

STORAGE NAME: h0615s2.grr

DATE: March 13, 2000

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
AS REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENTAL RULES & REGULATIONS
ANALYSIS**

BILL #: CS/CS/HB 615

RELATING TO: Unclaimed Property

SPONSOR(S): Committee on Governmental Rules & Regulations, Committee on Financial Services, Representative Prieguez and others

TIED BILL(S):

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

- (1) FINANCIAL SERVICES YEAS 11 NAYS 0
- (2) GOVERNMENTAL RULES & REGULATIONS YEAS 7 NAYS 0
- (3) FINANCE AND TAXATION
- (4) GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS
- (5)

I. SUMMARY:

Chapter 717, F.S., authorizes the Department of Banking and Finance (DBF or department) to receive unclaimed property and charges the department with attempting to reunite this property with its owners. Such owners are often solicited and represented by heir finder agencies.

This bill makes a number of conforming and technical revisions to Ch. 717, F.S., to reference unclaimed property as opposed to abandoned property and to improve the syntax of the statutory language. The substantive revisions to the chapter provided in this bill primarily focus on establishing contract disclosure requirements and set percentage fee caps for agreements between apparent owners and their representatives (i.e., heir finder agencies). The revisions stipulate that all contracts between owners and their representatives must be in writing, must be filed with the claim form to the department, must disclose that the property is being held by a governmental agency, must disclose the type of entity which held the property last, must disclose the date of the holder's last contact with the owner, and must disclose the approximate value and type of property the owner's representative is seeking to recover. Heir finders have the option of adhering to the above contract stipulations or following imposed fee caps as listed below. The bill authorizes the department to make payments directly to the owner after deducting any fees as authorized in the written contract, and sets the following as percentage caps on fees:

<u>Claim range</u>	<u>Percentage Fee</u>
\$100,000 and above	7 percent
\$ 50,000 to \$99,999	10 percent
\$ 5,000 to \$49,999	12 percent
\$ 500 to \$ 4,999	20 percent

Fees for accounts less than \$500 in value are not subject to these percentage caps. In addition, these disclosure and fee caps are not applicable to contracts entered into between an heir finder agency and a corporation.

This bill does not negatively impact the General Revenue Fund. As a result of increasing the amount retained for the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund from \$3 to \$8 million, there will be a one-time \$5 million impact for FY 2000-2001 from the State School Fund which is used, in part, to pay valid claims. The department also estimates a private sector cost, and a corresponding private sector benefit of \$1.4 million annually. This represents the potential for reduced fees paid to heir finders by claimants, based on industry representations that average fees range between six and eight percent. The bill's effective date is October 1, 2000.

II. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. DOES THE BILL SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. <u>Less Government</u> | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. <u>Lower Taxes</u> | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. <u>Individual Freedom</u> | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. <u>Personal Responsibility</u> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. <u>Family Empowerment</u> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

For any principle that received a "no" above, please explain:

B. PRESENT SITUATION:

In Florida, reversion of property to the State is based on the presumption that there is no heir to assume the property upon the death of the owner. The State has jurisdiction to take charge of unclaimed property, and it is within the power of the Legislature to establish a reasonable time period for succession and to determine what shall become of unclaimed property and the conditions upon which it shall pass to the State. Escheat of unclaimed property to the State under appropriate statutes does not constitute a taking of property without due process of law in violation of the Federal Constitution as established in Cockrill v. California (1925) 268 US 258, 69 L Ed 944, 45 S Ct 490. Generally, all property, real and personal, and every right of property of any nature is subject to escheat to the State.

The Florida Disposition of Unclaimed Property Act (Chapter 717, F.S.), provides the obligations of the "holder" of property presumed abandoned and provides a mechanism for the disposition of such property. Under this Act, the department's Unclaimed Property Program is responsible for receiving property, locating the rightful owners, and returning the property (or its value, in cases of sold securities) to them. The department is authorized to make a one-time attempt to notify owners of unclaimed property. There is no monetary charge to owners for the department's notification or for the recovery of the property. Owners have the right to claim their property at any time.

Unclaimed property constitutes any funds or other property, tangible or intangible, that has remained unclaimed by the owner for a certain number of years. Unclaimed property may include savings and checking accounts, money orders, traveler's checks, uncashed payroll or cashiers' checks, stocks, bonds, other securities, insurance policy payments, refunds, security and utility deposits, and contents of safety deposit boxes. Banks, insurance companies, and other holders of unclaimed property must submit unclaimed property to the Florida Department of Banking and Finance. The Act establishes that all checks, drafts, money orders, bank deposits, stocks, as well as other intangible property, is "presumed abandoned" if unclaimed for a period of five years. Notable exceptions include a three year period for contents in safe-deposit boxes, a seven year period for money orders, and a 15-year period for traveler's checks.

Prior to 1996, the department was required to publish the names of owners of unclaimed property of all accounts \$50 or greater in value in their respective local newspapers. In 1996, the law was amended to permit the department to use alternative means (i.e., direct mailing and electronic media) for owner notification. In addition, the 1996 law increased the minimum value of owner accounts requiring notice and publication from \$50 to \$100. In

general, once the allowable time period for holding unclaimed property has expired, a holder is required to file a verified report with the Department of Banking and Finance by May 1 of each year for all property presumed abandoned the previous fiscal-year. Within 120 days of filing, a holder must mail a written notice to the "apparent owner" of such property valued at or above \$50. Willful failure to report unclaimed property is punishable as a second degree misdemeanor. All reported property must be paid or delivered to the department within six months after the final date for filing the report.

Within 13 months following the report of abandoned property, the department must attempt to locate the apparent owner of property valued at or above \$100 by publishing a notice in a newspaper of general circulation at least once. All proceeds from abandoned property are deposited by the department into the State School Trust Fund.¹ The department maintains a separate account (Unclaimed Property Trust Fund) with up to \$3 million for the prompt payment of verified claims. According to the department, sometimes there are bi-weekly requests of the Department of Education to transfer funds to the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund for the payment of claims.

The department contracts with two separate companies to assist in discovering and recovering lost property. During FY 98-99, the two companies accounted for recovering over \$14.7 million and of these funds recovered, the two firms netted aggregate fees totaling over \$1.6 million. The contracts provide for a fee based upon 13 percent of what the companies recover.

In addition to the efforts by the department to match people with their unclaimed property, there are private investigative agencies, commonly referred to as heir finders, that locate owners of unclaimed property and offer their services to recover the property for a fee. Heir finders generally contact owners and may offer a percentage-based fee, or a sliding scale fee, to complete and file the necessary paperwork to the department to process the claim.

According to the department, there is a delay of a few weeks up to six months from the date the department receives a report from a property holder and the date in which the property is received by the department. When the department receives the property, the property is matched to the report (referred to as "balancing" the report) and the department either places the report on the unclaimed property roll or pays the claim if a claim for the property is on file. Heir finder agencies routinely make public record requests of the department, seeking current reports of unclaimed property by property holders. Heir finders then take whatever information the department has at that time and research public data bases in an attempt to find owners to offer them collection services.

Florida law prohibits heir finders from targeting owners whose property has been reported to the state for a period of time so that the department has an opportunity to notify owners before the heir finders. According to the law, such contracts are unenforceable if they are made within 90 days after the department attempted notification, or made within 12 months after the property is reported to the department, whichever occurs first. Heir finders are required to disclose these requirements in at least 6 point bold type in their agreements to ensure owners are apprised of their rights. Since the department is not a party to the contract between heir finder and an owner of unclaimed property, the department is unable

¹The State School Fund is funded from many sources: the proceeds of all lands that have been, or will be, granted to the state by the United States for public school purposes, donations to the state when the purpose is not specified, appropriations by the state, the proceeds of escheated property or forfeitures, and 25 percent of the sales of public lands now, or hereafter, owned by the state.

to enforce the statutory time period restrictions, and since there is no requirement that heir finders print the date the owner's property was reported to the department, it is unlikely that an owner would know if the contract could be declared "unenforceable." In Report No. 99-13, dated November, 1999, the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), recommended that, in order to protect owners of unclaimed property from paying unnecessary fees for heir finder agreements, the Legislature amend s. 717.135, F.S., to provide that heir finder agreements are void, rather than unenforceable, if the agreements do not include the required disclosures, or if they violate the required time periods. The department was not able to enforce that provision simply because the department was not a party to the contract between the owner and the heir finder agency. The department addressed the consumer protection issue in this bill through disclosure requirements in the contract between heir finder agencies and owners, and through percentage fee caps.

One may perform a computer search for unclaimed property by a name search in 46 of the 50 states, as well as Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico, on the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators' website at <http://www.unclaimed.org/>. Only Hawaii, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, do not yet have an active web site dedicated to unclaimed property searches. To research unclaimed property held in those states or territory, the aforementioned website provides an agency address to contact.

C. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

The bill sets percentage fee caps and requires certain disclosures in written agreements between apparent owners and their representative (i.e., an heir finder agency).

A contract between an owner and an owner's representative must be in writing and must be filed with the department. The contract must disclose that the property is being held by a government agency pursuant to Chapter 717, F.S., must disclose the type of entity which held the property last, must disclose the date of the holder's last contact with the owner, and must disclose the approximate value and type of property the owner's representative is seeking to recover.

Heir finders have the option of adhering to the above contract stipulations or following imposed fee caps as listed below.

The bill authorizes the department to make payments directly to the owner after deducting any fees as authorized in the written contract and sets the following as percentage caps on those fees:

<u>Claim range</u>	<u>Percentage Fee</u>	<u>Possible Maximum Fee Range</u>
\$100,000 and above	7 percent	\$7,000 +
\$ 50,000 to \$99,999	10 percent	\$5,000 - \$9,999
\$ 5,000 to \$49,999	12 percent	\$ 600 - \$5,999
\$ 500 to \$4,999	20 percent	\$ 100 - \$ 999

Fees for accounts less than \$500 in value are not subject to these percentage caps. In addition, these disclosure and fee caps are not applicable to contracts entered into between an heir finder agency and a corporation.

Furthermore, the bill:

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- Eliminates the requirement that abandoned property reports submitted to the department be verified. According to the department this requirement was unenforceable, given the fact that the department receives unclaimed property reports from holders all over the country. In addition, the department believes that the requirement is inconsistent with the high level of volunteerism upon which this system depends.
- Places an affirmative duty on the part of a holder (one in possession of property belonging to another, a trustee, or one indebted to another) to use due diligence and reasonable and prudent methods to locate apparent owners, and clarifies when an account is “inactive.”
- Establishes a two year period of inactivity as a trigger to require the account’s holder to actively seek the account’s owner.
- Differentiates between “active” and “passive” attempts to contact owners of property and places an affirmative duty on the department to make *at least one* active attempt to notify owners of unclaimed property. This, in effect, permits the department to make as many active attempts it deems necessary and prudent under the circumstances.
- Changes the requirement that stocks and other intangibles must be sold prior to submitting the property to the department.
- Eliminates the requirement that interest be added to an amount which is the result of a claimant’s successful action asserting rights to escheated property.
- Increases the amount the department retains for the payment of claims and administrative costs, from \$3 million to \$8 million. According to the department, this will decrease the number of requests for fund transfers from the State School Trust Fund to the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund from bi-weekly, to six annually.
- Stipulates that a power of attorney relationship be established when an apparent owner of unclaimed property executes a written contract for services with a duly-licensed “heir finder” agency to file a claim with the department on behalf of the owner, rather than executing a simple assignment of rights. This may afford more consumer protection, as an assignment reflects a complete or partial relinquishment of rights, whereas a power of attorney relationship carries with it a duty to act in the interest of the owner. There is nothing in this section which expressly prohibits assignments, however.
- Substitutes the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property, and makes other technical changes throughout the chapter.
- Exempts Florida certified public accountants (CPAs) from regulation as private investigators under Chapter 493, F.S., when they conduct activities pursuant to Chapter 717, F.S., and expressly authorizes these CPAs to serve as owner’s representatives under Chapter 717, F.S.
- Provides an effective date of October 1, 2000.

This bill does not appear to affect the General Revenue Fund, however, the department estimates a one-time, negative \$5 million for FY 2000-2001 from the State School Fund.

D. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

Section 1. Amends s. 717.101, F.S., by adding a definition of “due diligence” as such relates to efforts holders of property take to unite property with a person. Also amends the definition of “last known address” so that unclaimed property owned by Florida residents but held by sister states will be reported to the department.

Sections 2 - 6. Amends s. 717.102, s. 717.103, s. 717.1035, s. 717.104, and s. 717.105, F.S., substituting the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and making other technical changes.

Section 7. Amends s. 717.106, F.S., substituting the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property, providing for other technical changes, and adding, as indicia of an active account in a financial organization, first class mail sent to the apparent owner which is not returned as undeliverable.

Sections 8 and 9. Amends s. 717.107 and s. 717.108, F.S., substituting the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and making other technical changes.

Section 10. Amends s. 717.109, F.S., making substitutions for the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and other technical changes.

Section 11. Clarifies s. 717.1101, F.S., where in the case of an owner of stock or other security of a business association which has failed to claim a dividend or distribution for five years, that the stock will not be considered abandoned until there has been five *consecutive* dividends not claimed by the owner after the five-year presumptive period. This section also makes substitutions for the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and makes other technical changes.

Section 12. Amends s. 717.111, F.S., substituting the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and making other technical changes.

Section 13. Amends s. 717.112, F.S., providing that intangible property issued by a government or governmental subdivision and held by an agent, is presumed unclaimed after one year. This section reflects a governmental entity holding property in an agency capacity and is different from s. 717.113, F.S., which presumes property held by a governmental agency or subdivision for one year as unclaimed, but not expressly held in an agency capacity. This section also makes substitutions for the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and makes other technical changes.

Sections 14 - 16. Amends s. 717.113, s. 717.115, and s. 717.116, F.S., substituting the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and making other technical changes.

Section 17. Amends s. 717.117, F.S., removing the requirement that the department verify filed reports of unclaimed property. This section also requires insurance companies to include the date of birth of the insured or annuitant to assist in proper identification of the individual. This section places an affirmative duty on the part of a holder (one in possession of property belonging to another, a trustee, or one indebted to another) to use “due diligence” and “reasonable and prudent methods” to locate apparent owners. The standards invoked by these terms replace the current requirement to notify property owners 120 days prior to submitting a report to the department. The holder is required to make at least one search for the owner within 180 days after an account becomes inactive. An account is “inactive” if two years have transpired after the last owner-initiated account

activity, the expiration date on the instrument or contract, or first-class mail has been returned as undeliverable. This section also makes substitutions for the word "unclaimed" for "abandoned" property and makes other technical changes.

Section 18. Amends s. 717.118, F.S., differentiating between attempts to contact owners of property which are "active" (direct contact) and those attempts which are "passive" (publication in newspapers, posting on the Internet, or television spots), and placing an affirmative duty on the department to make an active attempt to notify owners of unclaimed property. The department is also authorized to purchase items in order to promote public awareness of the program. This section also increases the number of times the department may attempt to contact property owners, from a single attempt, to "at least one" attempt (e.g., no limit). The department is released from the obligation to publicize names and items over \$100 in value. This section also makes substitutions for the word "unclaimed" for "abandoned" property and makes other technical changes.

Section 19. Amends s. 717.119, F.S., authorizing unclaimed property holders to remit funds through electronic funds transfer, when appropriate. Cash and coin items identified as having numismatic value are required to be remitted to the department in their original form. This section also makes substitutions for the word "unclaimed" for "abandoned" property and makes other technical changes.

Section 20. Amends s. 717.1201, F.S., substituting the word "unclaimed" for "abandoned" property and making other technical changes.

Section 21. Amends s. 717.122, F.S., clarifying that if, at a public sale of unclaimed property, the department determines that the cost of the sale would probably exceed the value of the property, and the department decides not to sell the property at that time, that the department may dispose of the property as it deems appropriate. In addition, this section clarifies that in the case of a sale of unclaimed securities, and the department authorizes a deduction of brokerage fees, the owner's account shall not be reimbursed from the State School Fund if the securities were sold at the owner's request. This section also makes substitutions for the word "unclaimed" for "abandoned" property and makes other technical changes.

Section 22. Amends s. 717.123, F.S., increasing the amount the department retains for for the payment of claims and administrative costs, from \$3 million to \$8 million. This section eliminates the reference to "a separate account" for the retention of funds to pay claims and costs of the program, and specifically designates the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund as the depository for all funds received under this chapter. All remaining funds, after the retention amount is achieved, shall be deposited into the State School Fund. This section also makes substitutions for the word "unclaimed" for "abandoned" property and makes other technical changes.

Section 23. Amends s. 717.124, F.S., authorizing Florida certified public accountants to serve as owner's representatives. This section also expressly stipulates that a power of attorney relationship be established when an apparent owner of unclaimed property executes a written contract for services with a duly-licensed "heir finder" agency to file a claim with the department on behalf of the owner, rather than executing a simple assignment of rights. This section also establishes a level of accountability in the claims payment process by authorizing the department to make payments directly to the owner after deducting any fees as authorized in the written contract. Payment of the fees shall be made to the designated attorney or heir finder agency. This section appears to narrow the type of claims payments that must be placed in an escrow or trust account by an heir finder

agency or law firm to only unclaimed securities and other intangible interests. This section also makes substitutions for the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and makes other technical changes.

Section 24. Amends s. 717.1241, F.S., simplifying the department’s responsibilities in the event of a dispute or conflicting claims by authorizing the department to remit the property to the owner’s representative or claimant who first filed a claim with the department (in the case of a dispute between the owner and the representative) or to the owner’s representative who first signed a contract with the property owner.

Section 25. Amends s. 717.1243, F.S., by requiring that all claims made by heirs of a deceased unclaimed property owner, whether the owner dies testate or intestate, must be accompanied by an affidavit stipulating that all funeral expenses, expenses of the last illness, and all other just claims, have been paid. Previously, it was sufficient to stipulate that there was enough money in the estate to cover expenses. In addition, the maximum aggregate amount of the unclaimed property covered by this section is increased from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

Sections 26 and 27. Amends s. 717.125, and s. 717.129, F.S., substituting the word “unclaimed” for “abandoned” property and making other technical changes.

Section 28. Amends s. 717.132, F.S., adding language specifying that all administrative fines collected by the department shall be deposited into the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund.

Section 29. Amends s. 717.135, F.S., establishing disclosure requirements and setting maximum fee caps. All contracts between owners and their representatives (i.e., licensed heir finder agency) must be in writing and filed with the claim form to the department. The agreement must disclose that the property is being held by a governmental agency pursuant to Chapter 717, F.S., must disclose the type of entity which held the property last, must disclose the date of the holder’s last contact with the owner, and must disclose the approximate value and type of property the owner’s representative is seeking to recover. Heir finders have the option of adhering to the above contract stipulations or following imposed fee caps as listed below. The following percentage caps on maximum fees are established:

<u>Claim range</u>	<u>Percentage Fee</u>
\$100,000 and above	7 percent
\$ 50,000 to \$99,999	10 percent
\$ 5,000 to \$49,999	12 percent
\$ 500 to \$ 4,999	20 percent

Fees for accounts less than \$500 in value are not subject to these percentage caps. Under current law, these disclosure and fee caps are not applicable to contracts made in connection with guardianship proceedings or in the probate of an estate. This section excludes contracts entered with corporations from these disclosures and fee caps. This section also removes language stating that the contracts shall be unenforceable if made within 90 days after attempted notification by the department or within 12 months after such property is reported to the department.

Section 30. Clarifies s. 732.107, F.S., so that the ten year statute of limitation for claiming property escheated to the state begins to run at the time the state receives the property. In addition, this section eliminates the requirement that interest be added to an amount which is the result of a claimant’s successful action asserting rights to escheated property.

Section 31. Amends s. 493.6106, F.S., expressly exempting Florida certified public accountants from regulation as private investigators under Chapter 493, F.S., when they conduct activities pursuant to Chapter 717, F.S.

Section 32. Repeals s. 717.137, F.S., an outdated section of Florida law.

Section 33. Provides an effective date of October 1, 2000.

III. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

	<u>FY 00-01</u>	<u>FY 01-02</u>	<u>FY 02-03</u>
Trust Fund	\$115 m	\$115 m	\$115 m

2. Expenditures:

	<u>FY 00-01</u>	<u>FY 01-02</u>	<u>FY 02-03</u>
Program Costs	\$ 2.6 m	\$ 2.6 m	\$ 2.6 m
Claims	\$ 47 m	\$ 47 m	\$ 47 m
Transfers to the State School Fund	\$ 71 m	\$ 53 m	\$ 53 m
One-time transfer <u>From the SSF</u>	<u>\$ 5 m</u>	<u>\$ 0</u>	<u>\$ 0</u>
TOTAL (See, B.2., below)	(\$ 10.6 m)	(\$5.6 m)	(\$ 5.6 m)

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

This bill is not expected to have any effect on local government.

2. Expenditures:

This bill is not expected to have any effect on local government. Inasmuch as the bill calls for a one-time transfer of \$5 million from the State School Fund to the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund, this is a pool of funds which is available to the department to pay claims as needed. The department believes that this one-time transfer will reduce requests of the Department of Education for transfers from the State School Fund to the Unclaimed Property Trust Fund from bi-weekly to six times annually.

Despite the apparent negative impact in the total for Revenue and Expenditures for FY 01-02, and FY 02-03, the department explains that the above numbers are approximate and do not balance due to the fact that (1) the entities which report the property usually

perform an audit of themselves on a tax year basis, and (2) the entities are not required to file reports to the department until May 1 of every year, creating an accounting "lag time."

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The department estimates that reducing fees paid by claimants to research companies (heir finders) by imposing percentage caps on fees which are based on a sliding scale of amounts to be recovered, may result in a savings to consumers of approximately \$1.4 million annually. This estimate is based on representations by industry spokespersons, who claim the average fee percentage is between six and eight percent.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

N/A

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

A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

This bill does not require counties or municipalities to spend funds or to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

The bill will not reduce the authority of counties and municipalities to raise revenues.

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

This bill will not reduce the state tax shared with counties and municipalities.

V. COMMENTS:

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

N/A

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

The department has existing rulemaking authority for these activities.

C. OTHER COMMENTS:

Comments by the Committee on Financial Services

In section 13 of the bill, intangible property issued by the state and held by an agent is presumed unclaimed within one year after the property became payable or distributable unless the owner makes one of several actions listed in the section regarding the property.

VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

On February 7, 2000, the Financial Services Committee adopted 13 amendments, and the sponsor requested that the bill be made into a committee substitute. The committee substitute differs from the original bill in that the CS version:

- Restores current statutory language which permits a civil or administrative court order to affect the statutory one-year period in which a court-ordered sum owed by a business organization has been left unclaimed.
- Increases from one to two years the time requirement that businesses must begin to look for unclaimed property owners after property is presumed unclaimed.
- Broadens the department's authority to make additional active attempts to locate property owners by changing the statutory language from a *single* attempt to *at least one* attempt.
- Authorizes the department to purchase items which promote consumer awareness of the unclaimed property program (in addition to a television and Internet presence)
- Redrafts section 24 of the bill addressing conflicting claims keeping the same effect but making it more easily read and understood. In effect, when ownership is established, the first claim to reach the department gets paid. If an owner's claim and a locator's claim reaches the department the same day, the owner is paid. If two or more locators' claims are received by the department the same day, the contract which was executed first will be honored.
- Clarifies that the owner/representative contract fee structure represents the *maximum* fee allowed, which permits locators to charge lower fees than the fee structure lists.
- Amends the disclosure requirements in the owner/representative contract so that the contract discloses that the property is being held by a governmental agency pursuant to Chapter 717, F.S., rather than the department. In addition, the maximum fee permitted for two property amount categories is increased by two percentage points: for property amounts ranging between \$50,000 to \$99,000, the percentage is increased from 8 percent to 10 percent, and for property amounts over \$100,000, the percentage is increased from 5 percent to 7 percent.
- Removes that section of the bill amending agency rulemaking authority and providing a waiver of liability for acts which conform with existing rules; leaves intact the current rulemaking authority of the department.
- Exempts Florida certified public accountants from regulation as private investigators under chapter 493 when they conduct activities under chapter 717, and expressly authorizes Florida certified public accountants to serve as owner's representatives.
- Removes an incorrect statutory reference and makes other technical, conforming changes to text.

On March 8, 2000, the Committee on Governmental Rules & Regulations adopted 2 amendments, and the bill was reported favorably as a committee substitute for committee substitute. The adopted amendments are as follows:

Amendment 1 - Facilitates procedures for the department to distribute unclaimed property under \$5,000.

Amendment 2 - Clarifies procedures with respect to contracting with heir finders and intangible properties, and provides the option of either disclosing source of unclaimed property *or* a fee cap.

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VII. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES:

Prepared by:

Michael A. Kliner

Staff Director:

Susan F. Cutchins

AS REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL RULES & REGULATIONS:

Prepared by:

Shari Z. Whittier

Staff Director:

David M. Greenbaum