

**STORAGE NAME:** h0163s1a.rpp

**DATE:** March 9, 1999

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
AS REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE ON  
Real Property and Probate  
ANALYSIS**

**BILL #:** CS/HB 0163

**RELATING TO:** Local Government Code Enforcement

**SPONSOR(S):** Committee on Community Affairs & Representative Crist

**COMPANION BILL(S):** SB 0946 (i)

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

- (1) COMMUNITY AFFAIRS YEAS 8 NAYS 0
  - (2) REAL PROPERTY & PROBATE YEAS 8 NAYS 0
  - (3) JUDICIARY
  - (4)
  - (5)
- 

**I. SUMMARY:**

This bill makes the following changes to current law:

- ◆ Provides that a special master has the same status as a code enforcement board;
- ◆ Revises the definition of “repeat violation”;
- ◆ Requires an owner of property subject to enforcement proceedings to provide certain disclosures to prospective transferees; and requires filing a notice with the code enforcement official regarding the transfer of the property as well as identifying the new owner and providing copies of the disclosures, within 5 days after the date of the transfer;
- ◆ Specifies that certain actions taken by a local government do not create continuing obligations or liabilities;
- ◆ Creates a presumption that certified, mailed notice was received if such notice is sent to the owner of the property at the address listed in the tax collector’s office for tax notices and any other address provided to the local government by such owner;
- ◆ Provides for continuation of enforcement proceedings under certain circumstances;
- ◆ Clarifies enforcement of orders imposing certain fines or costs;
- ◆ Clarifies the time period for posting certain notices; and
- ◆ Provides an additional exception to requirements to provide reasonable time to correct violations under certain circumstances.

The Committee on Real Property and Probate adopted 4 amendments to this bill. See the “Amendments or Committee Substitute Changes” section of this analysis for further detail.

This bill does not appear to have a direct fiscal impact on state or local governments.

II. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. PRESENT SITUATION:

**Section 125.69, Florida Statutes:** Provides that violations of county ordinances shall be prosecuted in the same manner as misdemeanors and allows the board of county commissioners of each county to designate an agent or employee as a code inspector whose duty it is to assure compliance with the county's code.

Before issuing a citation, a code inspector must provide notice to the violator that the violator has committed a violation of code or ordinance and must establish a reasonable time period (not less than 30 days) within which the violator must correct the violation. If, after personal investigation, a code inspector finds the violation has not been corrected, the code inspector may issue a citation to the violator. A code inspector is not required to provide the violator with a reasonable time period to correct the violation prior to issuing a citation if the code inspector has reason to believe the violation presents a serious threat to the public health, safety, or welfare, or if the violation is irreparable or irreversible.

A citation must include the following:

- Date and time of issuance;
- Name and address of the person in violation;
- Date of the violation;
- Section of the codes or ordinances alleged in violation;
- Name of the code inspector; and
- Date and time when the violator must appear in county court.

The provisions of s. 125.69, Florida Statutes, do not apply to the enforcement of building codes pursuant to ss. 553.79 and 553.73, Florida Statutes, adopted pursuant to s. 553.73, Florida Statutes, as they apply to construction, provided that a building permit is either not required or has been issued by the county.

The provisions of s. 125.69, Florida Statutes, **may be used by a county in lieu of the provisions of part II of chapter 162, Florida Statutes.** These provisions are an additional and supplemental means of enforcing county codes and ordinances and do not prohibit a county from enforcing its codes or ordinances by any other means.

**Chapter 162, Florida Statutes:** Part I, chapter 162, Florida Statutes, is known as the "Local Government Code Enforcement Boards Act" and defines the authority and duties of local government code enforcement boards. Counties and municipalities are authorized to create administrative boards with authority to impose administrative fines and other noncriminal penalties to provide an equitable, expeditious, effective, and inexpensive method of enforcing any county and municipal codes and ordinances where pending or repeated violations exist.

**Section 162.03, Florida Statutes:** Authorizes each county or municipality to create or abolish, by local ordinance, a code enforcement board. In addition, this section authorizes a charter county, a noncharter county, or a municipality to adopt by local ordinance an alternative code enforcement system which grants code enforcement boards or special masters authority to hold hearings and assess fines against violators of the county or municipal codes and ordinances. The local governing body may appoint one or more code enforcement boards and legal counsel for the code enforcement boards. In the case of municipal code enforcement boards, the members of such boards must be residents of the municipality and in the case of county code enforcement boards, members must be residents of the county. The number of members depends on the population of the county or municipality.

**Section 162.04, Florida Statutes:** Defines the terms used in sections 162.01-.13, Florida Statutes.

**Section 162.06, Florida Statutes:** Provides that the code inspector is an authorized agent or employee of a county or municipality who must initiate enforcement proceedings for the violation of a code or ordinance before a code enforcement board. Board members are prohibited from initiating any enforcement proceedings. In a typical case, a code inspector must notify a violator and give reasonable time to correct the violation. If the violation is not corrected within the time limit, the code inspector must notify the board and request a hearing before the board.

The board schedules a hearing in which written notice of such hearing is provided to the violator either by hand delivery or by certified mail, return receipt requested. The board is also authorized, at its discretion, to notice the violator by publication or posting. Should the violation be corrected, but recurs, or should the violation not be corrected by the time specified for correction by the code inspector, the case may be presented to the code enforcement board even if the violation has been corrected prior to the board hearing. The fact that the case may be presented to the code enforcement board even if the violation is corrected must be stated in the notice.

If a repeat violation is found, the code inspector is required to give notice to the violator but is not required to give the violator a reasonable time to correct the violation. Upon notifying the violator, the code inspector must notify an enforcement board and request a hearing. The code enforcement board schedules a hearing and provides notice. The case may be presented to the enforcement board even if the repeat violation has been corrected prior to the board hearing, and this fact must be stated in the notice.

If the code inspector has reason to believe a violation or the condition causing the violation presents a serious threat to the public health, safety, and welfare or the violation is irreparable or irreversible in nature, the code inspector must make a reasonable effort to notify the violator and is authorized to immediately notify the enforcement board and request a hearing.

**Section 162.09, Florida Statutes:** Authorizes code enforcement boards to impose fines upon violators and repeat violators. The fines are subject to fee limitations (\$250 per day for a first violation, not to exceed \$500 per day for a repeat violation). Additional charges may be imposed to include all costs of repairs. In addition, if a code enforcement board finds the violation irreparable or irreversible, a fine, not to exceed \$5,000 per violation, may be imposed. The amount of the fines are based upon the gravity of the violation, actions taken to correct the violation, and previous violations committed by the violator. An enforcement board may also reduce a fine imposed under this section.

A certified copy of the order imposing the fine may be recorded in the public records, which constitutes a lien against the land. By petition to a circuit court, the order may be enforced in the same manner as a court judgment by the sheriff, including levy against personal property. However, the order is not deemed to be a court judgment except for enforcement purposes.

These fines shall continue to accrue until the violator comes into compliance or until judgment is rendered in a suit to foreclose on a lien filed under this part (whichever occurs first). Three months after the lien has been filed, if it remains unpaid, the enforcement board may authorize the local governing body attorney to foreclose on the lien. No lien created under the provisions of this part may be foreclosed on real property which is a homestead, in accordance s. 4, Art. X of the State Constitution.

**Section 162.12, Florida Statutes:** Requires notice of violations be provided to alleged violators by certified mail, return receipt requested; by hand delivery by the sheriff or other law enforcement officer, code inspector, or other designated person; or by leaving the notice at the violator's usual place of residence with any person residing at the residence, subject to certain restrictions.

Notice may be by publication or posting. Published notice must be published once a week for 4 consecutive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in the county where the code enforcement board is located. The newspaper must meet the requirements of chapter 50, Florida Statutes, for legal and official advertisements and proof of publication must be made in accordance with ss. 50.041 and 50.051, Florida Statutes. Posted notices must be posted for at

least ten days in at least two specific locations: the property where the alleged violation exists and, in the case of municipalities, the primary municipal government office, or in the case of counties, at the front door of the courthouse. Proof of posting must be by affidavit of the person posting the notice and must include the date and places of posting.

Notice by publication or posting may run concurrently with or may follow an attempt or attempts to notice by hand delivery or by certified mail, return receipt requested. Evidence that an attempt to notice by hand or certified mail, along with proof of publication or posting is sufficient to show that the notice requirements have been met.

**Section 162.23, Florida Statutes:** Authorizes code enforcement officers to issue a notice to appear at any hearing conducted by a county court if the officer, based upon personal investigation, has reasonable cause to believe that the person has violated a code or ordinance. A notice to appear is a written order issued by a code enforcement officer in lieu of physical arrest. The person alleged to be in violation is required to appear in a designated court or governmental office at a specified date and time. However, if a person issued a notice to appear refuses to sign the notice, the code enforcement officer does not have arrest authority.

Before issuing a notice to appear, a code enforcement officer must provide a written notice to the person that the person has committed a violation of a code or ordinance. A reasonable time period must be established for the person to correct the violation. The time period must not be less than five days and no more than thirty days. If, after personal investigation, the code enforcement officer finds that the person has not corrected the violation within the specified time period, a code enforcement officer may issue a notice to appear to the person who committed the violation. A code enforcement officer is not required to provide a period of time to correct the violation and may immediately issue a notice to appear if a repeat violation is found or if the officer has reason to believe that the violation presents a serious threat to the public health, safety, or welfare, or if the violation is irreparable or irreversible.

**Case Law:** In *City of Gainesville v. Englert*, 716 So. 2d 817 (Fla. 1st DCA 1998), the city appealed a final judgment of a trial court which had dismissed the city's petition for an order authorizing the city to enforce the city's code enforcement board's order in the same manner as a court judgment, as authorized in s. 162.09(3), Florida Statutes. The trial court concluded that the city's only available enforcement method was an action to foreclose a lien. The trial court's ruling was reversed and remanded for further proceedings because s. 162.09(3), Florida Statutes, specifically authorizes the enforcement method sought by the city.

**B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:**

This bill provides that special masters, as authorized under the "Local Government Code Enforcement Boards Act", have the same status as enforcement boards.

This bill clarifies enforcement of code or ordinance violations under Chapter 162, "Local Government Code Enforcement Act", and Chapter 125, "County Government." More specifically, it provides that violations of the same code provision by the same person at different locations constitutes a repeat violation; specifies disclosure and notice requirements for owners of property subject to enforcement proceedings transferring the property prior to the enforcement hearing; and provides for continuation of such hearings and correction of violations by new owners.

This bill further specifies that repairs made by a local government to bring property into code compliance do not create a continuing obligation of the government to make further repairs or maintain the property, and also states that repairs made by a local government do not create liability against the local government if damages *to the property* occur as a result of such repairs, provided that the repairs were made in good faith.

CS/HB 163 revises and clarifies provisions requiring notice and authorizes code enforcement officers to immediately issue a notice to appear without reasonable time to correct any violations of an itinerant or transient nature, as defined by local code or ordinance.

This bill also provides that violations of the same code provision by the same person at different locations constitutes a repeat violation; specifies disclosure and notice requirements for owners of property subject to enforcement proceedings transferring the property prior to the enforcement

hearing; and provides for continuation of such hearings and correction of violations by new owners.

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?

New responsibilities are contained in the following sections of the bill:

**Sections 1 and 4:** Require the owner of a property, which is subject to an enforcement proceeding before an enforcement board, special master, or court, who transfers ownership of the property, to do the following:

- Disclose the existence and nature of the proceeding to the prospective transferee;

- Deliver to the prospective transferee a copy of the pleadings, notices, and other materials relating to the code enforcement proceeding;

- Disclose to the prospective transferee that the new owner will be responsible for compliance with the applicable code and with orders issued in the code enforcement proceeding; and

- File a notice with the code enforcement official of the transfer of the property within 5 days of the transfer of the property.

[Note: These sections apply to s. 162.06 and s. 125.69, Florida Statutes.]

**Section 6:** Authorizes hand delivery of notice to the manager or other person in charge at commercial properties.

[Note: This section applies to s. 162.06, Florida Statutes.]

**Section 7:** Authorizes a code enforcement officer not to provide a reasonable time period to correct a violation prior to issuing a notice to appear when the officer has reason to believe that the violation is irreparable or irreversible and that the violator is engaged in violations of an itinerant or transient nature within the jurisdiction.

[Note: This section applies only to s. 162.23, Florida Statutes.]

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

No

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

An agency or program is not eliminated or reduced.

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

N/A

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

N/A

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

N/A

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?

No

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?

This bill requires owners of property subject to enforcement proceedings to provide disclosure to prospective transferors under certain circumstances. This bill requires the owners of property subject to enforcement proceedings to file a notice with the code enforcement official of the transfer of the property, with the identity and address of the

new owner and copies of the disclosures made to the owner within 5 days after the date of the transfer.

5. Family Empowerment:

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

This bill does not purport to provide services to families or children.

- (1) Who evaluates the family's needs?

N/A

- (2) Who makes the decisions?

N/A

- (3) Are private alternatives permitted?

N/A

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

N/A

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

N/A

- 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:

This bill does not create or change a program providing services to families or children.

- (1) parents and guardians?

N/A

- (2) service providers?

N/A

- (3) government employees/agencies?

N/A

D. STATUTE(S) AFFECTED:

Sections 162.03, .04, .06, .09, .12, and .23, Florida Statutes, and Section 125.69, Florida Statutes.

E. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

This committee substitute provides nine WHEREAS clauses expressing the following:

- ◆ The intent of code enforcement procedures is to secure speedy compliance with local codes and ordinances while protecting the rights of property owners and the public health, safety, and welfare;
- ◆ The intent of the Legislature that the procedures for a special master or hearing officer was to be equivalent in all respects to the procedure for a code enforcement board;
- ◆ The acknowledgment of the substantial delays in code enforcement proceedings when owners of noncomplying property transfer ownership of the property to a third party requiring the code enforcement process to begin anew;
- ◆ The acknowledgment of the reluctance of local governments to use their power to repair unsafe, noncomplying property for concerns about future liability;
- ◆ The acknowledgment of the difficult, expensive, and cumbersome process local governments must undergo to bring foreclosure actions to enforce code enforcement liens, and the acknowledgment that collection of the liens as an assessment, and, therefore, part of the annual tax bill, would be more efficient;
- ◆ The acknowledgment that clarification is needed for the several alternative methods of code enforcement contained in chapter 162, Florida Statutes;
- ◆ The acknowledgment that creating a presumption of receipt of a notice sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, if properly addressed to the owner, greatly alleviates the current problem of violators evading or greatly delaying code enforcement proceedings by refusing to sign such notices; and
- ◆ The clarification that local governments are not required to prove that the posted notice was continuously present for the entire 10-day posting period, thus circumventing the actions of certain violators from frustrating the intent of posting by removing and secreting the posted notice before the 10 days had expired.

**Section 1:** Amends s. 125.69, Florida Statutes, clarifying the definition of “repeat violation” to mean a violation by a person who has previously been found to have violated the same provision of the code within 5 years prior to the current violation, *notwithstanding the violations occurred at different locations.*

Requires the owner of a property subject to an enforcement proceeding who transfers ownership of the property between the time the initial pleading was served and the time of the hearing to do the following:

- ◆ Disclose the existence and the nature of the proceeding to the prospective transferee;
- ◆ Deliver to the prospective transferee a copy of the pleadings, notices, and other materials relating to the code enforcement proceeding received by the seller.
- ◆ Disclose to the prospective transferee that the new owner will be responsible for compliance with the applicable code and with orders issued in the code enforcement proceeding.
- ◆ File a notice with the code enforcement official of the transfer of the property, including the identity and address of the new owner and copies of the disclosures made to the new owner, within 5 days after the date of the transfer.

Creating a rebuttable presumption of fraud when disclosure fails to occur before the transfer.

Providing that there is no continuing obligation on the part of a local governing body to make further repairs or to maintain property it has repaired to bring the property into compliance, and that repairing the property does not create a liability against the local governing body for damage to the property if the repairs were made in good faith.

**Section 2:** Amends s. 162.03(2), Florida Statutes, authorizing “special masters” to have the same status as an enforcement board under this chapter, except in s. 162.05, Florida Statutes, and if the context permits.

**Section 3:** Clarifies s. 162.04(5), Florida Statutes, clarifying the definition of “Repeat violation” to be a person who has previously been found to have violated the same provision of the code within 5 years prior to the current violation, *notwithstanding the violations occurred at different locations*.

**Section 4:** Creates s. 162.06(5), requiring the owner of a property subject to an enforcement proceeding who transfers ownership of the property between the time the initial pleading was served and the time of the hearing to do the following:

- ◆ Disclose the existence and the nature of the proceeding to the prospective transferee;
- ◆ Deliver to the prospective transferee a copy of the pleadings, notices, and other materials relating to the code enforcement proceeding received by the seller;
- ◆ Disclose to the prospective transferee that the new owner will be responsible for compliance with the applicable code and with orders issued in the code enforcement proceeding; and
- ◆ File a notice with the code enforcement official of the transfer of the property, including the identity and address of the new owner and copies of the disclosures made to the new owner, within 5 days after the date of the transfer.

Creating a rebuttable presumption of fraud when disclosure fails to occur before the transfer.

[Note: The bill as filed applied the above-listed requirements to sellers and purchasers of the property only.]

Allowing, in situations where the property is transferred before the hearing, that the proceeding is not to be dismissed, however, the new owner must be provided a reasonable time period to correct the violation before the hearing occurs.

**Section 5:** Amends s. 162.09(1), Florida Statutes, clarifying that there is no continuing obligation on the part of a local governing body to make further repairs or to maintain property it has repaired to bring the property into compliance. Providing that repairing the property does not create a liability against the local governing body for damage to the property if the repairs were made in good faith.

Amends s. 162.09(3), Florida Statutes, expanding and clarifying the current authorization of recording fines in the public records as liens, to authorizing fines plus repair costs to be recorded in the public records as liens. Requiring orders issued upon a petition to the circuit court to be enforceable in the same manner as a court judgment

by the sheriffs of the state, including execution and levy against the personal property of the violator.

**Section 6:** Amends s. 162.12(1), Florida Statutes, providing that if an individual either refuses to accept delivery of the certified, return receipt requested mail, or fails to claim the certified, return receipt requested mail after being notified by the post office, then no further attempts are necessary if the notice is sent to the address listed in the tax collector's office for tax notices, and at any other address provided to the local government by such owner. Creating an additional method of delivery of notice in the case of commercial premises, by leaving the notice with the manager or other person in charge.

Amends s. 162.12(2)(b), Florida Statutes, deleting the requirement for a property to be posted for at least ten days (requiring an inspector to make daily inspection to determine if the notice remains posted and if missing, re-post, beginning the 10-day period anew) and requiring the property to be posted at least 10 days prior to any deadline contained in the notice.

**Section 7:** Amends s. 162.23(2), Florida Statutes, adding an additional exception to the requirement for reasonable time to correct the violation prior to issuing a notice to appear, to include violators engaged in violations of an itinerant or transient nature within the jurisdiction.

**Section 8:** Provides an effective date of October 1, 1999.

### III. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

#### A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE AGENCIES/STATE FUNDS:

1. Non-recurring Effects:

None

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:

None

2. Recurring Effects:

None

3. Long Run Effects Other Than Normal Growth:

None

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

1. Direct Private Sector Costs:

None

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 bill does not require municipalities or counties to spend money or to take action that requires a significant expenditure of money.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

This bill is not anticipated to reduce the authority of municipalities or counties to raise total aggregate revenues.

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

This bill does not reduce the percentage of a state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

V. COMMENTS:

**Florida Association of Code Enforcement:** The Florida Association of Code Enforcement supports this bill.

**Building Officials Association of Florida:** The Building Officials Association of Florida supports this bill.

**Florida League of Cities:** The League of Cities supports this bill.

**Florida Association of Counties:** The Florida Association of Counties supports this bill.

**Note:** HB 479 by Representative Levine amends s. 162.09(2), Florida Statutes, by adding a paragraph (d) to the subsection. HB 479 authorizes certain counties or municipalities to adopt ordinances granting code enforcement boards or special masters authority to impose certain fines in excess of those authorized by law and specifies the limitations and requirements. This bill does not address the subject matter of HB 479.

#### VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

On February 17, 1999, the Committee on Community Affairs adopted the following amendments and subsequently approved a committee substitute. The committee substitute differs from HB 163 as follows:

**Amendment 1:** Replaces the word "purchaser" with "transferee" throughout the bill.

**Amendment 2:** Replaces the word "seller" with "transferor."

**Amendment 4:** Removes redundant language.

[Note: Amendments #1, #2, and #4, were offered by the Sponsor.]

**Amendment 5:** Amends s. 125.69, Florida Statutes, clarifying the definition of "Repeat violation." Requiring the owner of a property subject to an enforcement proceeding who transfers ownership of the property between the time the initial pleading was served and the time of the hearing to provide certain notice to prospective transferees and code enforcement officials. Creating a rebuttable presumption of fraud when disclosure fails to occur before the transfer. Clarifying that there is no continuing obligation on the part of a local governing body to make further repairs or to maintain property it has repaired to bring the property into compliance. Clarifying that repairing the property does not create a liability against the local governing body for damage to the property if the repairs were made in good faith.

[Note: This amendment was offered by Rep. Morroni.]

**Amendment 6:** Technical amendment for bill drafting purposes.

[Note: This amendment was offered by Rep. Gay.]

On March 9, 1999, the Committee on Real Property and Probate adopted 4 amendments to CS/HB 163. The first amendment, by Representative Crist, changed the word "served" to "issued" (on page 5, line 7) -- a citation is "issued", not "served". The second amendment, by Representative Crist, expressly provided that certain disclosures must be "in writing". The third amendment, also by Representative Crist, changed the word "violator" to "owner" (on page 6, line 7) -- thus the property owner would be charged with the costs of any government repairs. Amendment number four, by Representative Sublette, removed an inapplicable "Whereas" clause (on page 3, lines 1 through 5).

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**DATE:** March 9, 1999

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VII. SIGNATURES:

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