

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

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

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

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BILL: SB 686

INTRODUCER: Senator Lee

SUBJECT: Military Housing Ad Valorem Tax Exemptions

DATE: March 3, 2015

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Ryon	Ryon	MS	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			FT	
3.			AP	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 686 revises and clarifies parameters for an ad valorem tax exemption of United States government owned property pursuant to the U.S. Military Housing Privatization Initiative of 1996. The tax exemption would apply to leasehold interests and improvements to land owned by the United States and various branches of United States Armed Forces and agencies of the federal government. "Improvements" include, but are not limited to, actual housing units and related facilities under the federal initiative. Any leasehold interest or improvement shall be considered owned by the United States, regardless of whether title is held the by the United States, and the ad valorem tax exemption requires neither an exemption application, nor approval from the property appraiser.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Military Housing Privatization Initiative**

The U.S. Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI) was enacted as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1996 in an effort to address the poor condition of Department of Defense (DoD) owned housing and the shortage of affordable private sector housing for military families.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the program, DoD owned approximately 257,000 family housing units worldwide both on and off-base with over 50 percent of the units deemed in need of renovation or replacement.<sup>2</sup> Under MHPI authorities, the DoD works with the private sector to revitalize military family housing by employing a variety of financial tools including: direct loans, loan guarantees, equity investments, and conveyance or leasing of property or facilities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-106, §§ 2801-2841 (1996).

<sup>2</sup> The Office of the Deputy under Secretary of Defense Installations and Environment, *Military Housing Privatization*, available at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/housing/overview.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

In standard MHPI projects, a branch of the United States Armed Forces enters into a long term (fifty years) ground lease of the land under the housing areas with a private developer. Title to the housing units is conveyed to the developer by quitclaim deed. Within a time schedule set by contract, the developer rehabilitates or constructs a target level of housing units and is responsible for the leasing, management and maintenance of the units. At the end of the long term lease, the federal government may negotiate an extension of the lease or elect to acquire the improvements from the developer or its successor at no charge.

There are currently MHPI developments at the following military installations in Florida:

- Tyndall Air Force Base
- MacDill Air Force Base
- Patrick Air Force Base
- Eglin Air Force Base
- Hurlburt Field
- Naval Air Station Jacksonville
- Naval Air Station Key West
- Naval Air Station Pensacola
- Naval Air Station Whiting Field
- Naval Station Mayport
- Naval Support Activity Panama City

### **Property Valuation in Florida**

Section 4, Article VII of the Florida Constitution, requires that all property be assessed at just value for ad valorem tax purposes. Sections 3, 4, and 6, Article VII of the Florida Constitution, provide for specified assessment limitations, property classifications and exemptions. After the property appraiser has considered any assessment limitation or use classification affecting the just value of a property, an assessed value is produced. The assessed value is then reduced by any exemptions to produce the taxable value.<sup>4</sup> Such exemptions include, but are not limited to: homestead exemptions and exemptions for property used for educational, religious, or charitable purposes.<sup>5</sup>

### **Government Property Exemption in Florida**

Florida law generally exempts government property from ad valorem taxation.<sup>6</sup> Subject to certain conditions, property of the United States, property of Florida and property of political subdivisions and municipalities of the state are exempt from ad valorem taxation. Portions of governmental property may be leased to private parties. In instances where the government leases property to a private party, the lease is called “governmental leasehold” and is subject to tax as “intangible personal property.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See s. 196.031, F.S.

<sup>5</sup> Fla. Const. art. VII, ss. 3 and 6.

<sup>6</sup> See s. 196.199, F.S.

<sup>7</sup> See s. 196.199(2)(b), F.S. Section 192.001 (11)(b) defines “intangible personal property” as money, all evidences of debt owed to the taxpayer, all evidences of ownership in a corporation or other business organization having multiple owners, and all other forms of property where value is based upon that which the property represents rather than its own intrinsic value.

## Taxation of Federal Property

Generally, the federal government and property owned by the federal government are immune from state and local taxation.<sup>8</sup> The federal government's immunity from taxation extends to its agents and its instrumentalities.<sup>9</sup> Congress has the exclusive authority to determine whether and to what extent its instrumentalities are immune from state and local taxes.<sup>10</sup>

Ad valorem taxes that Congress *has* authorized for leasehold property on federal land under 10 U.S.C. § 2667, are expressly *not* authorized under the MHPI. Specifically, 10 U.S.C. § 2878(e)(1) of the MHPI states that “[t]he conveyance or lease of property or facilities under this section shall not be subject to . . . Section 2667 of this title.” In other words, the Housing Initiative expressly exempts such leaseholds and improvements from state or local ad valorem taxation.

In addition, certain sections of the MHPI specifically repealed prior Congressional consent to ad valorem state taxation as well as consent to taxation of intangible personal property.<sup>11</sup>

## Current Litigation

Until recently, all eight of the MHPI projects in Florida have not been subject to ad valorem tax. In 2012, the Monroe County property appraiser subjected the project at Naval Air Station Key West to tax retroactive to 2008. The Monroe County property appraiser asserted that the MHPI project improvements at Naval Air Station Key West were subject to tax because the owner of the improvements was not exempt.<sup>12</sup> However, a circuit court judge in the Sixteenth Judicial Circuit determined that such improvements are exempt from property tax because the use and ownership of the improvements are consistent with the property tax exemptions provided in s. 196.199, F.S.<sup>13</sup> The court found that the operation, construction and renovation of military housing is a governmental function,<sup>14</sup> and, even though the nongovernmental lessee technically held legal title to the property, the United States Navy was the equitable owner of the property.<sup>15</sup> The Monroe County property appraiser has appealed the decision to the Third District Court of Appeals.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, similar lawsuits have recently been filed in three other counties in Florida. In 2013, the Escambia County property appraiser denied the ad valorem tax exemption for the MHPI project at Naval Air Station Pensacola that had been in effect from 2008 through 2012. The MHPI developer filed a lawsuit in July 2014 contesting Escambia County property appraiser's removal and denial of the exemption.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *McCullough v. Maryland*, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 316 (1819).

<sup>9</sup> *Kern-Limerick, Inc. v. Scurlock*, 347 U.S. 110 (1954).

<sup>10</sup> *Maricopa County v. Valley Bank*, 318 U.S. 357 (1943).

<sup>11</sup> 10 U.S.C. §§ 2781-2885 and §2878.

<sup>12</sup> *See Southeast Housing LLC, v. Borglum*, No. 2012-CA-000831-K (Fla. 16th Cir. Ct., August 2012).

<sup>13</sup> *Southeast Housing LLC v. Borglum*, No. 2012-CA-000831-K, (Fla. 16th Cir. Ct., March 2014).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Russell v. Southeast Housing LLC*, No. 3D14-746 (3d DCA, May 2014).

<sup>17</sup> *See Southeast Housing LLC v. Jones*, No. 2014-CA-000293 (Fla. 1st Cir. Ct., July 2014).

In December 2014, the developer of the MHPI project at Naval Air Station Whiting Field filed a lawsuit contesting the Santa Rosa County property appraiser's removal and denial of ad valorem exemption. The lawsuit follows the property appraiser's termination of a Payment in Lieu of Taxes agreement that was agreed upon in 2009 by the property appraiser and the developer.<sup>18</sup>

Also in December 2014, the developer of the MHPI project at Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field filed a lawsuit contesting the Okaloosa County property appraiser's denial of the developer's initial application for ad valorem exemption in June 2014.<sup>19</sup>

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

The bill amends s. 196.199, F.S., to revise the definition of property of the United States for the purposes of an exemption from ad valorem taxation. The revision includes any leasehold interest of and improvements affixed to land owned by the United States, any branch of the United States Armed Forces, or any agency or quasi-governmental agency of the United States. The exemption applies if the leasehold interest and improvements are used to provide housing pursuant to the Military Housing Privatization Initiative of 1996. The term "improvements" include actual housing units and any facilities that are directly related to such housing units, including any housing maintenance facilities, housing rental and management offices, parks and community centers, and recreational facilities. Any leasehold interest or improvement shall be construed as owned by the United States, regardless of whether title is held by the United States, and the ad valorem exemption requires neither an exemption application, nor approval from the property appraiser. The bill does not apply to transient public lodging establishments.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2015, and shall apply retroactively to January 1, 2007.

### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

#### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

#### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

#### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

### **V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

#### **A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

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<sup>18</sup> See *Southeast Housing, LLC, v. Brown*, No. 2014-CA-1174 (Fla. 1st Cir. Ct., December 2014).

<sup>19</sup> See *Corvias Air Force Living, LLC, v. Smith*, No. 2014-CA-004502F (Fla. 1st Cir. Ct. December 2014).

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

Clarifying ad valorem tax exemption eligibility standards for United States property may ensure that private entities operating pursuant to the MHPI will continue to be eligible for such exemptions.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The Revenue Estimating Conference has determined that HB 361, companion to SB 686, will have an indeterminate negative or zero impact on local government revenues.<sup>20</sup>

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 196.199 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:****A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

**B. Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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<sup>20</sup> Revenue Estimating Conference, *Military Housing Ad Valorem Tax HB361* (Feb. 04, 2015) available at [http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/conferences/revenueimpact/archives/2015/\\_pdf/page110-112.pdf](http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/conferences/revenueimpact/archives/2015/_pdf/page110-112.pdf).