

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

BILL #:	CS/CS/CS/HB 491	FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:	
SPONSOR(S):	Regulatory Affairs Committee; Finance & Tax Committee; Energy & Utilities Subcommittee; Smith and others	103 Y's	12 N's
COMPANION BILLS:	CS/CS/CS/SB 534	GOVERNOR'S ACTION: Approved	

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/CS/HB 491 passed the House on March 3, 2016. The bill was amended by the Senate on March 9, 2016. The House concurred in one of two Senate amendments and passed the bill as amended on March 11, 2016. Subsequently, the bill passed the Senate on March 11, 2016.

Chapter 2012-187, Laws of Florida, created the Study Committee on Investor-Owned Water and Wastewater Utility Systems (Study Committee) to “identify issues of concern of investor-owned water and wastewater utility systems, particularly small systems, and their customers” and to research possible solutions. The Study Committee submitted a report containing its recommendations on February 15, 2013. This bill adopts several of the Study Committee’s recommendations for legislative action. The bill:

- Directs the Division of Bond Finance to review the allocation of private activity bonds in Florida with respect to water and wastewater projects.
- Creates an exemption from Public Service Commission (PSC) regulation for persons who resell water service to individually-metered residents at a price that does not exceed the purchase price of water plus the actual cost of meter reading and billing, not to exceed 9 percent of the actual cost of service.
- Requires the PSC, upon the request of an investor-owned water or wastewater utility (IOU) in a rate case, to create a reserve fund for the IOU to be used for certain infrastructure repair and replacement projects, with disbursement subject to PSC approval.
- Identifies specific types of expenses eligible for “pass-through” treatment in IOU rates and authorizes the PSC, by rule, to identify additional types of expenses eligible for such treatment, provided the expenses are beyond the utility’s control.
- Prohibits the recovery of an IOU’s rate case expense where the rate case expense is incurred to prepare or file a staff-assisted rate case in which no party intervenes.
- Authorizes the PSC, on its own motion or based on customer complaints, to review water quality issues involving secondary drinking water standards (e.g., standards related to odor, taste, and corrosiveness) and wastewater service issues involving odor, noise, aerosol drift, or lighting.
- Expands the availability of low-interest loans through the State Revolving Fund to all for-profit water utilities.
- Clarifies that each county that has opted to regulate water and wastewater services must comply with the requirements in current law concerning abandoned IOUs.

The bill appears to have no revenue impact on state or local government. The bill appears to have an insignificant impact on state government expenditures and no impact on local government expenditures.

The bill was approved by the Governor on April 14, 2016, ch. 2016-226, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2016.

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

STORAGE NAME: h0491z1.EUS

DATE: April 15, 2016

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Present Situation

Water and Wastewater Industry Overview

In various areas throughout Florida, water and wastewater services are provided through privately-owned or investor-owned water and/or wastewater utilities (IOUs). IOUs can range in size from very small systems, owned by individuals as sole proprietorships and serving only a few dozen customers in a small neighborhood, to systems owned by large interstate corporations which serve tens of thousands of customers in multiple Florida counties.

For IOUs operating within a single Florida county, the county has the option to regulate rates and service or allow the Public Service Commission (PSC or Commission) to regulate those utilities.¹ Regardless of whether the county has opted to regulate IOUs, the PSC has jurisdiction over all water and wastewater utility systems whose service transverse county boundaries, except for systems owned and regulated by intergovernmental authorities.² Currently, the PSC has jurisdiction over almost 150 water and/or wastewater IOUs in 37 of 67 counties in Florida.³ The remaining water and wastewater customers in the state are served either by IOUs in non-jurisdictional counties, by statutorily exempt utilities (such as municipal utilities, cooperatives, and non-profits), by wells and septic tanks, or by systems owned, operated, managed, or controlled by governmental authorities.⁴

For regulatory purposes, the PSC classifies a water or wastewater IOU into one of three categories based on annual operating revenues.⁵

Class A – Operating revenues of \$1,000,000 or more

Class B – Operating revenues of \$200,000 or more but less than \$1,000,000

Class C – Operating revenues less than \$200,000

Currently, there are 13 Class A utilities, 37 Class B utilities, and 96 Class C utilities under the PSC's jurisdiction.

Study Committee on Investor-Owned Water and Wastewater Utility Systems

Chapter 2012-187, Laws of Florida, created the Study Committee on Investor-Owned Water and Wastewater Utility Systems (Study Committee)⁶ to “identify issues of concern of investor-owned water

¹ s. 367.171, F.S. If a county chooses to allow regulation by the PSC, it may rescind this election only after 10 continuous years of PSC regulation.

² *Id.*

³ *Facts and Figures of the Florida Utility Industry*, Florida Public Service Commission, March 2015, p.30, available at <http://www.psc.state.fl.us/Publications/Reports#> (last visited March 15, 2016).

⁴ s. 367.022(2), F.S.

⁵ Rules 25-30.110(4) and 25-30.115, F.A.C. As noted in these rules, this classification system is used by the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners for publishing its system of accounts.

⁶ As required by the law, the Study Committee was comprised of 18 members, including three non-voting members and 15 voting members. The three non-voting members included Commissioner Julie I. Brown (representing the PSC as the Study Committee Chair), a representative of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Public Counsel. The 15 voting members included State Senator Alan Hays (appointed by the President of the Senate), State Representative Ray Pilon (appointed by the Speaker of the House), and representatives of the following entities or groups, as appointed by the Governor: a county commission that regulates investor-owned water/wastewater utilities; a governmental authority created under ch. 163, F.S.; a water management district; a county health department; two Class A utilities; a Class B utility; a Class C utility; a utility owned or operated by a municipal or county government; customers of a Class A utility; customers of a Class B or C utility; the Florida Section of the American Water Works Association; and the Florida Rural Water Association.

and wastewater utility systems, particularly small systems, and their customers” and to research possible solutions.⁷ Specifically, the Study Committee was required to consider:

- The ability of a small IOU to achieve economies of scale when purchasing equipment, commodities, or services;
- The availability of low interest loans to a small, privately owned water or wastewater utility;
- Any tax incentives or exemptions, temporary or permanent, which are available to a small water or wastewater utility;
- The impact on customer rates if a utility purchases an existing water or wastewater utility system;
- The impact on customer rates of a utility providing service through the use of a reseller; and
- Other issues that the Study Committee identifies during its investigation.⁸

The Study Committee conducted 12 public meetings at which it heard public comment on these issues, identified additional issues for consideration and research (and heard public comment on the additional issues), and discussed and debated solutions to the issues.⁹ Consistent with the law, the Study Committee submitted a report containing its recommendations to the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, and the Governor, on February 15, 2013.

The Study Committee’s report included recommendations for legislative action, agency rulemaking, and other agency action. Based on the issues that it was required to consider, the Study Committee recommended legislative action to do the following:

- Increase the availability of low-interest loans to small, privately owned water and wastewater utilities by:
 - Expanding availability of low-interest loans through the State Revolving Fund (SRF) to all for-profit water utilities;
 - Allowing IOUs to apply “pass-through” treatment for loan service fees or loan origination fees for eligible projects as identified by the PSC; and
 - Directing the Division of Bond Finance to review the allocation of private activity bonds (PABs) in Florida with respect to water and wastewater projects.
- Provide a sales tax exemption for sales or leases to an IOU owned or operated by a Florida corporation.
- Create an exemption from PSC regulation for persons who resell service to individually-metered end-users at a price that does not exceed the actual purchase price of water plus actual costs of meter reading and billing not to exceed 9%.

Based on additional issues that it identified and considered, the Study Committee recommended legislative action to do the following:

- Authorize the PSC, during a rate case, to create individual utility reserve funds to be used for projects identified in an IOU’s capital improvement plan, with disbursement subject to approval by the PSC, as a means of reducing borrowing costs and making funds more readily available.
- Identify specific types of expenses eligible for “pass-through” treatment in utility rates, and/or authorize the PSC to adopt rules identifying such expenses, provided the expenses are beyond the utility’s control, to help minimize the need for costly rate case proceedings.
- Reduce the impact of rate case expense on customer rates by prohibiting the recovery of rate case expense in certain circumstances.
- Provide a mechanism for the resolution of issues involving secondary water standards (e.g., odor, taste, corrosiveness, etc.) and wastewater operational requirements.

⁷ s. 2, Ch. 2012-187, Laws of Fla.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See Sections II and III, *Report of the Study Committee on Investor-Owned Water and Wastewater Utility Systems*, February 15, 2013 (*Study Committee Report*), available at <http://www.psc.state.fl.us/WaterWasteWater> (last visited March 15, 2016).

Private Activity Bonds

Qualified private activity bonds are tax-exempt bonds issued by a state or local government, the proceeds of which are used for a defined qualified purpose by an entity other than the government issuing the bonds. For a private activity bond to be tax-exempt, 95% or more of the net bond proceeds must be used for one of the qualified purposes listed in ss. 142 through 145 and 1394 of the Internal Revenue Code (the Code). These qualified purposes include facilities used to furnish water or sewer services. The Code limits an issuing authority (such as a state) to a maximum amount of tax-exempt bonds that can be issued to finance a particular qualified purpose during a calendar year. Facilities used to furnish water or sewer services are subject to a volume cap.¹⁰

Private activity bonds are administered in Florida by the Division of Bond Finance of the State Board of Administration (the Division) under ss. 159.801-159.816, F.S. Each year, the Division determines the amount of private activity bonds permitted to be issued in Florida under the Code.¹¹ This amount is allocated on January 1 of each year as follows:¹²

- An initial amount is allocated to manufacturing facility projects.
- 50 percent of the amount remaining after the initial allocation is allocated to individual counties and groups of counties¹³ on a per capita basis for any permitted purpose, which may include water and sewer projects.
- 25 percent of the amount remaining after the initial allocation is allocated to the Florida Housing Finance Corporation for use in connection with the issuance of housing bonds.
- 5 percent of the amount remaining after the initial allocation is allocated to the state allocation pool and applied to “priority projects,” which may include water and sewer projects.
- 20 percent of the amount remaining after the initial allocation is allocated to the Florida First Business allocation pool for projects certified by the Department of Economic Opportunity.

The Study Committee was unable to determine the amount of private activity bonds ultimately utilized for water and sewer projects in Florida.¹⁴

Resellers of Water Service

As noted above, the PSC currently has jurisdiction to regulate the rates and service of water and wastewater utilities in 37 of 67 counties in Florida. For purposes of the PSC’s jurisdiction, “utility” is defined as every person owning, operating, managing, or controlling a system, who is providing water or wastewater service to the public for compensation.¹⁵ However, certain entities that meet this definition are exempt from PSC regulation as utilities.¹⁶ Included among these exemptions are persons who resell water or wastewater service at a rate or charge which does not exceed the actual purchase price of the water or wastewater.¹⁷ If the reseller includes any additional costs in the rate or charge to the retail customer, the reseller is considered a utility subject to PSC regulation.

Reseller utilities that are regulated by the PSC generally have significant investment in distribution and collection lines and other utility equipment. Examples include mobile home parks and subdivisions. In a rate proceeding, the PSC determines the utility’s investment and expenses related to the facilities it owns and operates, then it sets rates accordingly. The cost of the water and/or wastewater service

¹⁰ *Tax-Exempt Private Activity Bonds, Compliance Guide*, Internal Revenue Service Publication 4078, Version 09-2005.

¹¹ s. 159.804, F.S.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ These individual counties and groups of counties are identified in s. 159.804(2)(b), F.S.

¹⁴ *Study Committee Report*, p. 43.

¹⁵ s. 367.021(12), F.S.

¹⁶ *See* s. 367.022, F.S.

¹⁷ s. 367.022(8), F.S.

purchased from a wholesale provider, which is often a significant portion of the customers' bills, is allowed to be passed through to the customers pursuant to s. 367.081(4)(b), F.S. Resellers that choose not to pass along costs beyond their cost to purchase water or wastewater (and therefore remain exempt from PSC regulation) generally have very little investment in equipment or lines needed to provide the service. Examples include apartment complexes, condominium buildings and small master-metered shopping centers.¹⁸

In its report, the Study Committee noted that a metered charge for water sends an appropriate price signal to end users and is a means of discouraging indiscriminate use of this resource. However, if a reseller wishes to install sub-meters for its users and bill those users for their actual water use, it will be unable to recover those metering and billing costs from its customers without becoming regulated and incurring the costs of regulation.¹⁹

Reserve Funds for Water and Wastewater Utilities

As noted above, the Study Committee was required to consider, among other things, the availability of low interest loans to a small, privately owned water or wastewater utility. In its report, the Study Committee noted the following:

Affordable, accessible financing is an ongoing issue for the water and wastewater industry and is a particularly acute need for smaller systems. Smaller utilities ... have difficulty securing low-cost, long-term financing because the characteristics and track record of the industry make smaller systems more risky in the view of lending institutions. Timing is also an issue, particularly when critical system failures occur and small utilities do not have the cash reserves to address such short-term needs. In addition, regulatory policy frequently does not provide sufficient cash flow to fully service the debt over the term of the loan. The establishment of individual utility reserve funding and/or establishment of a broader statewide reserve fund could reduce borrowing costs and make funding more readily available.²⁰

Section 367.081, F.S., establishes the rate-setting procedures for water and wastewater IOUs regulated by the PSC. None of these procedures provides explicit statutory authority for the PSC to establish reserve funds for water and wastewater IOUs during the rate-setting process.

Pass-Through Costs

Outside of a rate case, PSC-regulated water and wastewater IOUs are entitled to "pass through" specific types of expenses without the requirement of a PSC hearing.²¹ This mechanism provides quick rate relief to a utility when it experiences an increase in one of these types of costs and may help defer the need for a full rate case. Currently, the types of expenses eligible for pass-through treatment are limited by statute to the following:²²

- Purchased water or wastewater service.
- Electric power.
- Ad valorem taxes.
- Regulatory Assessment Fees.
- Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) fees for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Program.
- Water quality or wastewater quality testing required by DEP.

¹⁸ *Study Committee Report*, p. 61.

¹⁹ *Id.*, pp. 61-62.

²⁰ *Id.*, p. 67.

²¹ s. 367.081(4)(b), F.S.

²² *Id.*

Prior to changing rates using this mechanism, the IOU must file, under oath, an affirmation as to the accuracy of the figures and calculations upon which the change in rates is based and a statement that the change will not cause the utility to exceed the rate of return on equity last approved by the PSC.²³

Recovery of Rate Case Expense

In a rate case conducted by the PSC, a water or wastewater IOU is entitled to recover its reasonable expenses incurred in preparing and proceeding with the rate case.²⁴ These expenses (referred to as “rate case expense”) typically include legal, engineering, and accounting expenses and are reviewed by the PSC as part of the rate case. Any rate case expense deemed unreasonable by the PSC may not be recovered by the IOU through its rates.²⁵ The amount of rate case expense deemed reasonable is apportioned for recovery through the IOU’s rates over a period of 4 years. At the end of this 4-year period, the IOU’s rates are reduced to remove the impact of the rate case expense.²⁶ According to the Study Committee, the impact of rate case expense on customer bills varies from case to case and is often negligible.²⁷ However, one analysis presented to the Study Committee noted 3 cases between 2006 and 2011 in which the annual rate impact attributed to rate case expense (over the 4-year recovery period) exceeded the annual revenue increase approved in the rate case, excluding rate case expense. In addition, this analysis noted 6 additional cases over the same period in which the annual rate impact attributed to rate case expense equaled more than 25 percent of the annual revenue increase approved in the rate case, excluding rate case expense.²⁸

A water or wastewater IOU with gross annual revenues under \$275,000 is permitted by law to request and obtain assistance from the PSC staff in preparing the IOU’s rate case.²⁹ These rate cases are referred to as staff-assisted rate cases (SARCs). In these cases, the PSC staff reviews the IOUs books and records, inspects the IOU’s premises, prepares a quality of service analysis, and presents recommended rates and charges to the PSC for consideration. In requesting staff assistance, the IOU agrees to accept the final rates and charges approved by the PSC unless these rates and charges produce less revenue than the existing rates and charges.³⁰ An IOU that uses the SARC process may still seek assistance from other professionals in preparing and proceeding with its case and may submit the associated expenses for recovery as rate case expense.³¹ One analysis presented to the Study Committee showed an average rate case expense of \$4,563 for 23 SARCs conducted between 2007 and 2011 in which some level of rate case expense was approved.³² The average drops to \$3,025 by removing one case.³³

Quality of Service / Secondary Standards

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is the state agency with primary authority to implement and enforce federal and state drinking water and wastewater standards. The focus of DEP’s permitting, monitoring, and enforcement of water and wastewater systems is to ensure compliance with

²³ s. 367.081(4)(c), F.S.

²⁴ s. 367.081(7), F.S.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ s. 367.0816, F.S.

²⁷ *Study Committee Report*, p. 83.

²⁸ *Study Committee Report*, p. 88.

²⁹ s. 367.0814, F.S.

³⁰ *Id.* However, a person other than the utility may protest or appeal the PSC’s order approving the rates and charges.

³¹ *Study Committee Report*, pp. 84-91.

³² *Study Committee Report*, p. 87.

³³ *Id.* Information provided by the PSC indicated that there were approximately 48 SARCs conducted during this time frame, thus the average rate case expense for all SARCs is lower than this amount.

primary drinking water standards and wastewater operational requirements to protect the health and safety of the public and the environment.³⁴

With respect to drinking water, DEP has also adopted secondary standards for contaminants related to color, corrosion, and odor.³⁵ Testing for these secondary standards is required on a regular basis, though DEP generally requires corrective action only if users (i.e., water customers) voice significant complaints or if a primary contaminant level has also been exceeded.

With respect to wastewater, DEP requires that new treatment plants and modifications to existing plants be designed and sited to minimize adverse effects on neighboring residential and commercial areas resulting from odors, noise, aerosol drift, and lighting.³⁶ Permittees must give reasonable assurance that such effects will not be potentially harmful to human health or welfare or unreasonably interfere with the enjoyment of life or property.³⁷ Likewise, if existing facilities fail to function as intended and create such adverse effects, the permittee must take corrective action, or DEP may require corrective action.³⁸ DEP generally requires corrective action only in response to significant complaints or if a primary contaminant level has also been exceeded.³⁹

The PSC considers an IOU's quality of service in rate cases. In doing so, the PSC evaluates the quality of the product, the operating condition of the IOU's plant and facilities, and the IOU's efforts to address customer satisfaction.⁴⁰ Sanitary surveys, outstanding citations, violations and consent orders on file with DEP and county health departments are also considered. In addition, DEP and county health department officials' testimony and customer testimony concerning quality of service is considered.⁴¹ In most cases, the emphasis of this evaluation is compliance with standards related to health and safety of the public and the environment.⁴² If the PSC finds that an IOU has failed to provide its customers with water or wastewater service that meets the standards set by DEP or the water management districts, the PSC may reduce the IOU's return on equity until the standards are met.⁴³

In 2014, the Legislature passed CS/CS/CS/SB 272,⁴⁴ which established a process by which the customers of an IOU may petition the PSC to investigate issues concerning the quality of the water service provided by the utility. Upon review of a petition signed by at least 65 percent of the IOU's customers, the utility's response, and other relevant factors, the PSC may:

- Dismiss the petition, if doing so is supported by clear and convincing evidence;
- Require the utility to take corrective actions to resolve the issues identified; or
- Revoke the utility's certificate of authorization and appoint a receiver until a sale of the utility is approved by the PSC.

The bill also required the PSC, when setting rates for a water utility, to consider the extent to which the utility provides service that meets secondary drinking water standards established by DEP. If the PSC determines that the utility's water service does not meet these standards, the utility must create an estimate of the costs and benefits of a plausible solution to address each issue identified by the PSC, meet with its customers to discuss these estimates and the time necessary to implement the solution,

³⁴ See ch. 403, F.S., and Chapters 62-550, 555, 602, and 699, F.A.C., for drinking water regulations, and Chapters 62-600, 604, 610, 620, 621, and 640, F.A.C., for wastewater regulations.

³⁵ Rule 62-550.320, F.A.C.

³⁶ Rule 62-600.400(2)(a), F.A.C.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Rule 62-600.410, F.A.C.

³⁹ *Study Committee Report*, p. 105.

⁴⁰ Rule 25-30.433(1), F.A.C.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Study Committee Report*, p. 106.

⁴³ s. 367.111(2), F.S.

⁴⁴ Ch. 2014-68, Laws of Fla., codified at ss. 367.072 and 367.0812, F.S.

and report the results of these meetings to the PSC. The PSC may require the utility to implement a solution for each issue that is in the best interests of the customers, and the utility may recover its costs to implement any solutions ordered by the PSC. The PSC may impose penalties for a utility's failure to adequately resolve each issue as required.

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund

Sections 403.8532 and 403.8533, F.S., establish the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF). The SRF, which is administered by DEP, provides low-interest loans to eligible entities for planning, designing, and constructing public water facilities. Eligible entities include, among others, investor-owned public water systems that are legally responsible for public water services and which serve no more than 1,500 connections.⁴⁵ Projects eligible for SRF loans include new construction and improvements of public water systems, inclusive of storage, transmission, treatment, disinfection, and distribution facilities.⁴⁶ Loan funding is based on a priority system which takes into account public health considerations, compliance, and affordability.⁴⁷

Based on data gathered from IOUs' 2011 annual reports filed with the PSC, the Study Committee determined that all Class C water IOUs and almost all (28 out of 33) Class B water IOUs serve no more than 1,500 connections and are therefore eligible for the SRF program.⁴⁸ The remaining PSC-regulated Class B and Class A water IOUs are, presumably, not eligible to use the SRF program.

Abandonment of a Water or Wastewater Utility

Section 367.165, F.S., establishes a process to ensure continuous service in the event of abandonment by a water or wastewater utility. First, the utility must give 60 days' notice of abandonment to the PSC and to the county or counties in which the utility is located.⁴⁹ After receiving such notice, the county, or counties acting jointly if more than one county is affected, must petition the circuit court to appoint a receiver who will operate the utility from the date of abandonment until the receiver disposes of the utility property in a manner designed to provide for continuous service. The receiver may be the governing body of a political subdivision or any other person deemed appropriate. The receiver is considered to hold temporary authorization from the PSC to provide service, and the previously approved rates of the utility apply until modified by the PSC.

Effect of Proposed Changes

This bill adopts several of the Study Committee's recommendations for legislative action. In particular, the bill:

- Directs the Division of Bond Finance to review the allocation of private activity bonds in Florida with respect to water and wastewater projects.
- Creates an exemption from PSC regulation for persons who resell water service to individually-metered residents at a price that does not exceed the purchase price of water plus the actual cost of meter reading and billing, not to exceed 9 percent of the actual cost of service.
- Requires the PSC, upon an IOU's request in a rate case, to create a reserve fund for the IOU to be used for certain infrastructure repair and replacement projects, with disbursement subject to PSC approval.

⁴⁵ s. 403.8532(3), F.S. An investor-owned public water system that serves more than 1,500 connections may qualify for a loan only if the proposed project will result in the consolidation of two or more public water systems.

⁴⁶ Florida Department of Environmental Protection, *Drinking Water State Revolving Fund - Eligible Local Governments*, <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/wff/dwsrf/ellocgov.htm> (last visited March 15, 2016).

⁴⁷ s. 403.8532(9)(a), F.S.

⁴⁸ *Study Committee Report*, pp. 36-37. The report notes that this data does not include water IOUs that are regulated by counties.

⁴⁹ Section 367.165, F.S., provides criminal and administrative penalties for a utility that fails to provide proper notice.

- Identifies specific types of expenses eligible for “pass-through” treatment in IOU rates and authorizes the PSC, by rule, to identify additional types of expenses eligible for such treatment, provided the expenses are beyond the utility’s control.
- Prohibits the recovery of an IOU’s rate case expense where the rate case expense is incurred to prepare or file a staff-assisted rate case in which no party intervenes.
- Authorizes the PSC, on its own motion or based on customer complaints, to review water quality issues involving secondary drinking water standards (e.g., standards related to odor, taste, and corrosiveness) and wastewater service issues involving odor, noise, aerosol drift, or lighting.
- Expands the availability of low-interest loans through the State Revolving Fund (SRF) to all for-profit water utilities.
- Clarifies that each county that has opted to regulate water and wastewater services must comply with the requirements in current law concerning abandoned IOUs.

Private Activity Bonds

The bill directs the Division of Bond Finance of the State Board of Administration to review the allocation of private activity bonds (PABs) to determine the availability of additional allocation and reallocation of PABs for water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

Resellers of Water Service

The bill creates an exemption from PSC regulation for a person who resells water service to his or her tenants or to individually metered residents for a fee that does not exceed the reseller’s actual purchase price of the water plus the actual cost of meter reading and billing, not to exceed 9 percent of the actual cost of service.

Absent this exemption, a water reseller who charges more than the actual purchase price of the water would be subject to PSC regulation and would incur the costs and obligations of such regulation. While the costs would be recoverable from the reseller’s customers through PSC-approved rates, a reseller may not wish to incur the additional regulatory obligations.

This provision may encourage resellers to utilize individual metering more often for their tenants. Through individual metering, water users can be charged more accurately for the water they consume. Thus, customers of resellers who utilize individual metering may be more likely to use water more efficiently.

Reserve Funds for Water and Wastewater IOUs

The bill requires the PSC, upon request by a water or wastewater IOU in a rate case proceeding, to create a reserve fund to be used by the IOU for repair or replacement of its existing distribution and collection infrastructure if the infrastructure is either near the end of its useful life or detrimental to water quality or reliability of service. The reserve fund may be funded through a portion of the rates charged by the utility, by a secured escrow account, or through a letter of credit. The bill directs the PSC to adopt rules to govern the funding, implementation, management, and use of the fund. These rules must include, but are not limited to:

- Provisions related to the expenses for which the fund may be used.
- Segregation of the reserve fund accounts.
- Requirements for the IOU to maintain a capital improvement plan.
- Requirements for PSC authorization prior to disbursements from the fund.

The establishment of a reserve fund for an IOU during a rate proceeding likely will impact the rates set in that proceeding, though it also may reduce borrowing costs and make funding more readily available for the IOU. The IOU may be able to avoid the need to access capital markets to finance certain projects and repairs and/or avoid the need to request a future rate increase to cover the costs of the projects and repairs.

Pass-Through Costs

The bill expands the types of expenses eligible for “pass-through” treatment in IOU rates by adding the following non-exclusive list of expense items:

- Fees charged for wastewater biosolids disposal.
- Costs incurred for a tank inspection required by DEP or a local governmental authority.
- Treatment plant operator and water distribution system license fees required by DEP or a local governmental authority.
- Water or wastewater operating permit fees charged by DEP or a local governmental authority.
- Consumptive or water use permit fees charged by a water management district.

The bill authorizes the PSC, by rule, to establish additional specific expense items eligible for pass-through treatment. To be eligible for such treatment, an additional expense item must be imposed by a local, state, or federal law, rule, order, or notice and must be outside the control of the utility. If the PSC uses this authority, it must review its rule at least once every 5 years to determine if each specific expense item should remain eligible for pass-through treatment or if any additional expense items should become eligible.

The bill continues the current requirement that an IOU wishing to change its rates to reflect a change in any of these costs must provide verified notice to the PSC 45 days before implementing a change in its rates. The bill provides that the new rates must reflect, on an amortized or annual basis, as appropriate, the cost or amount of change in the cost of the specified expense item. Further, the bill provides that the new rates may not reflect the costs of any specific expense item already included in the IOU’s rates. The bill also continues the current prohibition on use of the pass-through mechanism for increases or decreases in a specific expense item that occurred more than 12 months before the IOU’s filing.

Rate Case Expense

The bill prohibits the PSC, where the IOU has requested a staff-assisted rate case, from approving rate case expense to cover fees for attorneys and other outside consultants who are engaged by an IOU for purposes of preparing or filing the case, unless another party has intervened in the case. The bill provides two exceptions. It authorizes the recovery of rate expense for such fees if the fees are incurred to provide consulting or legal services to the IOU after the initial PSC staff report is issued to customers and the utility. It also authorizes the PSC allow recovery of rate case expense for such fees incurred after any protest or appeal of the PSC's decision by a party other than the IOU. The bill requires the PSC to propose rules by December 31, 2016, to implement these provisions.

Quality of Service / Secondary Standards

The bill provides the PSC specific authority to review, on its own motion or based upon customer complaints, a water IOU's water quality in relation to secondary drinking water standards (e.g., standards related to odor, taste, and corrosiveness) established by DEP. The bill also authorizes the PSC, on its own motion or based upon customer complaints, to review a wastewater IOU's service in relation to odor, noise, aerosol drift, or lighting issues.

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund

The bill removes the current size restrictions on water IOUs eligible to utilize the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF). Water IOUs of any size will be eligible to seek low-interest loans through the SRF for planning, designing, and constructing public water facilities, including storage, transmission, treatment, disinfection, and distribution facilities. This may increase competition for available funds.

Abandonment of a Water or Wastewater Utility

The bill amends section 367.165, F.S., to clarify that each county, regardless of whether it regulates IOU's operating within the county, is responsible for receiving notice of an abandonment and seeking appointment of a receiver to ensure continuous service when a water or wastewater IOU is abandoned.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

The Revenue Estimating Conference has not estimated the revenue impacts of the bill as amended. However, staff estimates that the bill will have no revenue impact on state or local government.

2. Expenditures:

The PSC has not identified an impact on agency expenditures; however, it may be required to expend resources to complete rulemaking as required by the bill. In its analysis of a similar bill filed in 2015, the Department of Revenue identified an insignificant impact on its expenditures.⁵⁰ DEP, in its analysis of the same bill filed in 2015, estimated additional expenditures of between \$10,000 and \$100,000 to employ additional expertise needed to evaluate the credit worthiness of large, complex water systems that become eligible under the bill to seek low-interest loans through the SRF;

⁵⁰ Department of Revenue, Agency Analysis of 2015 HB 1173, p. 3 (March 5, 2015).

however, it indicated that these costs will be covered by service fees collected in the normal course of the SRF program.⁵¹

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

The Revenue Estimating Conference has not estimated the revenue impacts of the bill as amended. However, staff estimates that the bill will have no revenue impact on local government.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

Private Activity Bonds

To the extent that additional private activity bonds are made available for eligible projects, more water and wastewater IOUs may be encouraged to make investments in water and wastewater infrastructure in the state at a lower cost to ratepayers than would otherwise result from such expenditures.

Resellers of Water Service

The creation of a regulatory exemption for water resellers who add no more than the costs of meter reading and billing (capped at 9 percent) to their purchase price for water, will allow these resellers to avoid the costs and obligations of regulation and may encourage them to invest in individual metering apparatus.

Reserve Funds for Water and Wastewater IOUs

The establishment of an individual reserve fund for an IOU during a rate proceeding likely will impact the rates set in that proceeding, though it also may reduce borrowing costs and make funding more readily available for the IOU to make needed improvements and repairs. The availability of the reserve fund may allow the IOU to avoid or defer the need for a future rate case, the expense of which ultimately would be borne by ratepayers.

Pass-Through Costs

The expanded availability of “pass-through” treatment for additional expense items may, in some instances, allow IOUs to avoid or defer the need for a rate case, the expense of which ultimately would be borne by ratepayers.

Rate Case Expense

The limitation on the recovery of rate case expense may reduce the impact of rate case expense on ratepayers' bills. However, these limitations may discourage an IOU from seeking a rate increase necessary to make system repairs and improvements or to assure it a reasonable rate of return on its investment.

⁵¹ Department of Environmental Protection, Agency Analysis of 2015 HB 1173, pp. 2-4 (March 13, 2015).

Quality of Service / Secondary Standards

Depending on the PSC's application of the mechanism established to identify and potentially resolve secondary water quality issues and wastewater operational issues, IOUs may be compelled to incur additional costs to resolve these issues. To the extent that an IOU is compelled to incur additional costs, these costs likely will be recovered from ratepayers.

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund

The expanded availability of low-interest financing through the State Revolving Fund to additional water IOUs may encourage more of these utilities to make investments in water infrastructure in the state at a lower cost to ratepayers than would otherwise result from such expenditures.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.