financial harm directly related to a violation of a provision of part 1 of ch. 489, F.S.;
- Impose an administrative fine not to exceed \$10,000 per violation;
- Require continuing education; or
- Assess costs associated with investigation and prosecution.

If the violation is not expressly based on s. 489.129(1)(g), (j), or (k), F.S., the claimant must demonstrate that the contractor engaged in activity that is described in those subsections.¹⁴

¹⁴ Rule 61G4-21.003(3), F.A.C.
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The claimant must have obtained a final judgment, arbitration award, or board issued restitution order against the contractor for damages that are a direct result of a compensable violation. A claim for recovery must be made within 1 year after the conclusion of any civil, criminal, administrative action, or award in arbitration based on the act.¹⁵

Completed claim forms must be submitted with:

- A copy of the complaint that initiated action against the contractor, a certified copy of the underlying judgment, order of restitution, or award in arbitration, together with the judgment;
- A copy of any contract between the claimant and the contractor, including change orders;
- Proof of payment to the contractor and/or subcontractors;
- Copies of any liens and releases filed against the property, together with the Notice of Claim and Notice to Owner; copies of applicable bonds, sureties, guarantees, warranties, letters of credit and/or policies of insurance;
- Certified copies of levy and execution documents, and proof of all efforts and inability to collect the judgment or restitution order, and other documentation as may be required by the board to determine causation of injury or specific actual damages.¹⁶

Pursuant to s. 489.143, F.S., each recovery claim is limited to both a per-claim maximum amount and a total life time per-contractor maximum. For contracts entered prior to July 1, 2004, the fund claims are limited to \$25,000 per claim with a total life time aggregate limit of \$250,000 per licensee.¹⁷ For contracts entered after July 1, 2004, the per-claim payment limits are increased to \$50,000 with a total life time aggregate of \$500,000 per licensee.¹⁸ Claims are paid in the order that they are filed.¹⁹

The board will not compensate claimants from the recovery fund for any of the following reasons.

- The claimant is a licensee who acted as the contractor;
- The claimant is the spouse of the judgment debtor or licensee or a personal representative of such spouse;
- The claim is based upon a construction contract in which the licensee was acting with respect to the property owned or controlled by the licensee;
- The claim is based upon a construction contract in which the contractor did not hold a valid and current license at the time of the construction contract;
- The claimant was associated in a business relationship with the licensee other than the contract at issue;
- When, after notice, the claimant has failed to provide documentation in support of the claims required by rule;
- Where the licensee has reached the aggregate limit; or
- The claimant has contracted for scope of work described in s. 489.105(3)(d)-(q), F.S. [Division II contractors]²⁰

The fund is also not permitted to compensate consumers who suffered damages as a result of payments made in violation of Florida Construction Lien Law under part I of ch. 713, F.S.

¹⁵ Rule 61G4-21.003(5), F.A.C.

¹⁶ Rule 61G4-21.003(2), F.A.C.

¹⁷ Section 489.143(2) and (5), F.S.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Section 489.143(6), F.S.

²⁰ Rule 61G4-21.004(3), F.A.C.

Duty of Contractor to give Notice of Fund

Any agreement or contract for the repair, restoration, improvement, or construction to residential real property must contain a statutorily mandated notification statement informing the consumer of their rights under the recovery fund, unless the total contract price is less than \$2,500.²¹

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill revises the law to include Division II contractors within the parameters of the Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund (fund). Specifically, it revises the statutory limits on recovery payments to include Division II contracts beginning January 1, 2015, for any contract entered into after July 1, 2014. The bill limits Division II claims to \$15,000 per claim with a \$150,000 lifetime maximum per licensee.

The bill removes the prohibition against paying consumer claims where the damages resulted from payments made in violation of the Florida Construction Lien Law for contracts entered into after July 1, 2014.

The bill revises language for the notice that contractors must give to homeowners informing them of their rights under the recovery fund, to advise that payments from the fund are up to a limited amount.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amends s. 489.1401, F.S., revising legislative intent.

Section 2. Amends s. 489.1402, F.S., revising definitions.

Section 3. Amends s. 489.141, F.S., revising conditions under which a claimant is eligible to seek recovery from the recovery fund.

Section 4. Amends s. 489.1425, F.S., revising a form required to be provided by a contractor.

Section 5. Amends s. 489.143, F.S., prohibiting fund disbursements from exceeding a specified amount for each Division I claim and each Division II claim and revising requirements providing caps on payment for certain claims against a licensee.

Section 6. Provides an effective date of July 1, 2014.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

²¹ Section 489.1425, F.S.
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B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The bill may increase restitution payments required of licensed Division II contractors against whom a recovery claim is paid. Licensees must repay the Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund for any amount of recovery paid to a consumer from the fund or have their license suspended until the repayment is made.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

According to the Department of Business and Professional Regulation, the Florida Homeowners' Construction Recovery Fund currently has a backlog of 253 claims representing \$5,636,599.43 in anticipated payments, which are awaiting approval by the board. The amount of yearly recovery fund payments is limited by the amount of funding received from the 1.5% surcharge. Therefore, the total amount of claims paid each year will not increase as a result of receiving additional claims. However, the inclusion of additional claims may extend the amount of time it takes to pay each individual claim.²²

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable. The bill does not appear to affect county or municipal governments.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

Not applicable.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

On line 232 of the committee substitute, "per claimant" needs to be changed to "per claim." Statutes and the bill provide fiscal limits per licensee and per claim for different categories, but there are not statutory or proposed limits per claimant. This error was not discovered until after the committee substitute had been adopted by the Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

On March 24, 2014, the Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee adopted an amendment that did the following and reported the bill favorably with committee substitute:

²² Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Agency Analysis for SB 1098 (March 11, 2014) (on file with the Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee).

- Reinserts language that was stricken in the bill that limits claims to a \$250,000 lifetime cap per licensee and clarifies that this limitation is for contracts entered into prior to July 1, 2004.

This analysis is drafted to the committee substitute as adopted by the Business & Professional Regulation Subcommittee.