

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

BILL #:	CS/CS/HB 1127	FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:	
SPONSOR(S):	Appropriations Committee; Insurance & Banking Subcommittee; Sullivan	117 Y's	0 N's
COMPANION BILLS:	CS/CS/SB 1306	GOVERNOR'S ACTION:	Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/HB 1127 passed the House on April 22, 2015, and subsequently passed the Senate on April 24, 2015.

The Department of Financial Services (DFS) is responsible for regulating certain insurance activities under the Insurance Code (such as eligibility and conduct of insurance agents and agencies and policing fraud). The DFS Division of Insurance Fraud (DIF) is charged with investigating fraudulent insurance activities and employs sworn law enforcement investigators with arrest powers. While health care facilities operating in the state are generally licensed and regulated by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), the DIF has the authority to police fraudulent insurance claims and activities that may occur in health care facilities.

Health care clinics are regulated under the Health Care Clinic Act. The Act's purpose is to "provide for the licensure, establishment, and enforcement of basic standards for health care clinics and to provide administrative oversight by the Agency for Health Care Administration." A "clinic" under the act is defined as "an entity where health care services are provided to individuals and which tenders charges for reimbursement for such services, including a mobile clinic and a portable equipment provider." However, law provides a number of exemptions from licensure for health care clinics that are regulated by other provisions of law.

The charges and reimbursement claims made by an unlicensed health care clinic operating in violation of statute are unlawful, noncompensable, and unenforceable. The bill expressly identifies such prohibited charging and reimbursement claiming as theft, regardless of whether payments are made.

Section 400.993, F.S., and subsection 400.9935(4), F.S., establish offenses related to unlicensed clinic activities that are punishable as a felony. The bill combines these provisions into a single subsection of statute and establishes an additional felony offense for knowingly failing to update certain required information within 21 days. The bill amends the Criminal Punishment Code to reflect the penalty changes made by the bill.

The DIF is authorized to establish a direct-support organization, which is known as the Automobile Insurance Fraud Strike Force (Strike Force), to support the prosecution, investigation, and prevention of motor vehicle insurance fraud. The bill repeals the statute authorizing the Strike Force. It removes cross-references related to the Strike Force and eliminates the DFS' rulemaking authority related to the Strike Force.

The Criminal Justice Impact Conference (CJIC) met April 1, 2015, and determined this bill will have an insignificant impact on state prison beds, which equals less than 10 inmates, annually.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 16, 2015, ch. 2015-179, L.O.F., and will become effective on October 1, 2015.

This document does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill sponsor or House of Representatives.

STORAGE NAME: h1127z1.IBS

DATE: June 17, 2015

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

The Department of Financial Services (DFS) is responsible for regulating certain insurance activities under the Insurance Code¹ (such as eligibility and conduct of insurance agents and agencies and policing fraud). The Financial Services Commission and Office of Insurance Regulation also have responsibilities concerning insurance related to licensing insurance companies, ratemaking, and market conduct, among other things. The DFS is required to maintain a Division of Insurance Fraud (DIF).² The DIF is charged with investigating all manner of fraudulent insurance activities and employs armed law enforcement officers with statewide authority and arrest powers.³ Annual reports of the DIF and other public record information, including summaries of fraud referral, investigation, arrests and convictions, are available on the DIF's web site.⁴ While the many types of health care facilities operating in the state are generally licensed and regulated by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), the DIF has the authority to police fraudulent insurance claims and activities that may occur among health care facilities.

Health Care Clinic Licensing, Charges by Unlicensed Clinics, and Criminal Penalties

Licensing

Health care clinics are regulated under the Health Care Clinic Act.⁵ The purpose of the Act is to "provide for the licensure, establishment, and enforcement of basic standards for health care clinics and to provide administrative oversight by the Agency for Health Care Administration."⁶ A "clinic" under the act is defined as "an entity where health care services are provided to individuals and which tenders charges for reimbursement for such services, including a mobile clinic and a portable equipment provider."⁷ However, the law provides a number of exemptions from licensure for health care clinics that are regulated by other provision of law.⁸

Charges by Unlicensed Clinics

The charges and reimbursement claims made by a health care clinic that is required to be licensed under sections 400.990-995, F.S., but is not licensed or is operating in violation of the referenced statutes, are unlawful, noncompensable, and unenforceable. In addition, the bill applies this standard whether or not the charge or claim is paid. The bill expressly defines the making of such charges or claims as theft within the meaning of s. 812.014, F.S., and subject to the punishments found therein.⁹ Depending upon the circumstances, theft is punished as a misdemeanor of the first or second degree or a felony of the first, second, or third degree.¹⁰ This does not establish a new criminal offense; rather, it makes it plain that such activities are criminal theft.

¹ chs. 624-632, 634, 635, 636, 641, 642, 648, and 651 constitute the Florida Insurance Code. s. 624.01, F.S.

² s. 20.121(2)(e), F.S.

³ s. 626.989, F.S.

⁴ Insurance Fraud, <http://www.myfloridacfo.com/division/fraud/> (last visited Apr. 10, 2015).

⁵ Part X, chapter 400, F.S.

⁶ s. 400.990(2), F.S.

⁷ s. 400.9905(4), F.S.

⁸ s. 400.9905(4)(a)-(n), F.S., and s. 627.736(5)(h), F.S.

⁹ Section 812.014(1), F.S., defines theft as follows:

(1) A person commits theft if he or she knowingly obtains or uses, or endeavors to obtain or to use, the property of another with intent to, either temporarily or permanently:

(a) Deprive the other person of a right to the property or a benefit from the property.

(b) Appropriate the property to his or her own use or to the use of any person not entitled to the use of the property.

¹⁰ s. 812.014, F.S.

Criminal Penalties

Section 400.993, F.S., and subsection 400.9935(4), F.S., establish offenses related to unlicensed clinic activities that are punishable as a felony. A person who offers or advertises unlicensed health care services, performs unlicensed health care clinic services, or owns, operates, or maintains an unlicensed health care clinic, as specified in s. 408.812, F.S., commits a felony of the third degree.¹¹ A second or subsequent such offense is a second degree felony.¹² Also, knowingly filing false or misleading information in a license application or renewal application for health clinic licensure is a third degree felony. To help identify unlicensed clinic activity, health care providers, who know of an unlicensed health care clinic, are required to report such clinics to the AHCA.¹³ Those providers that fail to do so, when they knew or should have known that the clinic was unlicensed, must be reported to their licensing board.¹⁴

The bill consolidates these existing criminal offense provisions into a single subsection of statute by repealing s. 400.993, F.S., and revising subsection 400.9935(4), F.S.

The bill creates a new third degree felony offense applicable to any person who knowingly fails to report a change in information contained in the most recent health care clinic license application or a change regarding the required insurance or bonds.^{15, 16} Such changes must be reported within 21 days of their occurrence.¹⁷

Direct-Support Organization to Fight Automobile Insurance Fraud

The DIF is authorized to establish a direct-support organization to support the prosecution, investigation, and prevention of motor vehicle insurance fraud, known as the “Automobile Insurance Fraud Strike Force” (Strike Force).¹⁸ The Strike Force is a not-for-profit corporation incorporated under ch. 617, F.S. It is authorized to be organized and operated to conduct programs and activities; raise funds; request and receive grants, gifts, and bequests of money; acquire, receive, hold, invest, and administer, in its own name, securities, funds, objects of value, or other property, real or personal; and make grants and expenditures to or for the direct or indirect benefit of the division, state attorneys’ offices, the statewide prosecutor, the Agency for Health Care Administration, and the Department of Health to the extent that such grants and expenditures are used exclusively to advance the prosecution, investigation, or prevention of motor vehicle insurance fraud. Grants and expenditures may include the cost of salaries or benefits of motor vehicle insurance fraud investigators, prosecutors, or support personnel if such grants and expenditures do not interfere with prosecutorial independence or otherwise create conflicts of interest which threaten the success of prosecutions.¹⁹ The Strike Force is precluded from engaging in lobbying activities or from using grants and expenditures for advertising using the likeness or name of any elected official.

The Strike Force is required to operate under a written contract with the DIF, which must provide for:

¹¹ A third degree felony is punishable by up to five years imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine. Sections 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

¹² A second degree felony is punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment and a \$10,000 fine. Sections 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

¹³ s. 400.993(3), F.S.

¹⁴ Individual health care providers are regulated by one or more of the boards at the Department of Health. FLORIDA HEALTH, *Licensing and Regulation*, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/licensing-and-regulation/> (last visited Apr. 10, 2015).

¹⁵ The required reports go to the AHCA. *See* s. 400.810, F.S.

¹⁶ s. 408.810(3), F.S. There are no express insurance requirements for health care clinic licensure, but an applicant can offer a bond of at least \$500,000, payable to the AHCA, as surety for compliance with the law, as an alternative to showing the financial responsibility required under s. 400.810(8), F.S. The AHCA has implemented the financial responsibility requirements for licensure through Rule 59A-35.062, F.A.C.

¹⁷ s. 408.810(3), F.S.

¹⁸ s. 626.9895(2), F.S.

¹⁹ s. 626.9895(2)(b), F.S.

- DIF approval of the Strike Force's articles of incorporation and bylaws, and its annual budget (which begins on July 1 and ends on June 30th of the following year);
- DIF certification of the Strike Force's compliance with contract terms and that it is acting in a manner consistent with its goals and purposes of the department and in the best interest of the State;
- Allocation of funds to address motor vehicle insurance fraud, and reversion of moneys and property to the DIF, if the Strike Force ceases to exist, or to the state, if the DIF ceases to exist.
- Criteria to be used by the Strike Force's board of directors in evaluating the effectiveness of funding to combat insurance fraud; and
- Disclosure of material provisions of the contract, including disclosure on all promotional and fundraising publications of the Strike Force.²⁰

The Strike Force's board of directors consists of 11 members as follows: the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or a designee of the CFO, who serves as the chair; two state attorneys (one appointed by the CFO and the other by the Attorney General); two representatives of motor vehicle insurers appointed by the CFO; two representatives of local law enforcement agencies (one appointed by the CFO and the other by the Attorney General); two representatives of the types of health care providers who regularly make claims for PIP benefits (one appointed by Speaker of the House of Representatives and one appointed by the President of the Senate); a private attorney that has experience representing PIP claimants (appointed by the President of the Senate); and a private attorney with experience representing PIP insurers (appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives).²¹

The DFS is required to adopt rules prescribing the procedures by which the Strike Force is to be governed.²² For regulatory purposes, insurer contributions to the Strike Force are allowed as appropriate business expenses.²³ The Strike Force may place its receipts in a separate depository account in its name, subject to its contract with DIF. Any moneys that DIF receives from the Strike Force are required to be deposited into the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund.²⁴

The Strike Force filed its incorporation with the Department of State on April 25, 2012.²⁵ The Strike Force has engaged in limited organizational activity during its existence.²⁶ The DFS reports²⁷ that the Strike Force has not: taken in any donations, paid any grants, established a bank account,²⁸ or made any transfers into the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund.

The bill repeals the statute authorizing the Strike Force. It removes cross-references related to the Strike Force and eliminates the DFS' rulemaking authority related to the Strike Force.

Criminal Punishment Code Offense Severity Ranking Chart

The Criminal Punishment Code²⁹ applies to sentencing for felony offenses committed on or after October 1, 1998. Criminal offenses are ranked in the "offense severity ranking chart"³⁰ from level one

²⁰ s. 626.9895(3), F.S.

²¹ s. 626.9895(4), F.S.

²² s. 626.9895(5)(c), F.S. The authorized rules were adopted as ch. 69D-3, F.A.C.

²³ s. 626.9895(6), F.S.

²⁴ s. 626.9895(7), F.S.

²⁵ FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL SERVICES, <http://www.myfloridacfo.com/autofraud/docs/Articles%20of%20Incorporation.pdf> (last visited Apr. 10, 2015).

²⁶ The Strike Force held four board meetings; August 7, 2012, January 24, 2013, July 9, 2013, and December 9, 2013. FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL SERVICES, *Auto Insurance Fraud Strike Force*, <http://www.myfloridacfo.com/autofraud/meetings.html> (last visited Apr. 10, 2015) [hereinafter *Auto Insurance Fraud Strike Force*].

²⁷ Email from Legislative Affairs, Department of Financial Services, RE: HB 1127 – new proposed strike all (Mar. 23, 2015).

²⁸ The minutes of the board of directors of the Strike Force meeting on July 9, 2013, reflect that a depository account was authorized but do not indicate where or if the account was established. See *Auto Insurance Fraud Strike Force*. Strike Force meeting records are available on the Internet at <http://www.myfloridacfo.com/autofraud/meetings.html>.

²⁹ s. 921.002, F.S.

(least severe) to level ten (most severe) and are assigned points based on the severity of the offense, as determined by the Legislature.³¹ A defendant's sentence is calculated based on points assigned for various factors, such as the offense for which the defendant is being sentenced and injury to the victim.³² The points are added together in order to determine the "lowest permissible sentence" for the offense.³³

The bill amends the offense severity ranking chart to reflect the changes made by the bill. The titles of relevant offenses are updated consistent with the bill and additions are made to the chart consistent with the bill. Filing a false license application or other required information or failing to report information³⁴ is classified as a Level 3 offense.³⁵ A second or subsequent conviction of operating a clinic without a license³⁶ or offering services requiring licensure is classified as a Level 6 offense.³⁷ While such second or subsequent offenses are currently second degree felonies under s. 400.993(2), F.S., this offense does not appear on the offense severity ranking chart and is added to the chart by the bill.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The Criminal Justice Impact Conference (CJIC) met April 1, 2015, and determined this bill will have an insignificant impact on state prison beds. According to the CJIC, an insignificant impact estimates that this bill may increase the state's prison bed population by less than 10 inmates, annually.³⁸

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

³⁰ s. 921.0022, F.S.

³¹ s. 921.0024, F.S.

³² See generally, THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS & THE OFFICE OF THE STATE COURTS ADMINISTRATOR, *Florida Criminal Punishment Code Scoresheet Preparation Manual*, Oct. 1, 2014, available at http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/sen_cpcm/cpc_manual.pdf.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ s. 400.9935(4)(e), F.S., as revised by the bill.

³⁵ Level 3 offenses carry 16 sentencing points for the primary offense and 2.4 sentencing points for each additional offense. s. 921.0024(1)(a), F.S.

³⁶ s. 400.9935(4)(c), F.S., as revised by the bill.

³⁷ Level 6 offenses carry 36 sentencing points for the primary offense and 18 sentencing points for each additional offense. s. 921.0024(1)(a), F.S.

³⁸ Criminal Justice Impact Conference results can be located at:

<http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/conferences/criminaljusticeimpact/CSHB1127.pdf> (last accessed April 6, 2013)

The bill has an indeterminate impact on the private sector. The private sector will benefit from increased enforcement activities, including restitution orders, due to the criminal penalty provisions of the bill. Savings realized by the insurance industry should be passed on to consumers.

C. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.