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.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Judiciary Committee						
BILL:	SB 1830					
INTRODUCER:	Senator Flores					
SUBJECT:	Landlords and Tenants					
DATE:	February 8, 2012 REVISED:					
ANALYST		STAFF	DIRECTOR	REFERENCE		ACTION
1. Munroe		Cibula		JU	Pre-meeting	
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I. Summary:

The bill makes numerous changes to the Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act. Specifically, the bill makes the following changes:

- Specifies that the eviction procedures in the Act apply to eviction from a dwelling after a final judgment in foreclosure, ejectment, quiet title, partition, or other cause action in which a court awards possession of a dwelling unit.
- Provides that the eviction procedures in the Act apply to an eviction based on the nonpayment of fees due to a condominium, cooperative, or homeowners' association.
- Authorizes the eviction procedures under the Act, instead of foreclosure procedures, to apply to a person who occupies a dwelling pursuant to a lease-purchase agreement in some circumstances.
- Provides that the right of a prevailing party to attorney fees for enforcing a rental agreement may not be waived in the rental agreement.
- Provides that the right to the statutorily required notices before a landlord or tenant may terminate a lease may not be waived in the lease.
- Provides that attorney fees may not be awarded in a claim for personal injury damages based on a breach of duty to maintain the rental premises.
- Revises the notice that a landlord must provide a tenant which describes how advance rent and security deposits will be held and used by the landlord or returned to the tenant.
- Allows landlords to withdraw advance rents without notice to tenants.
- Creates a rebuttable presumption that a new owner of a rental property receives the security deposits paid by a tenant to the previous owner, but limit's the liability of the new owner for the tenant's deposit to 1-months rent.

- Relieves landlords of single-family homes and duplexes of the obligation to provide and maintain screens on windows.
- Eliminates a landlord's obligation to make certain disclosures regarding fire safety to tenants.
- Requires landlords to pay condominium, cooperative, or homeowners' association assessments.
- Provides that upon the re-occurrence of tenant actions constituting noncompliance under a lease, the landlord is not required to provide an additional notice before initiating an eviction action.
- Provides that a lease must require a landlord to give advance notice of the intent to nonrenew the lease if the lease requires a tenant to give advance notice to a landlord of the intent to vacate the premises at the end of the lease.
- Revises procedures for restoration of possession of a rental property to a landlord to provide that weekends and holidays do not stay the applicable notice period.
- Specifies additional grounds for which a landlord may not retaliate against a tenant.
- Provides that a landlord is not required to notify a tenant of a mortgage default.
- Provides that a pending foreclosure action involving leased premises is not grounds for a tenant to terminate a lease.

The bill conforms statutory cross-references and makes other editorial changes.

This bill creates section 83.683, Florida Statutes.

This bill amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 83.41, 83.42, 83.48, 83.49, 83.50, 83.51, 83.56, 83.575, 83.58, 83.59, 83.60, 83.62, 83.63, and 83.64.

II. Present Situation:

Applicability of the Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act

Part II, ch. 83, F.S., known as the "Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act," governs the relationship between landlords and tenants under a residential rental agreement.¹

The Act does not apply to:

- residency or detention in a facility, whether public or private, when residence or detention is incidental to the provision of medical, geriatric, educational, counseling, religious, or similar services.²
- occupancy under a contract of sale of a dwelling unit or property of which it is a part.³
- transient occupancy in a hotel, condominium, motel, roominghouse, or similar public lodging, or transient occupancy in a mobile home park.⁴
- occupancy by a holder of a proprietary lease in a cooperative apartment.⁵

¹ Section 83.41, F.S., provides that part II, ch. 83, F.S., applies to the rental of a dwelling unit.

² Section 83.42(1), F.S.

³ Section 83.42(2), F.S.

⁴ Section 83.42(3), F.S.

⁵ Section 83.42(4), F.S.

• occupancy by an owner of a condominium unit.⁶

Attorney Fees

Under s. 83.48, F.S., in any civil action brought to enforce the provisions of a rental agreement or the Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, the party in whose favor a judgment or decree has been rendered may recover reasonable costs, including attorney fees from the prevailing party. In an interpretation of s. 83.48, F.S., by the Third District Court of Appeal, the court held that the statute did not allow for the award of attorney fees in an action for damages for personal injuries resulting from a landlord's failure to maintain the rental premises.⁷

Advance Rent Payments

Section 83.49, F.S., specifies requirements for the landlord's duty to a tenant for deposit money or advance rent. "[T]he purpose of [s. 83.49(3)(a), F.S.,] is to assure tenants that their security deposits will be returned expeditiously or they will be promptly notified otherwise."⁸ Section 83.49(3)(a), F.S., states:

[u]pon the vacating of the premises for termination of the lease, if the landlord does not intend to impose a claim on the security deposit, the landlord shall have 15 days to return the security deposit together with interest if otherwise required, or the landlord shall have 30 days to give the tenant written notice by certified mail to the tenant's last known mailing address of his or her intention to impose a claim on the deposit and the reason for imposing the claim. The notice shall contain a statement in substantially the following form:

This is a notice of my intention to impose a claim for damages in the amount of _____ upon your security deposit, due to _____. It is sent to you as required by s. 83.49 (3), Florida Statutes. You are hereby notified that you must object in writing to this deduction from your security deposit within 15 days from the time you receive this notice or I will be authorized to deduct my claim from your security deposit. Your objection must be sent to <u>(landlord's address)</u>.

If the landlord fails to give the required notice within the 30-day period, he or she forfeits the right to impose a claim upon the security deposit.

Section 83.49(3)(b), F.S., provides that:

[u]nless the tenant objects to the imposition of the landlord's claim or the amount thereof within 15 days after receipt of the landlord's notice of intention to impose a claim, the landlord may then deduct the amount of his or her claim and shall remit the balance of the deposit to the tenant

⁶ Section 83.42(5), F.S.

⁷ Gilbert v. Jabour, 527 So. 2d 951 (Fla. 3d DCA 1988).

⁸ See Durene v. Alcime, 448 So. 2d 1208, 1210 (Fla. 3d DCA 1984).

within 30 days after the date of the notice of intention to impose a claim for damages.

Disclosure of Fire Protection

The landlord or the landlord's authorized representative, upon completion of construction of a building exceeding three stories in height and containing dwelling units, must disclose to the tenants initially moving into the building the availability or lack of availability of fire protection.⁹

Landlord's Obligation to Maintain Premises

At all times during a tenancy, the landlord must comply with the requirements of applicable building, housing, and health codes.¹⁰ Where there are no applicable building, housing, or health codes, the landlord must maintain the roofs, windows, screens, doors, floors, steps, porches, exterior walls, foundations, and all other structural components in good repair and the plumbing in reasonable working condition.¹¹

Unless otherwise agreed in writing, in addition to the requirements [described above], the landlord of a dwelling unit other than a single-family home or duplex shall, at all times during the tenancy, make reasonable provisions for:

1. The extermination of rats, mice, roaches, ants, wood-destroying organisms, and bedbugs. When vacation of the premises is required for such extermination, the landlord shall not be liable for damages but shall abate the rent. The tenant shall be required to temporarily vacate the premises for a period of time not to exceed 4 days, on 7 days' written notice, if necessary, for extermination pursuant to this subparagraph.

- 2. Locks and keys.
- 3. The clean and safe condition of common areas.
- 4. Garbage removal and outside receptacles therefor.

5. Functioning facilities for heat during winter, running water, and hot water.¹²

Unless otherwise agreed in writing, at the commencement of the tenancy of a single-family home or duplex, the landlord shall install working smoke detection devices.¹³

Termination of Rental Agreement - Noncompliance

Section 83.56, F.S., establishes the circumstances under which the tenant or landlord may terminate a rental agreement. A tenant may be subject to eviction for monetary default or non-

⁹ Section 83.50(2), F.S.

¹⁰ Section 83.51(1)(a), F.S.

¹¹ Section 83.51(1)(b), F.S.

¹² Section 83.51(2)(a), F.S.

¹³ Section 83.51(2)(b), F.S.

monetary default. Section 83.56, F.S., recognizes two different categories of non-monetary default:

Noncurable Default

(2)(a) If such noncompliance is of a nature that the **tenant should not be** given an opportunity to cure it or if the noncompliance constitutes a subsequent or continuing noncompliance within 12 months of a written warning by the landlord of a similar violation, deliver a written notice to the tenant specifying the noncompliance and the landlord's intent to terminate the rental agreement by reason thereof. Examples of noncompliance which are of a nature that the tenant should not be given an opportunity to cure include, but are not limited to, destruction, damage, or misuse of the landlord's or other tenants' property by intentional act or a subsequent or continued unreasonable disturbance. In such event, the landlord may terminate the rental agreement, and the tenant shall have 7 days from the date that the notice is delivered to vacate the premises.¹⁴

Curable Default

(2)(b) If such noncompliance is of a nature that the **tenant should be** given an opportunity to cure it, deliver a written notice to the tenant specifying the noncompliance, including a notice that, if the noncompliance is not corrected within 7 days from the date the written notice is delivered, the landlord shall terminate the rental agreement by reason thereof. Examples of such noncompliance include, but are not limited to, activities in contravention of the lease or this act such as having or permitting unauthorized pets, guests, or vehicles; parking in an unauthorized manner or permitting such parking; or failing to keep the premises clean and sanitary.¹⁵

Termination of Rental Agreement - Waiver of Rent

If the tenant fails to pay rent when due and the default continues for 3 days, excluding Saturday, Sunday, and legal holidays, after delivery of written demand by the landlord for payment of rent or possession of the premises, the landlord may terminate the rental agreement.¹⁶

If the landlord accepts rent with actual knowledge of a noncompliance by the tenant or accepts performance by the tenant of any other provision of the rental agreement that is at variance with its provisions, the landlord waives his or her right to terminate the rental agreement or to bring a civil action for a specific noncompliance.¹⁷ The landlord does not waive his or her right to terminate the rental agreement or to bring a civil action for any subsequent or continuing noncompliance. If a landlord accepts a partial payment of rent from a tenant with full knowledge

 ¹⁴ Section 83.56(2)(a), F.S.
 ¹⁵ Section 83.56(2)(b), F.S.

¹⁶ Section 83.56(3), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 83.56(5), F.S.

that the payment is not for the full amount, the landlord waives the right to terminate the rental agreement or to bring a civil action.¹⁸

Termination of a Tenancy with a Specific Duration

A rental agreement with a specific duration may contain a provision requiring the tenant to notify the landlord before vacating the premises at the end of the rental agreement.¹⁹ Such a provision may not require more than 60 days' notice before vacating the premises.²⁰ A rental agreement having a specific duration may also provide that if a tenant fails to give the required notice before vacating the premises at the end of the rental agreement, the tenant may be liable for liquidated damages as specified in the rental agreement. To do so, the landlord must provide written notice to the tenant specifying his or her obligations under the notification provision contained in the lease and the date the rental agreement is terminated. The landlord must provide the written notice within 15 days before the start of the notification period contained in the lease and the written notice must list all fees, penalties, and other charges applicable to the tenant.

Restoration of Possession to Landlord Upon Eviction

In an action for possession, if the judgment is entered in the landlord's favor, the clerk must issue a writ to the sheriff commanding him or her to put the landlord in possession after 24 hours' notice is conspicuously posted on the premises.²¹

Retaliatory Conduct

Section 83.64, F.S., prohibits a landlord from discriminatorily increasing a tenant's rent or decrease services to a tenant, or to bring or threaten to bring an action for possession or other civil action, primarily because the landlord is retaliating against the tenant. The tenant may raise the defense of retaliatory conduct if the tenant acts in good faith.

Rental Units or Parcels in Condominiums, Cooperatives, and Homeowners' Associations

If a unit or parcel is occupied by a tenant and the unit or parcel owner is delinquent in paying any monetary obligation due to the association, the association may demand that the tenant pay to the association the subsequent rental payments and continue to make such payments until all monetary obligations of the unit owner related to the unit have been paid in full to the association.²² The tenant must pay the monetary obligations to the association until the association releases the tenant or the tenant discontinues the tenancy in the unit or parcel.

¹⁸ See In re Sorrento's I, Inc., 195 B.R. 502, 504 (Bankruptcy. M.D. Fla. 1996).

¹⁹ Section 83.575(1), F.S.

 $^{^{20}}$ *Id*.

²¹ Section 83.62, F.S.

²² Sections 718.116(11)(a) and (b), 719.108(10)(a) and (b), and 720.3085(8)(a) and (b), F.S.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Applicability of the Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act

The bill specifies that the eviction procedures in s. 83.62, F.S.,²³ apply to an eviction from a dwelling subsequent to a final judgment in foreclosure, ejectment, quiet title, partition, or other cause of action in which the court awards possession of a dwelling unit.

The eviction procedures in ss. 83.59,²⁴ 83.60,²⁵ 83.61,²⁶ 83.62, 83.625,²⁷ and 83.681, F.S.,²⁸ apply to eviction from a dwelling based on nonpayment of association fees required to be paid by the owner of the dwelling to a condominium, cooperative, or homeowners' association after demand. In such cases, the prevailing party in the litigation is considered a landlord for purposes of those sections. A prevailing party awarded possession of a dwelling unit shall be governed by s. 83.67(1), (5), (6), and (7), F.S.²⁹

The bill expands the application of the Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to apply to lease-purchase agreements for residential properties which are not a "bona fide" contract of sale. The bill further defines a bona fide contract of sale as one in which at least one month's rent has

²³ Section 83.62(1), F.S., provides that in an action for possession of a dwelling unit, after entry of judgment in favor of the landlord, the clerk is required to issue a writ to the sheriff describing the premises and commanding the sheriff to put the landlord in possession after 24 hours' notice conspicuously posted on the premises.

²⁴ Under s. 83.59, F.S., a landlord, the landlord's attorney, or the landlord's agent applying for the removal of a tenant must file in the county court where the premises are located a complaint describing the dwelling unit and stating the facts that authorize its recovery. The landlord is entitled to the summary procedure in s. 51.011, F.S., and the court must advance the cause on the calendar. Section 83.59(2), F.S. The prevailing party is entitled to have judgment for costs and execution thereof.

 $^{^{25}}$ In an action by the landlord for possession of a dwelling unit, if the tenant interposes any defense other than payment, the tenant must pay into the registry of the court the accrued rent as alleged in the complaint or determined by the court and the rent which accrues during the pendency of the proceeding, when due. Section 83.60(2), F.S. Failure of the tenant to pay the rent into the registry of the court constitutes an absolute waiver of the tenant's defenses other than payment, and the landlord is entitled to an immediate default judgment for removal of the tenant with a writ of possession to issue without further notice or hearing. *Id.*

²⁶ "When the tenant has deposited funds into the registry of the court in accordance with the provisions of s. 83.60(2), [F.S.,] and the landlord is in actual danger of loss of the premises or other personal hardship resulting from the loss of rental income from the premises, the landlord may apply to the court for disbursement of all or part of the funds or for prompt final hearing." Section 83.61, F.S. "The court, after preliminary hearing, may award all or any portion of the funds on deposit to the landlord or may proceed immediately to a final resolution of the cause." *Id.*

²⁷ "In an action by the landlord for possession of a dwelling unit based upon nonpayment of rent, if the court finds the rent is due, owing, and unpaid and by reason thereof the landlord is entitled to possession of the premises, the court, in addition to awarding possession of the premises to the landlord, shall direct, in an amount which is within its jurisdictional limitations, the entry of a money judgment with costs in favor of the landlord and against the tenant for the amount of money found due, owing, and unpaid by the tenant to the landlord." Section 83.625, F.S.

²⁸ "A landlord who gives notice to a tenant of the landlord's intent to terminate the tenant's lease [under applicable law], due to the tenant's intentional destruction, damage, or misuse of the landlord's property may petition the county or circuit court for an injunction prohibiting the tenant from continuing to violate any provisions of the [Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act]." Section 83.681, F.S.

²⁹ A landlord of any dwelling unit governed by Florida Residential Landlord and Tenant Act may not cause, directly or indirectly, the termination or interruption of any utility service furnished the tenant, including, but not limited to, water, heat, light, electricity, gas, elevator, garbage collection, or refrigeration, whether or not the utility service is under the control of, or payment is made by, the landlord. Section 83.67

been paid and the buyer has paid a deposit of at least 5 percent of the value of the property, or in which the buyer has paid at least 12 months' rent.

Attorney Fees

The bill provides that a right to attorney fees may not be waived in a lease agreement. In addition, the bill provides that attorney fees may not be awarded in a claim for personal injury damages based on a breach of duty under s. 83.51, F.S., regarding the landlord's obligation to maintain the premises. The limitation on the award of attorney fees in a personal injury action based on the failure of a landlord to maintain the leased premises appears codify the interpretation of that section by the Third District Court of Appeal in *Gilbert v. Jabour*.

Advance Rent Payments/Nonrefundable Deposits

The bill eliminates a requirement under s. 83.49(2), F.S., for a landlord to give to a tenant a copy of the law relating to security deposits and replaces it with another disclosure which states:

YOUR LEASE REQUIRES PAYMENT OF CERTAIN DEPOSITS. THE LANDLORD MAY TRANSFER ADVANCE RENTS AND NONREFUNDABLE DEPOSITS TO THE LANDLORD'S ACCOUNT AS THEY ARE DUE AND WITHOUT NOTICE. WHEN YOU MOVE OUT, YOU MUST GIVE THE LANDLORD YOUR NEW ADDRESS SO THAT THE LANDLORD CAN SEND YOU NOTICES REGARDING YOUR DEPOSIT. THE LANDLORD MUST MAIL YOU NOTICE, WITHIN 30 DAYS AFTER YOU MOVE OUT, OF THE LANDLORD'S INTENT TO IMPOSE A CLAIM AGAINST THE DEPOSIT. IF YOU DO NOT REPLY TO THE LANDLORD STATING YOUR OBJECTION TO THE CLAIM WITHIN 15 DAYS AFTER RECEIPT OF THE LANDLORD'S NOTICE, THE LANDLORD WILL COLLECT THE CLAIM AND MUST MAIL YOU THE REMAINING DEPOSIT, IF ANY. IF YOU TIMELY OBJECT, THE LANDLORD MUST HOLD THE DEPOSIT AND EITHER YOU OR THE LANDLORD WILL HAVE TO FILE A LAWSUIT SO THAT THE COURT CAN RESOLVE THE DISPUTE.

The bill allows the landlord to withdraw advance rents from the deposit account without notice and as the rents become due to the landlord. The bill also allows a landlord to transfer "nonrefundable deposits" to the landlord. However, the bill does not describe what constitutes a nonrefundable deposit. Such deposits appear to be more like a fee than a deposit.

Transfer of Deposits to New Owner or Manager

The bill creates a rebuttable presumption that the previous owner or manager of the property of the property has transferred any deposit to the new owner. However, the new owner's liability is limited to one month's rent.³⁰

³⁰ The amount could be at variance with the amount actually received from the previous owner or agent.

The bill eliminates a disclosure requirement for landlords regarding the availability or lack of availability of fire protection in certain new construction. Current law requires the landlord or the landlord's authorized representative, upon completion of construction of a building exceeding three stories in height and containing dwelling units, to disclose to the tenants initially moving into the building the availability or lack of availability of fire protection.³¹

Maintenance of Screens on Windows

The bill relieves landlords of single-family homes and duplexes of the obligation to provide and maintain screens on windows. The bill moves a landlord's mandatory obligation to maintain screens at the landlord's expense under from s. 83.51(1)(b), F.S., to s. 83.52(2)(a), F.S., where the maintenance of screens could be required of a tenant if the lease so provides.

Payment of Condominium, Cooperative, or Homeowners' Association Assessments

The bill requires the landlord to pay condominium, cooperative, or homeowners' association assessments. Under current law, "a [condominium] unit owner, regardless of how his or her title has been acquired, including by purchase at a foreclosure sale or by deed in lieu of foreclosure, is liable for all assessments which come due while he or she is the unit owner.³² Under current law, "[w]hen authorized by the governing documents, the [homeowner's] association has a lien on each parcel to secure the payment of assessments and other amounts provided for by law." Current law authorizes cooperative associations to make and collect assessments and to lease, maintain, repair, and replace the common areas.³³

Termination of Rental Agreement- Noncompliance

In the event a notice of noncompliance has been previously delivered to a tenant giving the tenant an opportunity to cure a curable lease violation, the bill provides that upon re-occurrence of the noncompliance, the landlord is not required to provide an additional notice before instituting an eviction action.

Termination of Rental Agreement- Rent Waiver

The bill requires that after a landlord serves a tenant with a 3-day notice for failure to pay rent, the landlord may require payment of the rent to be in cash, money order, or certified funds. The bill also allows the landlord to demand "all moneys due," including late fees, to the landlord. However, beyond rent and late fees, the bill does not describe what could constitute "all moneys due." As a technical matter, the bill should be amended to conform the statutory form for the 3-day notice to replace the word "rent" with "all moneys due."

The bill provides that the right to the statutorily required notices before a landlord or tenant may terminate a lease may not be waived in the lease. The bill provides that a landlord does not waive

³¹ Section 83.50(2), F.S.

 $^{^{32}}$ Section 718.116(1)(a), F.S.

³³ Section 719.104(5), F.S.

the right to terminate a rental agreement or to bring a civil action for noncompliance by accepting partial rent if the landlord notifies the tenant that the landlord may seek payment of the remainder. Additionally, the bill increases the period to institute an action for possession of a rental unit for noncompliance before an exemption involving rent subsidies is waived to 90 days from 45 days.

Termination of a Tenancy with a Specific Duration

The bill provides that if a rental agreement has a requirement for a tenant to provide notice to the landlord regarding nonrenewal, the rental agreement must provide a reciprocal requirement for the landlord to provide the same notice of an intent not to renew. If the landlord fails to give the tenant a timely notice of nonrenewal, the tenant may elect to continue the tenancy for up to 60 days after the tenant's receipt of the notice of nonrenewal.

Restoration of Possession to Landlord

Existing law requires an eviction notice to be posted on a rental property at least 24 hours before a sheriff may restore possession of the property to the landlord. The bill provides that weekends and holidays do not stay the 24-hour notice period. The bill revises procedures for the restoration of possession of a rental unit to a landlord to provides that weekends and legal holidays do not stay the 24-hour notice period.

Retaliatory Conduct

The bill specifies two additional grounds for which a landlord may not retaliate against a tenant:

- The tenant has paid the rent to a condominium, cooperative, or homeowners' association after demand from the association.
- The tenant has exercised his or her rights under local, state, or federal fair housing laws.

Foreclosure of Leased Property

Under the bill, a landlord is not required to notify a tenant of a mortgage default. Additionally, a pending foreclosure action involving the leased premises is not grounds for a tenant to terminate a lease.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2012.

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.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The bill may make evictions or actions for possession of a residential dwelling unit faster and less costly in some circumstances.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes: (Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

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