

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Governmental Oversight and Productivity Committee

BILL: SB 1254

SPONSOR: Senator Constantine

SUBJECT: Deferred Compensation/Government Employees

DATE: March 1, 2005

REVISED: 03/08/05

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Wilson	Wilson	GO	Fav/1 amendment
2.			GA	
3.			WM	
4.				
5.				
6.				

Please see last section for Summary of Amendments

- Technical amendments were recommended
- Amendments were recommended
- Significant amendments were recommended

I. Summary:

The bill permits membership in salary deferral programs sponsored by the State of Florida through the Department of Financial Services by employees of governmental entities other than the state.

This bill amends s. 112.215, Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Workplace benefits provided employees of State of Florida agencies are generally free from federal taxation under Title 26, United States Code, the Internal Revenue Code.¹ The numerical subdivisions of Title 26 are used as popular citations for the specific benefit provisions:

Section 401(a) - Government-sponsored pension plans;

Section 401(k) - Corporate pension plans;

Section 403(b) - Tax-sheltered annuities for educational, health care, and research-based non-profit entities; and

Section 457 - Deferred compensation programs.

¹ A premium charged for a benefit is also federally tax-sheltered under the authority granted by s. 110.161, F.S.

The State of Florida deferred compensation plan, while not a pension plan, does permit an individual employee to defer from federal taxation a portion of gross income up to an annually indexed amount for placement in a fund or funds of a prequalified investment provider.² Account earnings are similarly sheltered from federal taxation until a distribution occurs.

The Chief Financial Officer of the State of Florida, through the Department of Financial Services, acts as the sponsoring agency. It competitively selects several investment providers along with a third-party financial administrator. The advice of the State Board of Administration, the investment entity for the State of Florida and the Florida Retirement System, is solicited before the approval of investment vehicles or products. The department engages in periodic qualitative and quantitative reviews of provider company funds and may terminate them if their performance falls below a designated level.³ Five of the six participating firms are insurance companies; the sixth is a mutual fund.⁴ Because these are salary deferral programs the participating employee bears all of the investment risk and is responsible for the payment of associated fees and costs charged by the provider. The fees and associated participant costs, or total investment management expenses, generally fall within a range between institutional, the lowest, and retail, the highest. The state plan operates under a long-term contract that was last amended in 1997.

Participant financial records are confidential and exempt from the public records access provisions of s. 119.07(1), F.S.

Each company provides an array of investment products permitting selection from fixed and variable annuities, time deposits, no-load mutual funds (purchased at net asset value), securities, and evidences of indebtedness. Products offered for sale require the provider company representative to have state insurance sales licensure or federal registration. Participants may select from as many funds or companies as they wish, provided the total does not exceed the annually indexed deferral amount set in federal law. Some companies also offer products that permit employees to make social or value choices about investing that reflect their personal sensibilities. One company permits a more interactive trading experience with a brokerage window that allows selection and active trading from a larger group of listed stocks and mutual funds not offered by any of the other provider companies.

Section 112.215, F.S., authorizes all governments in Florida to create such programs but restricts enrollment eligibility to the one sponsored by the Department of Financial Services to employees of State of Florida agencies.⁵

² Only withholding taxes on income may be deferred until withdrawal. Employee-paid Social Security and Medicare matching contributions still apply.

³ More fully described in the department publication "Investment Policy and Product Selection and Retention Policy."

⁴ The participating companies are AIG Valic; ING; Symetra ShareBuilder (formerly Safeco Life Insurance Company); Great West Retirement Services; Nationwide Retirement Solutions; and T. Rowe Price.

⁵ Persons paid from Other Personal Services budget categories and considered part-time, seasonal or temporary may still participate in this program even though they are denied eligibility for other State of Florida retirement programs pursuant to s. 216.011(1)(dd)2, F.S.

Since January 1, 2003, the State of Florida plan also permits provider companies to offer “Deemed Individual Retirement Accounts, also known as “sidecar IRAs,” that are supplemental to the main plan offerings.⁶ These plans permit additional contributions to the participant’s Roth or traditional retirement account that do not count against Section 401(a) contribution limits. Pending clarification of federal tax issues, none have been issued yet by the provider companies.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends s. 112.215, F.S., to permit participation in the State of Florida deferred compensation program by all units of government in Florida, not just state agencies.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Deferred compensation programs are participant-directed and the subscriber bears the full cost of the investment management expenses which vary among the provider companies and the selected funds.

There are 72,500 accounts in the state deferred compensation program with total assets of \$1.87 billion. Every one basis point (.01% or .0001) change in fees and expenses produces participant cost or savings of \$187,000. This would equate to \$2.58 on an average account balance of \$25,800 on an annual basis.

C. Government Sector Impact:

State universities have been reconstituted as non-state agencies but their eligibility for the state deferred compensation program was maintained under separate legislation.

⁶ Authorized by federal legislation, the Economic Growth and Tax Reconciliation Act of 2001.

Many local governments have their own Section 457 plans with varying types of fees and costs. As noted, above, the State of Florida deferred compensation program has a fee structure that is priced below retail but is more expensive than the institutional level. For comparison purposes, funds approved for inclusion in the Florida Retirement System Investment Plan, a Section 401(a) defined contribution plan, must be priced at the wholesale, or institutional level, by law.⁷

Two of the largest national local government-affiliated deferred compensation providers are the National Association of Counties and its financial partner Nationwide Retirement Solutions, and the International City Managers Association Retirement Corporation.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

A similar measure, House Bill 787, also expands the eligibility base but specifically names only counties and their employees.

Plan sponsors have fiduciary duties under federal law and proper execution of these duties imposes oversight and reporting requirements on them. Title 26 U.S.C. 457(g)(1) requires deferred compensation funds to be held in trust for the exclusive benefit of participants and beneficiaries. Plan sponsors also have other significant record-keeping and monitoring duties to these named parties that cannot be compromised. While government plans are exempt from the regulatory provisions of the Employee Retirement and Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA), the Florida Retirement System and other Florida government pension plans adopt its provisions in ch. 121, F.S. or the respective implementing special acts or ordinances. The most noteworthy features of ERISA are its three principal fiduciary duties for plan sponsors: loyalty, such that actions are solely in the best interests of participants and beneficiaries; acting with care, skill, and prudence; and discharging duties with an exclusive, uncompromised purpose.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.

⁷ Section 121.4501(9)(d), F.S., provides: "As a condition of offering any investment option or product in the optional retirement program, the approved provider must agree to make the investment product or service available under the most beneficial terms offered to any other customer, subject to approval by the Trustees of the State Board of Administration."

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

Barcode 273826 by Governmental Oversight and Productivity:

Modifies the employee population eligible for deferred compensation participation to include all governmental entities rather than only those of State of Florida agencies.

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