

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 505

Communications Services Tax

SPONSOR(S): Murzin

TIED BILLS:

IDEN./SIM. BILLS: SB 1296

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR
1) Finance & Tax Committee		Diez-Arguelles	Diez-Arguelles
2) Utilities & Telecommunications Committee			
3) Fiscal Council			
4)			
5)			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

In the 2000 Regular Session, the Legislature substantially rewrote Florida’s communications tax law. The rewrite was intended to provide that communications services be subject to a uniform statewide tax rate and a local tax administered by the Department of Revenue (DOR). Numerous individuals from business, state and local governments assisted the Legislature in formulating policy and drafting language. The new communications tax law was meant to replace the old tax structure with a simplified and revenue-neutral new tax code.

Taking effect in October 2001, the new Communications Services Tax Simplification (CST) law combined different state taxes, local taxes, and fees into a two-tiered tax composed of a State Communications Services Tax and a Local Communications Service Tax. The CST broadened, among other things, the taxable base of communications services by restructuring separate taxes and fees into a revenue-neutral communications services tax centrally administered by the Department of Revenue (DOR). Since the rewrite was so substantial, some provisions need further clarification.

The bill establishes a new procedural system for the DOR to administer resale certificates issued to dealers under the CST. This new procedural system is similar to the one DOR utilizes for sales and use tax. Additionally, effective July 1, 2007, the bill repeals the authority for local governments to adopt by ordinance or resolution “emergency rates” which exceed the statutory maximum rates allowed under the local CST. The bill also expands the list of prohibited taxes, charges, and fees that each public body can levy with respect to the sale or purchase of communications services.

The provision deleting the emergency rate authority has an indeterminate fiscal impact on local governments since it is unknown whether any of the local governments would have used the authority.

The bill has an effective date of July 1, 2005, except as otherwise provided.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

Lower Taxes: The bill deletes the authorization for cities and counties to adjust CST emergency tax rate.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

BACKGROUND

In the 2000 Regular Session, the Legislature substantially rewrote Florida's communications tax law. The rewrite was intended to provide that communications services be subject to a uniform statewide tax rate and a local tax administered by the Department of Revenue (DOR). Numerous individuals from business, state and local government assisted the Legislature in formulating policy and drafting language. The new communications tax law was meant to replace the old tax structure with a simplified and revenue neutral new tax code.

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PROPOSED CHANGES

The bill amends s. 202.16(2), F.S., to establish an alternative procedural system for any dealer who documents an exempt "sale for resale" transaction by retaining a copy of the purchaser's initial or annual resale certificate. In lieu of maintaining a copy of the certificate, a dealer may document, prior to the time of sale, an authorization number that will be provided by the DOR telephonically, or electronically, or by other means established by the DOR. The dealer may also rely on an initial or annual resale certificate issued pursuant to s. 202.17(6), valid at the time of receipt from the purchaser, without seeking additional annual resale certificates from the purchaser, if the dealer makes recurring sales to the purchaser in the normal course of business on a continual basis.

The bill defines "recurring sales to a purchaser in the normal course of business" as a sale in which the dealer extends credit to the purchaser and records the debt as an account receivable, or in which the dealer sells to a purchaser who has established cash account, similar to an open credit account. During any tax protest period, the bill provides that a dealer may submit, in lieu of a resale certificate, an exemption certificate executed by entities that were exempt at the time of sale, resale certificates provided by purchasers who were active dealers at the time of sale, and verification by the DOR of the purchaser's active dealer status at the time of sale. However, this alternative documentation may not be accepted in chapter 120, F.S., or circuit court proceedings instituted under chapter 72, F.S., relating to tax matters.

Further the bill amends s. 202.19(3)(a), F.S., specifying that the local CST tax authorized under s. 202.19, F.S., includes "and is in lieu of . . . application fees, transfer fees, siting fees, renewal fees, or claims for related costs" that a local taxing jurisdiction may impose upon dealers of communications services for the right to use or occupy public roads or rights-of-way. This change is retroactive to October 1, 2001.

Effective July 1, 2007, the bill deletes subsection 202.20(2), F.S., relating to local CST conversion rates, and it renumbers the remaining subsection that provides the levy and conversion rate for a discretionary sales surtax on the sale of communication services. This provision eliminates the emergency rate authority currently granted to local jurisdictions. Additionally, the bill deletes references to local CST rate changes by emergency ordinance or resolution contained in s. 202.21, F.S., dealing with notice to dealers of changes in rates.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amends s. 202.16(2), F.S., which provides that a dealer must document an exempt “sale for resale” transaction by retaining a copy of the purchaser’s annual resale certificate.

Section 2. Amends s. 202.19(3)(a), F.S.

Section 3. Amends s. 212.20(2)(a), F.S.

Section 4. Effective July 1, 2007, repeals subsection 202.20(2), F.S.

Section 5. Effective July 1, 2007, amends s. 202.21, F.S., to delete references to local CST rate changes by emergency ordinance or resolution.

Section 6. Provides that the amendment to s. 202.19(3)(a), F.S., is remedial in nature and intended to clarify existing law.

Section 7. Provides that, except as otherwise provided, the act takes effect on July 1, 2005.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None

2. Expenditures:

None

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

The Revenue Estimating Conference has determined that the bill will have a negative indeterminate impact on local revenues. The provisions amending and then repealing the authority of cities and counties to adjust CST rates by emergency ordinance have an indeterminate fiscal impact on local government revenues, since it is unknown whether the authority to adjust rates would be exercised.

Some local governments are charging fees that will have to be rescinded pursuant to the provisions of Section 2 of the bill.

2. Expenditures:

None

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

Some communication services dealers will pay lower fees and related costs to local governments.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

The provisions deleting the authority of some cities and counties to adjust CST rates by emergency ordinance reduce their authority to raise revenues. The Communications Services Tax was designed as a revenue-neutral tax and the legislature made specific findings that the legislation did not reduce the authority that cities or counties had to raise revenues in the aggregate, as such authority existed on February 1, 1989. Section 202.15, F.S. It is unclear to what extent, if any, the deletion of the emergency rate authority by this bill reduces the authority of cities and counties to raise revenues in the aggregate.

2. Other:

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE & COMBINED BILL CHANGES