

# 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: Government Efficiency Appropriations Committee

BILL: SB 554

SPONSOR: Senator Haridopolis and others

SUBJECT: Property Taxes

DATE: March 7, 2005

REVISED: 3/10/05

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Herrin	Yeatman	CA	Fav/1 amendment
2.	Fournier	Johansen	GE	Fav/3 amendments
3.				
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 allows a charter county to cap its ad valorem taxes in its charter at a rate that is less than the constitutional limit of 10 mills. Additionally, it allows a charter county to cap the growth in property tax revenues, but the cap may not restrict the annual growth rate below the lesser of 3 percent or the Consumer Price Index. A cap on the growth in ad valorem revenues may be exceeded if the county commission, by a super-majority vote, makes a finding of necessity due to emergency or critical need.

The bill also specifies how a charter county shall compute its millage rate when applying a cap on revenue growth. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the bill requires each constitutional and charter officer to comply with the growth rate cap in the county charter when preparing a budget to submit to the county commission. Finally, the bill limits county municipal service taxing unit millage to the amount specified in the ordinance that established such unit.

This bill substantially amends section 200.071 of the Florida Statutes.

### II. Present Situation:

#### Property Taxation

Ad valorem taxes or “property taxes” are a major source of revenue for county governments in Florida. In FY 2001-02 (the last year for which fiscal information is available) property taxes constituted 30 percent of county governmental revenue (\$5.7 billion ).<sup>1</sup>

The property tax is important not only because of the revenue it generates, but because it is the only taxing authority not preempted by the Florida Constitution to the state.<sup>2</sup> However, the property tax is not an unlimited source of revenue. The Florida Constitution grants property tax relief in the form of valuation differentials, assessment limitations, and exemptions, which includes homestead exemptions.

In addition, the State Constitution caps the millage rates that may be levied on the value of the property.<sup>3</sup> For counties, municipalities, and school districts, the cap is 10 mills. Section 200.071, F.S., in part, implements the constitutional millage cap for counties. Subsection (1) provides that except as otherwise provided, counties may not levy more than 10 mills, except for voted levies, against real property and tangible personal property in their jurisdictions. Furthermore, subsection (3) restricts counties from levying more than 10 mills for municipal purposes against real property and tangible personal property within each such municipal service taxing unit (MSTU).

### **MSTUs**

Section 125.01(1)(q), F.S., authorizes counties to establish municipal service taxing or benefit units for any part or all of the unincorporated area of the county, within which may be provided

fire protection; law enforcement; beach erosion control; recreation service and facilities; water; alternative water supplies, including, but not limited to, reclaimed water and water from aquifer storage and recovery and desalination systems; streets; sidewalks; street lighting; garbage and trash collection and disposal; waste and sewage collection and disposal; drainage; transportation; indigent health care services; mental health care services; and other essential facilities and municipal services from funds derived from service charges, special assessments, or taxes within such unit only.

This paragraph further provides that if ad valorem taxes are levied, the millage levied on any parcel of property for municipal purposes by all municipal service taxing units may not exceed 10 mills.

### **Charter Counties**

The Florida Constitution provides that the state be divided by law into political subdivisions called counties.<sup>4</sup> There are two general types of counties in Florida: charter and non-charter. Non-charter counties have home-rule powers as provided by general or special law, and may enact ordinances that are not inconsistent with general or special law.<sup>5</sup> Charter counties have all powers of local government not inconsistent with general law or with special law approved by

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the Legislative Committee on Governmental Relations (LCIR), from the LCIR database at <http://fcn.state.fl.us/lcir/cntyfiscal/corevprofsw.xls>.

<sup>2</sup> Article VII, Section 1 of the State Constitution.

<sup>3</sup> See Article VII, Section 9 of the State Constitution. A mill is defined as 1/1000 of a dollar, or \$1 per \$1000 of table value.

<sup>4</sup> Article VIII, s. 1(a) of the State Constitution. Ch. 7, F.S., specifies the physical boundaries of the 67 counties in Florida.

<sup>5</sup> Article VIII, s. 1(f) of the State Constitution.

vote of the electors.<sup>6</sup> This ‘special law’ constitutes a local charter, or a “local constitution” that defines the structure, powers and functions of county government. This charter may only be approved, amended or repealed by the county electorate. Approximately 80 percent of all Floridians live in one of the state’s 19 charter counties.<sup>7</sup>

### **Recent Efforts to Cap Local Budgets**

Numerous past local efforts to establish some type of millage rate or budget cap in county charters have been struck down by the courts as unconstitutional.

- In *Board of County Commissioners of Dade County v. Wilson*,<sup>8</sup> the Florida Supreme Court found that ch. 200, F.S., set forth the exclusive manner by which to set countywide millage rates. The Court held that a proposed voter initiative to set a county millage rate at four mills for Dade County for 1980-1981 was unconstitutional.
- In *Board of County Commissioners of Marion County v. McKeever*,<sup>9</sup> the Fifth District Court of Appeals found that chapters 129 and 200, F.S., contemplated the annual preparation and adoption of the budget and the setting of millage rates by a county commission. This Court struck down a Marion County ordinance that purported to establish a cap of .25 mills of ad valorem tax for the county transportation fund for a period of ten years.
- In *Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners v. Taylor*,<sup>10</sup> the Second District Court of Appeals found unconstitutional a voter approved amendment to the County’s charter to limit the Commission’s authority to adopt any millage rate which would result in more than a 3% increase in the total revenue generated over the total ad valorem taxes for the previous year. In so finding, the Court noted the charter amendment was inconsistent with the provisions of chapters 129 and 200, F.S. The Court struck down the charter amendment noting that Art. VIII, s. 1(g), State Constitution, provides that the counties operating under county charters shall have all the powers of local self-government not inconsistent with general law.
- Attorney General Opinion 2001-04 opined to the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners that a county could not amend its charter to place a cap on the annual increase in the county’s operating budget with the provision that the cap may be waived by an affirmative vote of at least six of the seven members of the board of county commissioners.
- Recently, in *Ellis v. Burk*,<sup>11</sup> the Fifth District Court of Appeals struck down a tax cap provision of the Brevard County Home Rule Charter. The provision prohibited the

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<sup>6</sup> Article VIII, ss. 1(c) and (g) of the State Constitution.

<sup>7</sup> Which are: Alachua, Brevard, Broward, Charlotte, Clay, Columbia, Duval, Hillsborough, Lee, Leon, Miami-Dade, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota, Seminole, and Volusia Counties.

<sup>8</sup> 386 So. 2d 556 (Fla. 1980).

<sup>9</sup> 436 So. 2d 299 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> DCA 1983).

<sup>10</sup> 650 So. 2d 146 (Fla. 2d DCA 1995).

<sup>11</sup> 866 So. 2d 1236 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004), *cert. denied*, 879 So. 2d 621 (Fla. 2004).

County from increasing its ad valorem tax revenue in any one year by more than the lesser of 3% or the percentage change of the Consumer Price Index for the previous year, over the previous year's ad valorem revenues without the approval of a majority of the voters at a general or special election. In the decision, the Court stated that "[u]nder our state constitution and statutory scheme, the power to limit a county commission's ability to raise revenue for the county's operating needs by way of ad valorem taxation is effectively and exclusively lodged in the [L]egislature."

### **Constitutional Officers**

Section 1 (d) of Art. VIII of the Florida Constitution provides for each county to elect a sheriff, a tax collector, a property appraiser, and supervisor of elections, and a clerk of the circuit court, except in those cases where the county charter or a special law provides for another manner of choosing the officer. These elected positions are collectively referred to as the constitutional officers. Section 30.49, F.S., provides for the preparation and adoption of the sheriffs' budgets by the boards of county commissioners. The budgets of the tax collectors and property appraisers are reviewed and approved by the Department of Revenue, as provided by s. 195.087, F.S. The budgets of the supervisors of elections for each county are prepared and approved as provided by s. 129.201, F.S. The budgets of the court-related duties of the clerks of the circuit court are approved by the Chief Financial Officer pursuant to s. 28.35, F.S.; the budgets for their county-related duties are prepared and approved as provided by s. 129.03, F.S.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

**Section 1** amends s. 200.71, F.S., to allow a charter county to cap its millage rate at a rate specified in its charter if the amount is less than the 10 mills allowed under s. 9, Art. VII of the State Constitution, or to cap the growth in its ad valorem tax revenues. However, a cap on revenue growth may not restrict the annual growth rate to a rate below the lesser of 3 percent or the Consumer Price Index. Also, a county charter with an ad valorem cap on revenue growth must allow for the cap to be exceeded with a finding of necessity due to emergency or critical need by a super-majority vote of the county commission.

In applying a cap on revenue growth, the county shall compute a millage rate that provides the same ad valorem revenue for each taxing authority as was levied in the prior year, "exclusive of any new construction, additions to structures, deletions, increases in the value of improvements that have undergone a substantial rehabilitation and that increased the assessed value of such improvements by at least 100 percent, and property added due to geographic boundary changes." This millage rate is subject to the revenue growth cap in the county charter. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, each constitutional and charter officer shall comply with any cap in growth for ad valorem taxes in the charter when preparing a budget for submittal to the county commission.

In addition, the bill prohibits a county, which provides municipal services through an MSTU, from levying ad valorem millage higher than the amount specified in the ordinance establishing the MSTU.

**Section 2** provides the act shall take effect January 1, 2006.

**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:

This bill allows county charters to be amended to cap the maximum millage rate or annual growth in ad valorem tax revenues of the county.

## B. Private Sector Impact:

If the electorate chooses to amend their county charter to cap the maximum county millage rate or annual growth in ad valorem tax revenues of the county, property taxes may be lower than they would be absent the cap.

## C. Government Sector Impact:

This bill caps the growth of constitutional and charter officers' budgets, notwithstanding other provisions of law governing these budgets.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

The county and MSTU millage limits are expressed as an "amount." It is unclear how an amount can be expressed as a tax rate or millage.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.



## VIII. Summary of Amendments:

### **Barcode 250324 by Community Affairs**

Requires a provision in a county charter that limits the annual growth in ad valorem tax revenues to be approved by a three-fifths vote of the electorate of the county.

### **Barcode 773904 by Government Efficiency Appropriations**

Removes requirement that constitutional officers' budgets comply with the growth cap adopted by a charter county.

### **Barcode 890410 by Government Efficiency Appropriations**

Replaces "amount" with "ad valorem millage rate" to clarify what is being capped in s. 200.071(1)(a) and (3), F.S.

### **Barcode 460470 by Government Efficiency Appropriations**

Corrects a typographical error.

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

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