HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/HB 1065 Annuities
SPONSOR(S): Insurance & Banking Subcommittee and Broxson
TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 1476

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Insurance & Banking Subcommittee	14 Y, 0 N, As CS	Reilly	Cooper
2) Government Operations Appropriations Subcommittee			
3) Economic Affairs Committee			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Section 627.4554, F.S., provides protections for consumers 65 years of age and older in annuity transactions. The section, enacted in 2004, adopted the National Association of Insurance Commissioners' (NAIC) Senior Protection in Annuity Transactions Model Regulation of 2003. In 2008, the Legislature amended the law to provide additional safeguards for senior consumers that are not in the NAIC's model regulation. In 2010, the Legislature also increased the unconditional refund period for senior consumers to 21 days and required insurers to attach a cover page, with specified information, to any annuity policy sold.

The bill amends s. 627.4554, F.S., to incorporate into Florida law the most current version of the NAIC model regulation on annuity protections (the 2010 NAIC Model), while maintaining most of the provisions adopted by Florida in 2008 and 2010. The 2010 NAIC Model, which has been enacted by 19 states, including California and New York, provides annuity protections for consumers of any age; insurer review of every annuity transaction; and clarifies that insurers are responsible for compliance with annuity protection provisions, even when they contract with third parties.

OIR reports that the bill will result in an increase in form re-filings, but did not indicate that this would require additional staff.

The bill is effective October 1, 2012.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

Annuities[1]

An annuity is a contract between a buyer and an insurance company that provides guaranteed payments over a period of time. Annuities are designed to meet retirement and long-range planning goals,[2] and are long-term contracts that typically restrict an investor's ability to access their money.

There are two basic types of annuities, fixed and variable. Fixed annuities guarantee both the rate of return and the amount of payout. Variable annuities do not guarantee the rate of return, which can fluctuate based on the performance of underlying investment options chosen by the purchaser.

Fixed and variable annuities are available as either immediate or deferred annuities. Typically, premiums for immediate annuities are paid in a lump sum amount, and the purchaser receives an immediate and regular stream of payments for a period of time. Variable annuities generally involve an accumulation phase, during which premiums paid experience tax-deferred growth, and the payout phase (annuitization phase) when the annuity provides a regular stream of periodic payments to the purchaser.

Fixed annuities are considered insurance contracts because of the mortality risk associated with payout options, and are regulated by state insurance departments. With a variable annuity, premium dollars are placed into a variety of investment options called subaccounts. Because variable annuities involve risk and provide no guarantee of principal, they are considered investments and fall within the jurisdiction of both securities regulators and state insurance departments. Agents selling variable annuities must hold a variable annuity license from the state and also possess a securities license and hold an active securities registration with a broker dealer. As investments, variable annuities also have accompanying prospectuses with disclosures regarding risk. All sales of variable annuities are subject to suitability standards established by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA).[3]

Equity indexed annuities are considered a hybrid of both fixed and variable annuities. They are classified, defined, and regulated as fixed annuities. In contrast to a traditional fixed annuity, which provides a stated guaranteed rate of interest, equity indexed annuities provide a minimum guaranteed interest rate in combination with an index-linked component. A guaranteed minimum interest rate may still create a loss of principal if the guarantee is based on an amount less than the amount of premium or initial payment. Investors who find it necessary to cancel an annuity to access funds prior to maturity of the contract may also lose principal through detrimental features such as surrender charges, hidden penalties, costs, fees, and massive multi-year surrender charges.

Determining whether an Annuity is a Suitable Investment for a Consumer: Suitability Issues

In 2003, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) adopted the "Senior Protection in Annuity Transactions Model Regulation" (Model Regulation), designed to help protect senior citizens when they purchase or exchange annuity products. In 2004, Florida adopted the Model Regulation by

[1] Background information on annuities derived from "2008 White Paper on Annuities," by Roxanne Rehm, 2008 Assistant General Counsel for the DFS. On file with staff of the Insurance & Banking Subcommittee.

[2] See "Annuities," U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission at hhtp://www.sec.gov/answers/annuity.htm (Last accessed January 27, 2012).

[3] The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) is the largest independent regulator for all securities firms doing business in the United States.

creating s. 627.4554, F.S. This section provides protection for senior citizens in annuity transactions, requiring insurance companies and agents offering these products to clearly document the basis for selling the product, including consideration of a senior citizen's financial and tax status, as well as investment objectives. In 2006, the NAIC removed the age restriction from its Model Regulation, extending annuity protections to consumers of any age.

In 2008, Florida amended s. 627.4554, F.S. Although the legislation did not incorporate the 2006 change to the Model Regulation, it provided additional safeguards for senior consumers, including:

- Requiring insurers and agents to have an "objectively" reasonable basis for recommending a particular annuity product.
- Specifying the minimum information that an insurer or agent must obtain and use to determine the suitability of a recommendation before executing a purchase or exchange of a policy.
- Requiring suitability information obtained from a consumer to be recorded on a Department of Financial Services' (DFS) form, which must be completed and signed by the applicant and the agent, with a copy given to the consumer.
- Requiring the insurer or agent, in exchange situations, to provide the consumer with specified information, on a DFS form, concerning differences between the policy being recommended for purchase and an existing policy that would be surrendered or replaced.
- Increasing the "free look" refund period.
- Requiring insurers to establish standards for product training.
- Authorizing the Office of Insurance Regulation to rescind an annuity and provide a full refund of premiums paid or the accumulation value, whichever is greater, when a consumer is harmed by a violation of the suitability statute.

In 2010, the Legislature also increased the unconditional refund period for senior consumers in annuity transactions to 21 days and required insurers to attach a cover page with specified information, including notice of the refund period, contact information, and the name of the issuing company and selling agent, to each annuity sold.[4]

In March 2010, the NAIC revised its Model Regulation to clarify that insurers are responsible for compliance with the model's requirements, even if the insurer contracts with a third party; requiring insurers to review all annuity transactions; and establishing both general and product-specific training requirements for insurance agents.

To date, 19 states, including New York and California, have adopted the 2010 version of the NAIC's Model Regulation.

Effect of the Bill

The bill amends s. 627.4554, F.S., to incorporate into Florida law the most recent version of the NAIC's Model Regulation on protections in annuity transactions. The bill makes the following changes to existing law:

- Extends the protections currently afforded to senior citizens in annuity transactions to consumers of any age and sophistication level.
- Revises definitions; defines additional terms relevant to annuity transactions, including Annuity, FINRA (Financial Regulatory Authority), Recommendation, Replacement, and Suitability Information.
- Requires insurers or agents to have reasonable grounds (as opposed to "objectively" reasonable grounds under current law) for believing that recommendations made to a consumer to purchase, exchange, or replace annuity products are suitable to the consumer's circumstances and that there are reasonable grounds to believe that:
    - The consumer has been reasonably informed of specified information.
    - The consumer would benefit from the product recommended.
    - That the annuity as a whole (or the exchange or replacement of a policy) is suitable for the consumer.

[4] Section 626.99, F.S.

- Prohibits agents from dissuading, or attempting to dissuade a consumer from truthfully responding to an insurer's request for confirmation of suitability information, or from cooperating with the investigation of a complaint.
- Clarifies that compliance with FINRA requirements constitutes compliance with s. 627.4554, F.S.
- Provides that insurers are responsible for ensuring compliance with the law.
- Requires insurers to establish a supervision system that is reasonably designed to achieve insurer and agent compliance with this section, which must include procedures for the review of each recommendation before issuance of an annuity; establishing standards for agent product training; and annual reports to senior managers to determine the effectiveness of the supervision system. Permits insurers to contract with a third party as to any aspect of the supervision system, but provides that insurers remain responsible for compliance.
- Authorizes the OIR to order insurers to take reasonably appropriate corrective action for insurer or agent misconduct that harms a consumer. However, the bill removes from current law, language that specifically authorizes the OIR to rescind an annuity and provide a full refund of premiums paid or the accumulation value, whichever is greater, when a consumer is harmed by a violation of the suitability statute.

The bill also amends s. 626.99, F.S., to increase the unconditional refund period to 21 days for all consumers of annuities.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amends s. 627.4554, F.S., to incorporate the 2010 amendments to NAIC's model regulation on protections in annuity transactions into Florida law.

Section 2. Amends s. 626.99, F.S., to provide a 21 day unconditional refund period for all purchasers of annuities.

Section 3. Provides an effective date of October 1, 2012.

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:

   None.

2. Expenditures:

   None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

To the extent that the bill provides for enactment of the most recent version of the NAIC model regulation on annuity protections, adopted by the NAIC in 2010 and enacted in 19 states to date, it will bring further uniformity to the sale of annuity products by insurers conducting business in multiple states.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

OIR reports that the bill will result in an increase in form re-filings, but did not indicate that this would require additional staff.[5]

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable. This bill does not appear to: require counties or municipalities to spend funds or take an action requiring the expenditure of funds; reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenues in the aggregate; or, reduce the percentage of a state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

2. Other:

To the extent that the bill extends the protections of s. 627.4554, F.S., to all purchasers of annuities and establishes additional protections, it will offer enhanced protection to all purchasers of annuities in Florida.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

Authorizes the DFS to adopt rules to administer s. 627.4554, F.S.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

On January 30, 2012, the Insurance & Banking Subcommittee adopted 11 amendments to HB 1065. The amendments:

- Made technical changes to clarify that: transactions in compliance with FINRA requirements satisfy the requirements of s. 627.4554, F.S; s. 627.4554, F.S., does not apply to direct response solicitations where there is no recommendation by an agent based on information collected from the consumer; and that the insurer has certain duties if there is no agent involved.
- Corrected a drafting error.
- Extended the unconditional refund period to all consumers of annuities to 21 days after the date of purchase.
- Restored current law to require insurers and agents to use the Department of Financial Services' (DFS) form currently in effect to document suitability information obtained from customers in annuity transactions.
- Restored current law to require insurers and agents, in transactions involving the exchange of annuities, to use the DFS form currently in effect to explain to the consumer the differences between products recommended for purchase and those that will be exchanged or surrendered.
- Removed new continuing education requirements for agents that sell annuities.
- Restored current law to require that a cover page be attached to all annuity policies, which contains specified information.
- Restored current law to limit the surrender charges or deferred sales charges for withdrawal of money from an annuity that applies to senior consumers.
- Changed the effective date of the bill to October 1, 2012.

[5] OIR analysis of HB 1065 dated January 18, 2012, on file with staff of the Insurance & Banking Subcommittee.