

STORAGE NAME: h3743s1.er
DATE: March 20 1998

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON
ELECTION REFORM
BILL RESEARCH & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT**

BILL #: CS/HBs 3743, 3941

RELATING TO: Elections

SPONSOR(S): Committee on Election Reform, Reps. Morse, Meek, & Garcia

COMPANION BILL(S): HB 3683(c); SB 1402(c)

ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:

- (1) ELECTION REFORM (GRC) YEAS 9 NAYS 0
 - (2) CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (JC)
 - (3)
 - (4)
 - (5)
-

I. SUMMARY:

CS/HBs 3743, 3941 provides that supervisors of elections must forward the name and homestead address of any person who registers to vote at an address other than the address at which the person claims a homestead exemption to the local property appraiser for the county in which the homestead is claimed. Local property appraisers are required to examine these and are directed to terminate a person's homestead exemption and assess back taxes, if appropriate under current law.

The bill requires the last four digits of an applicant's social security number to be included on a voter registration application, as well as on an absentee ballot Voter's Certificate. The bill also revises the uniform statewide voter registration application to conform. Notices of certain penalties are required to be included in the Voter's Certificate.

Changes are also made to the requirements to be a witness to an absentee ballot. The bill limits the number of absentee ballots a person can witness per election to five, with exceptions. The bill amends the provisions relating to the instructions to absent electors enclosed with each absentee ballot, to conform. Changes are also made to the conditions under which a canvassing board must declare an absentee ballot illegal, to conform. The bill also provides for certification of witnesses by state executive committees of political parties. Provides that witnessing more than five absentee ballots per election, unless exempt, is a misdemeanor of the first degree.

The bill requires supervisors of elections to post a notice at the polls that sets forth the penalty for committing fraud in connection with voting. Under this bill, supervisors of elections, deputy supervisors of elections and employees of supervisors of elections, when designated by the supervisor of elections, are allowed to administer and attest to oaths for purposes of the Florida Election Code. In addition, persons who are preregistered to vote under the law are eligible to serve on an election board. The bill increases the penalty for certain offenses under the Florida Election Code to a third degree felony.

This bill does appear to have a fiscal impact on both state and local governments, although indeterminate at this time.

STORAGE NAME: h3743s1.er

DATE: March 20 1998

PAGE 2

CS/HB 3743, 3941 would take effect January 1 of the year after the year in which enacted.

II. SUBSTANTIVE RESEARCH:

A. PRESENT SITUATION:

Voter Registration

The eligibility requirements for voter registration are prescribed by Article VI, Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Florida Constitution. Under section 2, Article VI of the State Constitution, “[e]very citizen of the United States who is at least twenty-one years of age and who has been a permanent resident for one year in the state and six months in a county, if registered as provided by law, shall be an elector of that county. Provisions may be made by law for other bona fide residents of the state who are at least twenty-one years of age to vote in the election of presidential electors.” Pursuant to section 3, Article VI of the State Constitution, each eligible citizen shall subscribe to the following oath upon registering: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Florida, and that I am qualified to register as an elector under the Constitution and laws of the State of Florida”. Further, no person convicted of a felony, or adjudicated in this or any other state to be mentally incompetent, shall be qualified to vote or hold office until their civil rights have been restored, or their disability has been removed. [Fla. Const. art. VI, § 4(a)].

The United States Congress passed the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) on April 28, 1993. In order to comply with this law, the State of Florida had to make sweeping changes to its laws regarding voter registration. As a result, the 1994 Legislature passed the Florida Voter Registration Act, which is codified in ss. 97.032 - 97.105, of the Florida Statutes.

No provision of the Florida Election Code defines “legal residency”. However, the Division of Elections, the Attorney General’s office and Florida courts have consistently construed legal residence to mean a permanent residence, domicile, or permanent abode, rather than a residence that is temporary. [See generally, Op. Div. Elect. Fla. 80-27 (August 27, 1980); Opt. Div. Elect. Fla. 93-05 (June 23, 1993); Op. Atty. Gen. 070-97 (August 3, 1970); Bloomfield v. City of St. Petersburg Beach, 82 So.2d 364 (Fla. 1955); and Walker v. Harris, 398 So.2d 955 (Fla. 4th DCA 1981)]. In Bloomfield v. City of St. Petersburg Beach, the Florida Supreme Court held that the “establishment of one’s residence will usually depend on a variety of acts or declarations all of which must be weighed in the particular case as evidence would be weighed upon any other subject”. 82 So.2d at 369 (Fla. 1955). The Bloomfield court stated:

[W]here a good faith intention is coupled with an actual removal evidenced by positive overt acts, then the change of residence is accomplished and becomes effective. This is so because legal residence consists of the concurrence of both fact and intention. The bona fides of the intention is a highly significant factor.

Id. at 368. Therefore, legal residence will be determined on a case-by-case basis by looking to where a person intends to make a home permanent and to whether factual evidence exists to corroborate the intent.

The Department of State is responsible for prescribing a uniform statewide voter registration application which must be accepted for any of the following purposes:

- Initial registration
- Change of address
- Change of party affiliation
- Change of name
- Replacement of voter registration identification card

[s. 97.052(1)(a), F.S. (1997)]. The uniform statewide voter registration application must be designed to elicit the following information from the applicant:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Address of legal residence
- Mailing address, if different
- County of legal residence
- Race or ethnicity that best describes the applicant
- Sex
- Party affiliation
- Whether the applicant needs assistance in voting
- Name and address where last registered
- Social security number (optional)
- Telephone number (optional)
- Signature of applicant under penalty for false swearing
- Whether the application is being used for initial registration, to update a voter registration record, or to request a replacement registration identification card
- Whether the applicant is a citizen of the United States
- That the applicant has not been convicted of a felony or, if convicted, has had his or her civil rights restored
- That the applicant has not been adjudicated mentally incapacitated with respect to voting or, if so adjudicated, has had his or her right to vote restored

[s. 97.052(2), F.S. (1997)]. The uniform statewide voter registration application must also contain certain statements and notices. [s. 97.052(3), F.S. (1997)].

Federal law does not allow states to require social security numbers on applications. The Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-579) states that it is unlawful for any federal, state or local government agency to deny to any individual any right or benefit because such individual refuses to disclose his or her social security number. There is an exception for governmental agencies that were requiring social security numbers prior to the enactment of this law.

Social security numbers have been mentioned as being ideal voter registration identification numbers for the following reasons: (1) essentially everybody has a social security number; (2) each social security number is unique, as the first three numbers are based on the location of the person when the number was first requested and can only be followed by certain numbers or sequences of numbers; (3) social security numbers are difficult to make up, as they are not simply randomly assigned but are based on certain criteria; and (4) using a number that already exists is more advantageous than making up a registration number at the time of registration. [See,

Florida House of Representatives, Committee on Ethics and Elections, *Fraud in Registration and Voting*, (November, 1995)]. Nonetheless, since the social security number cannot be required, it cannot be uniformly used as a voter registration number.

Under current law, a voter registration application is considered complete if it contains:

- The applicant's name
- The applicant's legal residence address
- The applicant's date of birth
- An indication that the applicant is a citizen of the United States
- An indication that the applicant has not been convicted of a felony or that, if convicted, has had his or her civil rights restored
- An indication that the applicant has not been adjudicated mentally incapacitated with respect to voting or that, if so adjudicated, has had his or her right to vote restored
- The signature of the applicant swearing or affirming under the penalty for false swearing that the information contained in the registration application is true and subscribing to the oath required by s. 3, Art. VI of the State Constitution and s. 97.051

[s. 97.053(5)(a), F.S. (1997)].

Instructions to Electors at the Polls

The supervisors of elections shall provide at each polling place one instruction model illustrating the manner of voting with the system. The model must be located at a place which voters must pass to reach the official voting booth. [s.101.5611(1), F.S. (1997)]. In addition, each voter is to be offered instruction in voting by use of the instruction model prior to entering the voting booth and must be given the opportunity to operate the model. [s. 101.5611(2), F.S. (1997)].

Absentee Ballots

An "absent elector" is defined as "any registered and qualified voter who is unable to attend the polls on election day". [s. 97.021(1), F.S. (1997)]. A voter may request an absentee ballot from the supervisor of elections in the county where he or she is registered to vote. The request may be made by the voter, or a person designated by the voter, and may be made in person, by mail, or by telephone. [s. 101.62(1), F.S. (1997)]. Most absentee ballots are mailed directly to the voters who have requested them. However, some voters go to the supervisor's office to pick up their ballots. In addition, voters can have a designated individual pick up their ballot, with certain limitations. [s. 101.62(4)(b), F.S. (1997)].

After a voter has received and voted the absentee ballot, the voted ballot is inserted into a secrecy envelope. The voter then places the secrecy envelope inside a mailing envelope which is addressed to the supervisor of elections. [s. 101.64(1), F.S. (1997)]. Section 101.64, F.S., prescribes the form of the Voter's Certificate which appears on the back of the mailing envelope. The voter completes this certificate by swearing or affirming that the voter is a qualified elector in the particular election and that the voter is unable to attend the polls on election day. The voter must also swear or affirm that he or she has not and will not vote more than one ballot in the particular election. The voter

affixes his or her signature to the Voter's Certificate. [s. 101.64(1), F.S. (1997)]. Following the space for the voter's signature is a space for a witness to attest to the voter's signature. The witness must be 18 years of age or older and must swear or affirm that the elector signed the Voter's Certificate in his or her presence. In addition to a signature, the witness must also provide their address. [s. 101.64(1), F.S. (1997)]. There is no limit on the number of absentee ballots an individual may witness in any given election.

Section 101.64(2), F.S., requires the Voter's Certificate to be arranged on the envelope so that the signatures of the voter and the witness will be across the seal of the envelope.

Under s. 101.65, F.S., the supervisor of elections is charged with enclosing certain instructions with each absentee ballot. The instructions must clearly state that in order for an absentee ballot to be counted, it must include the signature and address of a witness, 18 years of age or older, affixed to the Voter's Certificate and that no candidate may serve as an attesting witness.

When the voted ballot is returned to the supervisor of elections, the supervisor may compare the signature of the elector on the Voter's Certificate with the signature of the elector in the registration books to determine whether the elector is duly registered in the county. [s. 101.68(1), F.S. (1997)]. Signatures of witnesses are not verified by comparing them to signatures in the registration books because their signatures are not necessarily on the books, since witnesses are not required to be registered voters.

The county canvassing board may begin the canvassing of absentee ballots at 7:00 a.m. on the fourth day before the election, but not later than noon on the day following the election. [s. 101.68(2)(a), F.S. (1997)]. To ensure that all ballots are accounted for, the county canvassing board compares the number of ballots in its possession with the number of requests for ballots received to be counted according to the supervisor's file or list. [s. 101.68(2)(b), F.S. (1997)]. If the supervisor has not already done so, the canvassing board must compare the signature of the elector on the Voter's Certificate with the signature of the elector in the registration books to determine the legality of the absentee ballot. [s. 101.68(2)(c)1., F.S. (1997)].

An absentee ballot is considered illegal if it does not include the signature of the elector, as shown by the registration records, and the signature and address of an attesting witness. An absentee ballot is not considered illegal if the signature of the elector or attesting witness does not cross the seal of the mailing envelope. [s. 101.68(2)(c)1., F.S. (1997)]. If the canvassing board determines that a ballot is illegal, it is so noted on the envelope and the ballot is not counted.

In 1975, the Florida Supreme Court retreated from earlier, contradictory opinions relating to absentee ballots. The Court in Boardman v. Esteve determined that insignificant omissions or irregularities appearing on absentee ballots do not void the ballots if the information is sufficient to show that the voter is qualified and registered and that there was no fraud. 323 So.2d 259 (Fla. 1975), cert. denied 425 U.S. 967, 96 S.Ct. 2162, 48 L.Ed.2d 791. In developing the rule regarding how far irregularities in absentee ballots will affect the result of the election, the Court held that "the fundamental inquiry should be whether or not the irregularity complained of has prevented a full, fair and free expression of the public will". The Court went on to state

that unless the absentee voting laws which have been violated in the casting of the vote expressly declare that the particular act is essential to the validity of the ballot, or that its omission will cause the ballot not to be counted, the statute should be treated as directory, not mandatory, *provided such irregularity is not calculated to affect the integrity of the ballot or election.* Id. at 265. The Court cited three factors to be considered by a canvassing board in measuring the effect of irregularities on the validity of absentee ballots:

- The presence or absence of fraud, gross negligence, or intentional wrongdoing;
- Whether there has been substantial compliance with the essential requirements of the absentee voting law; and
- Whether the irregularities complained of adversely affect the sanctity of the ballot and the integrity of the election.

Id. at 269. Therefore, after the Boardman decision strict technical compliance with absentee voting laws is not a requirement for a ballot to be counted by a canvassing board.

Administration of Oaths

For purposes of the Florida Election Code, the following persons are authorized to administer and attest to oaths except when the Code requires otherwise:

- Any commissioned officer in the active service of the Armed Forces
- Any member of the Merchant Marine of the United States designated for this purpose by the Secretary of Commerce
- Any civilian official empowered by state or federal law to administer oaths
- Any civilian employee designated by the head of any department or agency of the United States

[s. 101.665, F.S. (1997)].

Election Boards

Under current law, each member of an election board must be able to read and write the English language, and must be a registered qualified elector of the county in which the member is appointed. [s. 102.012(2), F.S. (1997)].

Election Code Violations and Penalties

The Florida Election Code specifies various penalties for corrupt or fraudulent practices relating to voting. Chapter 104, F.S., sets forth these penalties, which range from first degree misdemeanors to third degree felonies.

Homestead Exemptions

Under Article VII, section 6 of the State Constitution, “[e]very person who has the legal or equitable title to real estate and maintains thereon the permanent residence of the owner, or another legally or naturally dependent upon the owner, shall be exempt from taxation thereon, except assessments for special benefits, up to the assessed valuation of five thousand dollars, upon establishment of right thereto in the manner prescribed by

law". The phrase "legally or naturally dependent on the owner" refers to persons to whom the owner is under a legal duty to support, and to persons related by blood to the owner who are, by reason of disability of age, or non-age, physical or mental incapacity, coupled with lack of property means, dependent in fact for support and who have a reasonable expectation of support or some reasonable claim to support. [1939 Op. Atty. Gen. 438].

The term "permanent residence" is defined by statute:

Permanent residence means that place where a person has his or her true, fixed, and permanent home and principal establishment to which, whenever absent, he or she has the intention of returning. A person may have only one permanent residence at a time; and, once a permanent residence is established in a foreign state or country, it is presumed to continue until the person shows that a change has occurred.

[s. 196.012(18), F.S. (1997)].

Pursuant to s. 196.015, F.S., intention to establish a permanent residence in this state is a factual determination to be made by the property appraiser. The following factors are considered by the property appraiser in making a determination as to the intent of the person claiming a homestead exemption to establish a permanent residence in this state:

- Formal declarations of the applicant
- Informal statements of the applicant
- The place of employment of the applicant
- The previous permanent residency by the applicant in a state other than Florida or in another country and the date non-Florida residency was terminated
- The place where the applicant is registered to vote
- The place of issuance of a license tag on any motor vehicle owned by the applicant
- The address as listed on federal income tax returns filed by the applicant
- The previous filing of Florida intangible tax returns by the applicant
- The place of issuance of a driver's license to the applicant

[s. 196.015, F.S. (1997)]. No one factor is considered conclusive of the establishment or nonestablishment of permanent residence.

The application forms for homestead exemption require the taxpayer to furnish certain information to the property appraiser for the purpose of determining that the taxpayer is a permanent resident. Such information may include, but need not be limited to, the factors enumerated in s. 196.015, F.S. [s. 196.121(2), F.S. (1997)]. Any person who knowingly and willfully gives false information for the purpose of claiming homestead exemption is guilty of a first degree misdemeanor, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, F.S., or by fine not exceeding \$5,000, or both. [s. 196.131(2), F.S. (1997)].

The property appraiser must examine each claim for exemption filed with or referred to him or her, and shall allow the homestead exemption if it is found to be in accordance with law. [s. 196.141, F.S. (1997)]. On or before July 1st of each year, the property

appraisers must consider all applications for tax exemptions. If the property appraiser determines that the applicant is not entitled under the law to the exemption, a notice of disapproval, with the reasons therefor, must be served upon the applicant. The applicant may appeal to the county value adjustment board. The action of the value adjustment board is final unless the applicant files a proceeding for declaratory judgment in circuit court within 15 days from the date of refusal of the application by the board. [s. 196.151, F.S. (1997)].

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Voter Registration

CS/HBs 3743, 3941 requires each supervisor of elections to forward the name and homestead address of any person who registers to vote at an address other than that at which the person claims a homestead exemption to the property appraiser for the county in which the homestead is claimed. In order to implement this requirement, the bill requires that the uniform statewide voter registration application be designed to elicit the address of any property for which a homestead exemption has been granted.

Under this bill, providing one's social security number would no longer be an optional feature of the uniform statewide voter registration application but rather, the applicant would be required to provide the last four digits of his or her social security number. Therefore, under this bill the last four digits of an applicant's social security number is required in order for a voter registration application to be considered complete.

With respect to the statements and notices that the uniform statewide voter registration application must contain, this bill requires that a statement be provided to notify the applicant that any person who has been granted a homestead exemption in this state, who registers to vote in a precinct other than the one in which the homestead property is located, shall have that information forwarded to the appropriate property appraiser, which may result in the homestead exemption being terminated and back taxes assessed, with exception.

Instructions to Electors at the Polls

Under the bill, the supervisors of elections are required to post a notice at each polling place that sets forth the penalty for committing or attempting to commit any fraud in connection with voting; voting a fraudulent ballot; or voting more than once in an election.

Absentee Ballots

This bill changes what information is required to be included in the Voter's Certificate which appears on the back of the mailing envelope of an absentee ballot. Under CS/HBs 3743, 3941, an actual notice of the penalty for committing fraud in connection with voting (a third degree felony) would be added to the Voter's Certificate. The voter would also be required to provide the last four digits of their social security number in order for their absentee ballot to be counted.

One of the more significant changes that this bill makes deals with witness requirements. Under this bill, a voter still only has to have one witness attest to his or her signature. However, the witness must either have a valid United States driver's license or a state issued identification card, or be a registered voter in this State, a notary public, or other person entitled to administer oaths. Additionally, witnesses are restricted to witnessing no more than five absentee ballots per election, unless they are a notary public, or other persons entitled to administer oaths, or witnesses certified in accordance with s. 101.667, F.S. (a new section created in this bill). Presumably, it will be the responsibility of the local supervisors of elections to set up some type of mechanism, such as additional data bases, to keep track of how many ballots an individual witnesses.

To help ensure compliance with this measure, the bill requires the witness to swear or affirm that he or she has not witnessed more than five absentee ballots per election. Further, the bill requires a notice of the penalty for false swearing in connection with voting or elections (third degree felony) to be included in the Voter's Certificate where the witness affixes his or her signature. The bill also requires a notice of the penalty for witnessing more than five ballots per election (a first degree misdemeanor under the bill) to be included in the Voter's Certificate.

This bill provides that a witness to an absentee ballot print their full name, along with their signature. This bill also makes it clear that a witness must include their full name printed on the Voter's Certificate in order for an absentee ballot to be counted. In addition, witnesses other than notaries public, or other persons entitled to administer oaths, would also be required to provide either their driver's license number with state of issue, state identification card number with state of issue, or Florida voter registration number in order for an absentee ballot to be counted. Presently, Florida voter registration numbers are determined and assigned by the local supervisors of elections.

The bill also directs the county canvassing boards to declare an absentee ballot illegal if it does not include the last four digits of the social security number of the elector, as shown by the registration records, and the full printed name, driver's license number with state of issue, state identification card number with state of issue, or Florida voter registration number, if applicable, of the attesting witness. The bill makes it clear that an absentee ballot will not be considered illegal if the attesting witness has witnessed more than five absentee ballots in the election.

As stated previously, this bill provides a penalty for witnessing more than five ballots in an election. Any person who knowingly witnesses more than five ballots per election would commit a first degree misdemeanor under this bill, which is punishable by up to one year in prison and/or a \$1000 fine. Again, notaries public, persons entitled to administer oaths as provided by s. 101.655, F.S., or certified witnesses provided by s. 101.667, F.S. would be exempt.

CS/HBs 3743, 3941 creates a procedure by which persons may become certified to witness absentee ballots by the state executive committee of any political party. Under this certification process, the state executive committee of a political party may submit a list of persons certified to witness absentee ballots to the Division of Elections. The list must contain certain information: the witness's full name, address, Florida voter registration number and driver's license number. In order to become certified, the witness must also submit an affidavit that they have read and understand Chapter 104,

F.S. The certification would last for one year and the party would be required to maintain the records on the witnesses for two years.

Administration of Oaths

The bill would allow supervisors of elections, deputy supervisors of elections, or any employee of a supervisor of elections when designated by the supervisor, to administer and attest to any oath under the Florida Election Code.

Election Boards

Under CS/HBs 3743, 3941, persons who have preregistered to vote pursuant to s. 97.041(1)(b), F.S., would be able to be appointed to an election board in the county in which they are appointed.

Election Code Violations and Penalties

Sections 10 through 19 of CS/HBs 3743, 3941 simply increase the penalty for the following violations to that of a third degree felony, punishable by a term of imprisonment not to exceed 5 years, and/or a fine of up to \$5,000. In addition, these acts could also be punishable under the habitual offender statute:

- consideration for registration; interference with registration (subsequent violations would be second degree felonies) ; soliciting registrations for compensation; and/or alteration of registration application;
- unauthorized use, possession, or destruction of a voter registration card;
- false declaration to secure assistance in preparing a ballot;
- vote selling;
- violations; neglect of duty; corrupt practices on the part of any supervisor, deputy supervisor, or election employee;
- deprivation of, or interference with, an individuals voting rights;
- corruptly influencing voting (subsequent violations would be second degree felonies);
- threats of employers to control the votes of their employees;
- knowingly signing a petition more than once; signing another person's name or fictitious name; and
- assuming a name for voting purposes.

Homestead Exemptions

Under this bill, local property appraisers would be required to examine referrals from supervisors of elections of persons registering to vote at an address that is different from the address of their homestead exemption, to conform with the requirements of Section 1 of the bill. In turn, the property appraisers are directed to terminate a person's homestead exemption and assess back taxes, is appropriate, if the person is not entitled to the exemption under the law. In effect, the bill is simply providing an additional source of information for the local property appraisers in determining the "permanent residency" of those individuals claiming a homestead exemption.

C. APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES:

1. Less Government:

a. Does the bill create, increase or reduce, either directly or indirectly:

(1) any authority to make rules or adjudicate disputes?

No.

(2) any new responsibilities, obligations or work for other governmental or private organizations or individuals?

Yes. Local supervisors of elections and property appraisers will have the responsibility to implement the provisions of this bill.

(3) any entitlement to a government service or benefit?

No.

b. If an agency or program is eliminated or reduced:

(1) what responsibilities, costs and powers are passed on to another program, agency, level of government, or private entity?

Not applicable.

(2) what is the cost of such responsibility at the new level/agency?

Not applicable.

(3) how is the new agency accountable to the people governed?

Not applicable.

2. Lower Taxes:

a. Does the bill increase anyone's taxes?

No.

b. Does the bill require or authorize an increase in any fees?

No.

c. Does the bill reduce total taxes, both rates and revenues?

No.

d. Does the bill reduce total fees, both rates and revenues?

No.

e. Does the bill authorize any fee or tax increase by any local government?

No.

3. Personal Responsibility:

a. Does the bill reduce or eliminate an entitlement to government services or subsidy?

No.

b. Do the beneficiaries of the legislation directly pay any portion of the cost of implementation and operation?

Not applicable.

4. Individual Freedom:

a. Does the bill increase the allowable options of individuals or private organizations/associations to conduct their own affairs?

No.

b. Does the bill prohibit, or create new government interference with, any presently lawful activity?

Yes. Certain individuals are prohibited from witnessing more than five absentee ballots per election, which is currently a lawful activity. In addition, the bill imposes requirements as to who can witness an absentee ballot.

5. Family Empowerment:

a. If the bill purports to provide services to families or children:

(1) Who evaluates the family's needs?

Not applicable.

(2) Who makes the decisions?

Not applicable.

(3) Are private alternatives permitted?

Not applicable.

(4) Are families required to participate in a program?

Not applicable.

(5) Are families penalized for not participating in a program?

Not applicable.

b. Does the bill directly affect the legal rights and obligations between family members?

No.

c. If the bill creates or changes a program providing services to families or children, in which of the following does the bill vest control of the program, either through direct participation or appointment authority:

(1) parents and guardians?

Not applicable.

(2) service providers?

Not applicable.

(3) government employees/agencies?

Not applicable.

D. STATUTE(S) AFFECTED:

Amending ss. 97.052, 97.053, 98.015, 101.5611, 101.64, 101.65, 101.665, 101.68, 102.012, 104.012, 104.013, 104.031, 104.045, 104.051, 104.0515, 104.061, 104.081, 104.185, 104.24, 196.141, F.S.; creating ss. 101.667 and 104.125, F.S.

E. SECTION-BY-SECTION RESEARCH:

Section 1: Amends s. 98.015, F.S., relating to duties of supervisors of elections. Adds a new subsection to provide that supervisors of elections must forward the name and homestead address of any person who registers to vote at an address other than the address at which the person claims a homestead exemption to the local property appraiser for the county in which the homestead is claimed.

Section 2: Amends s. 97.052, F.S., revising the uniform statewide voter registration application. Requires an applicant to include the address of any property for which the applicant has been granted a homestead exemption and the last four digits of his or her social security number. Provides that the uniform statewide voter registration application contain a statement informing the applicant that any person who has been granted a homestead exemption in this state and who registers to vote in a precinct other than the one in which the homestead property is located, shall have that information forwarded to the appropriate property appraiser, which may result in the homestead exemption being terminated and back taxes assessed, provides an exception.

Section 3: Amends s. 97.053, F.S., relating to the acceptance of a voter registration application. Requires the last four digits of an applicant's social security number to be included in their voter registration application in order for the application to be considered complete.

Section 4: Amends s. 101.5611, F.S., relating to instructions to voters on election day. Adds a new subsection to require the supervisors of elections to post a notice at each polling place that sets forth the penalty for committing or attempting to commit any fraud in connection with voting; voting a fraudulent ballot; or voting more than once in an election.

Section 5: Amends s. 101.64, F.S., revising absentee ballot requirements as they relate to the voter's certificate and witnesses. Requires the voter's certificate to include notice of the penalty for fraud in connection with voting and the penalty for false swearing and witnessing more than 5 absentee ballots. Requires the voter to provide the last four digits of the voter's social security number and the witness to provide their printed full name and either their driver's license number with state of issue, state identification card number with state of issue, or their Florida voter registration number, when applicable. Provides that a voter's certificate must be witnessed by one witness who has either a valid United States driver's license or a state issued identification card, or who is a registered voter in the State of Florida, a notary public, or other person entitled to administer oaths. Limits the number of absentee ballots a person can witness to 5, unless the witness is a notary public or other person entitled to administer oaths, or witness certified in accordance with s. 101.667, F.S.

Section 6: Amends s. 101.65, F.S., relating to instructions to absent electors. Requires that the instructions include notice to the absentee voter that he or she must include the last four digits of their social security number and that witnesses must include their full printed name and either their driver's license number with state of issue, state identification card number with state of issue, or their Florida voter registration number,

when applicable, for an absentee ballot to be counted. The instructions must also include notice of the restriction on the number of absentee ballots that may be witnessed per election.

Section 7: Amends s. 101.665, F.S., relating to administration of oaths. Allows supervisors of elections, deputy supervisors of elections, or any employee of a supervisor of elections when designated by a supervisor, to administer and attest to any oath under the Florida Election Code.

Section 8: Amends s. 101.68, F.S., relating to the canvassing of absentee ballots. Requires county canvassing boards to declare an absentee ballot illegal if it does not include the last four digits of the elector's social security number, the printed full name of the attesting witness, and either the driver's license number with state of issue, state identification card number with state of issue, or the Florida voter registration number of the attesting witness, when applicable. Provides that an absentee ballot will not be declared illegal if the attesting witness witnesses more than five absentee ballots per election.

Section 9: Amends s. 102.012, F.S., to allow a person who has preregistered to vote in the county in which the person is appointed to be a member of an election board.

Section 10: Amends s. 104.012, F.S., to increase the penalty for engaging in consideration for registration; interference with registration; soliciting registrations for compensation; and alteration of registration applications from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 11: Amends s. 104.013, F.S., to increase the penalty for the unauthorized use, possession, or destruction of a voter registration identification card from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 12: Amends s. 104.031, F.S., to increase the penalty for false declaration to secure assistance in preparing ballot or for assistance in voting from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 13: Amends s. 104.045, F.S., to increase the penalty for vote selling from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 14: Amends s. 104.051, F.S., to increase the penalty for attempts to influence or interfere with an elector voting a ballot by any election official or employee from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 15: Amends s. 104.0515, F.S., to increase the penalty for the deprivation of or interference with voting rights from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 16: Amends s. 104.061, F.S., to increase the penalty for corruptly influencing voting from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony for the first conviction and a second degree felony for subsequent convictions. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 17: Amends s. 104.081, F.S., to increase the penalty for threats by employers to control votes of employees from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 18: Amends s. 104.185, F.S., to increase the penalty for knowingly signing more than one petition or signing another person's name or fictitious name to a petition from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 19: Amends s. 104.24, F.S., to increase the penalty for assuming a name in connection with the election process from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony. Includes a reference to the habitual offender statute.

Section 20: Creates s. 104.125, F.S., to provide that any person who knowingly witnesses more than five absentee ballots per election commits a misdemeanor of the first degree. Provides that this penalty does not apply to witnesses who are notaries public, persons entitled to administer oaths, or certified witnesses under s. 101.667, F.S.

Section 21: Creates s. 101.667, F.S., to provide that the state executive committee of any political party may submit a list of persons certified to witness absentee ballots to the Division of Elections. Provides that the list must contain the witness's full name, address, Florida voter registration number and driver's license number. Provides that in order to be certified, the witness must submit this information to the respective party along with an affidavit that he or she has read and understands Chapter 104, F.S. Certification will last for one year and the party must maintain the records for two years.

Section 22: Amends s. 196.141, F.S., to require local property appraisers to examine the referrals of persons registering to vote at an address that is different from the address of their homestead exemption. Property appraisers are directed to terminate a person's homestead exemption and assess back taxes, if appropriate.

Section 23: Provides an effective date of January 1st of the year after the year in which enacted.

III. FISCAL RESEARCH & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE AGENCIES/STATE FUNDS:

1. Non-recurring Effects:

Minimal. Can be handled with current staff.

2. Recurring Effects:

None.

3. Long Run Effects Other Than Normal Growth:

None.

4. Total Revenues and Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS A WHOLE:

1. Non-recurring Effects:

There will be costs associated with revising the uniform statewide voter registration application; absentee ballot Voter's Certificates and the instructions to voters that go out with absentee ballots, as well as providing referrals to the local property appraisers. These costs are indeterminate at this time.

2. Recurring Effects:

There may be costs associated with the prosecution of, and revenues associated with fines collected under, the new offense created under this bill and the increased penalties imposed by the bill, although indeterminate at this time.

3. Long Run Effects Other Than Normal Growth:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

1. Direct Private Sector Costs:

Potential fine for witnessing more than five absentee ballots per election of up to \$1000. Potential loss of homestead exemption for registering to vote in another precinct other than where the homestead property is located.

2. Direct Private Sector Benefits:

None.

3. Effects on Competition, Private Enterprise and Employment Markets:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF ARTICLE VII, SECTION 18 OF THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION:

A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

This act is exempt from the mandates provision of the Florida Constitution because it is an elections law.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. REDUCTION OF STATE TAX SHARED WITH COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES:

None.

V. COMMENTS:

In 1997, the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) issued a report on the impacts of the National Voter Registration Act. In this report, the FEC recommended to Congress that the states should require the last four digits of an elector's social security number on voter registration applications. Presently, only the state of Illinois requires the last four digits of an elector's social security number on their voter registration application. Two states request this information: Arizona and West Virginia.

By and large, absentee balloting had its post-revolutionary origin in the need to provide men under arms with some vehicle for voting. In the absence of federal law, states are not required to permit either registration or voting while the voter is absent from his or her residence. Therefore, absentee voting is generally considered to be a privilege granted by a state and not an absolute right. Notwithstanding, the Florida Supreme Court has recognized that times have changed since the absentee voting laws were first enacted in Florida in 1917 and regardless of the original reasons for the enactment of these laws, they must be interpreted in light of modern conditions. Boardman v. Esteve, 323 So.2d 259, 264 (Fla. 1975), cert. denied 425 U.S. 967, 96 S.Ct. 2162, 48 L.Ed.2d 791. As the Court stated in Boardman, "it would be naive of us to fail to recognize that the accommodation of the public has become the primary basis for the privilege of voting absentee". Id.

In light of the foregoing, there has been a trend toward easing requirements for obtaining and casting an absentee ballot. Indeed, organized absentee voter outreach programs have become a major element of many political campaigns. This increase in absentee voting does pose several problems for election officials. The most important of which is maintaining the integrity of the voting process. Unlike with polling place elections, absentee

voting does not readily lend itself to public scrutiny. As a result of this "invisibility", the process occasionally gives rise to suspicions that absentee ballots are somehow being used to manipulate election results. These suspicions are all the more likely if the absentee ballot count ends up deciding the election.

In deciding absentee voting procedures the question then becomes, whether to open up the absentee voting process in order to promote greater participation or whether to tightly restrict it in an effort to minimize opportunities for fraud. Historically, the answer to this question has been based on the voter participation rates and the risks of fraud within a particular jurisdiction.

Prior to the 1996 legislative session, Florida law required that an absentee ballot be witnessed by either a notary public or two witnesses 18 years of age or older. There was no requirement that the witness swear or affirm that the voter signed the absentee ballot in his or her presence. HB 233 (Chapter 96-57, Laws of Florida) changed this requirement to what is now current law - one witness who swears or affirms that the elector signed the Voter's Certificate in his or her presence. According to the staff analysis on HB 233, after the Florida Supreme Court's decision in Boardman v. Esteva, 323 So.2d 259, 264 (Fla. 1975), cert. denied 425 U.S. 967, 96 S.Ct. 2162, 48 L.Ed.2d 791, there was a great deal of disparity in the way the local county canvassing boards canvassed absentee ballots. In some counties, the canvassing boards followed the letter of the law and required absentee ballots to be properly witnessed, while other counties, relying on Boardman, counted absentee ballots which were not properly witnessed. Accordingly, HB 233 (Chapter 96-57, Laws of Florida) was drafted to provide more uniformity between the counties in the dissemination and canvassing of absentee ballots and to address concerns of fraud.

Because the Boardman court did not feel that the laws relating to absentee ballots expressed a clear legislative mandate, HB 233 clarified that an absentee ballot must be signed by the voter and witnessed by one person 18 years of age or older. In addition, the law made it clear that an absentee ballot must contain the signature and address of a witness to be valid. Apparently, requiring a witness to swear or affirm that the voter signed the ballot in his or her presence was considered as sufficient as requiring an absentee ballot to be witnessed by either a notary or two witnesses.

VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

Voter Registration

The committee substitute removed the provisions of the bill that required a person to register to vote in the county and precinct where their homestead property is located. Instead, the committee substitute simply directs the supervisors of elections to forward names and homestead addresses of those persons who register to vote at an address other than the address at which a homestead exemption is claimed. The notice requirement was changed, to conform.

Instructions to Electors at the Polls

This is a new section that was adopted. Directs the supervisors of elections to post a notice at the polls informing voters of the penalty for fraud in connection with voting.

Absentee Ballots

The committee substitute made a few changes to this section. Clarifications were made with respect to who can witness an absentee ballot. References to specific groups were removed and replaced with a reference to those persons who are entitled to administer oaths under the law. In addition, persons who have a valid United States driver's license or a state issued identification card were added to the list of allowable witnesses. The committee substitute also increased the number of absentee ballots a person can witness to 5 and the exceptions were retained and expanded to include witnesses certified by state executive committees of any political party. The committee substitute also clarified that witnesses must provide their full printed name and their driver's license number with state of issue, state identification card number with state of issue or their Florida voter registration number, when applicable, in order for an absentee ballot to be counted.

Administration of Oaths

This is a new section that was adopted. Expands the category of who may administer and attest to oaths for purposes of the Florida Election Code to include supervisors of elections, deputy supervisors of elections, or any employee of the supervisor of elections when designated by the supervisor.

Election Boards

This is a new section that was adopted. Allows a person who has preregistered to vote in the county in which the person is appointed to be a member of an election board.

Election Code Violations and Penalties

This section comes directly from HB 3941. Certain offenses under the Florida Election Code have been raised to the level of a third degree felony.

Homestead Exemptions

Under the original bill, any person who had been granted a homestead exemption in this state who registered to vote in a precinct other than the one in which the homestead property was located would have had their homestead exemption terminated and back taxes assessed against them (there were exceptions). The committee substitute significantly narrowed the scope of this section to simply require local property appraisers to examine the referrals from the supervisors of elections of persons registering to vote at an address that is different from the address of their homestead exemption. Property appraisers are directed to terminate a person's homestead exemption and assess back taxes, if appropriate under current law. This change eliminated the problems that were discussed in the original bill research & economic impact statement.

The effective date has remained the same.

VII. **SIGNATURES:**

COMMITTEE ON ELECTION REFORM:

Prepared by:

Legislative Research Director:

Dawn Roberts

Clay Roberts