

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 Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice

BILL: SB 1464

INTRODUCER: Senator Lee

SUBJECT: Office of the Attorney General

DATE: March 19, 2013 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Shankle	Cibula	JU	Favorable
2.	Cantral	Sadberry	ACJ	Favorable
3.			AP	
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

SB 1464 makes changes to laws enforced by or governing the Office of the Attorney General, also known as the Department of Legal Affairs.

The bill has an insignificant fiscal impact.

The changes in the bill:

- Clarify how much money in the Legal Affairs Revolving Trust Fund will be transferred to the General Revenue Fund at the end of a fiscal year;
- Correct a discrepancy in statute and specify that rewards for reporting Medicaid fraud to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement be paid from the Operating Trust Fund;
- Incorporate current federal consumer protection laws and regulations of the Federal Trade Commission, by reference, into Florida’s Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act, effectively specifying additional, deceptive and unfair trade practices;
- Allow final written notification of the need to repair a vehicle that does not conform to the manufacturer’s warranty to be made by any method providing a delivery confirmation.
- Require the Department of Legal Affairs, upon receipt from a manufacturer of a procedure for handling consumer complaints, to notify the manufacturer of any deficiencies in those procedures, certify the procedures for a period not to exceed 1 year, or deny certification of the manufacturer’s procedures and state the reasons for the denial.
- Allow notices sent by the Department of Legal Affairs rejecting arbitration for a motor vehicle dispute to be sent by any method and deleting a requirement that such notices be sent by registered mail.

- Allow the Attorney General discretion as to whether to file an action based on a complaint involving discriminatory housing practices.

This bill makes technical and procedural changes.

This bill has an effective date of July 1, 2013.

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 16.53, 409.9203, 501.203, 501.204, 681.102, 681.104, 681.108, 681.109, and 760.34.

II. Present Situation:

Legal Affairs Revolving Trust Fund

Section 16.53, F.S., creates the Legal Affairs Revolving Trust Fund from which the Legislature may appropriate funds for the purpose of enforcement by the Attorney General of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act, the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act, the Florida False Claims Act, or state or federal antitrust laws.¹ The fund acquires money from a portion of the money recovered by the Attorney General enforcing the state's antitrust and racketeering laws and the Florida False Claims Act.²

Currently, at the end of the fiscal year, any money remaining in the fund in excess of three times the budgets of the antitrust and racketeering sections of the Attorney General's office are transferred to the General Revenue fund.³

Medicaid Fraud

Currently s. 409.9203(3), F.S., requires that rewards for reporting Medicaid fraud to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement be paid from the Legal Affairs Revolving Trust Fund pursuant to s. 68.085, F.S. However, s. 68.085(4), F.S., states that such rewards will be paid from the Operating Trust Fund, leading to confusion in the statutes as to which fund should be used to pay awards.

Nonconformity of Motor Vehicles

Under s. 681.104, F.S., a manufacturer of an automobile notified of a defect in the vehicle by the consumer within 24 months of the delivery of the vehicle to the consumer, must make repairs to the vehicle so that it conforms to the warranty on the vehicle. After three attempts to repair the nonconformity, the consumer must give written notice by certified or express mail to the manufacturer, allowing the manufacturer one final chance to repair the vehicle.⁴

If the manufacturer cannot repair the vehicle to conform to the warranty after this final attempt, the manufacturer, within 40 days, must either repurchase the vehicle and refund the full purchase

¹ Section 16.53(1), F.S.

² Sections 16.53(2), 16.53(3), 16.53(4), and 16.53(5), F.S.

³ Section 16.53(7), F.S.

⁴ Section 681.104(1), F.S.

price to the consumer, less a reasonable offset for use, or if the consumer pays a reasonable offset for use, replace the vehicle with a vehicle acceptable to the consumer.⁵

Reasonable offset for use is defined in s. 681.102(19), F.S., as “the number of miles attributable to a consumer up to the date of a settlement agreement or arbitration hearing, whichever occurs first, multiplied by the purchase price of the vehicle and divided by 120,000, except in the case of a recreational vehicle, in which event it shall be divided by 60,000.”

However, under s. 601.108(1), F.S., if a manufacturer establishes a procedure that the Department of Legal Affairs (DLA) certifies as complying with the informal dispute settlement procedures in the Code of Federal Regulations,⁶ and informs the consumer how to file a claim, the consumer must follow that procedure before he or she can either receive a refund or a replacement vehicle.

In order to have such a procedure certified, the manufacturer must submit the procedure to the DLA which must either certify the procedure or notify the manufacturer of any deficiencies in the application or the procedure.⁷ The DLA is required to review each certified procedure annually.

If a manufacturer has a certified procedure and the consumer and manufacturer cannot reach a decision on a dispute by use of the certified procedure, within 40 days after filing, the consumer may apply to the DLA to have the dispute removed to the Florida New Motor Vehicle Board for arbitration.⁸ If the DLA determines that it does not have sufficient evidence to resolve the dispute after providing the consumer with an opportunity to present additional evidence, the DLA may reject arbitration of the matter. If a dispute is rejected, the DLA must, by registered mail, notify the consumer and manufacturer and provide a brief explanation as to why.⁹

Discriminating Housing Practices

Section 760.34, F.S., requires that when a complaint of discriminatory housing practices has been filed and the Florida Commission on Human Relations finds there is reasonable cause to believe that discrimination has occurred, the Attorney general must bring an action to enforce the Florida Fair Housing Act¹⁰ and prevent the discrimination.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Legal Affairs Revolving Trust Fund (Section 1)

The bill amends s. 16.53(7), F.S., to clarify how much money in the Legal Affairs Revolving Trust Fund will be transferred to the General Revenue Fund at the end of a fiscal year. Current

⁵ Section 681.104(2)(a), F.S.

⁶ See 16 C.F.R. part 703.

⁷ Section 681.108(2), F.S.

⁸ Section 681.109(1), F.S.

⁹ Section 681.109(8), F.S.

¹⁰ Sections 760.20-760.37, F.S.

law specifies the amount which will be transferred as the excess of three times the amount of the combined budgets of the antitrust and racketeering sections of the Attorney General's office for the forthcoming fiscal year. Both of those sections of the office, however, are supported by the fund, and one of those sections has been renamed. The change in the statute provides that the budgets of the sections of the Attorney General's Office supported by the fund will be used to determine the amount of funds that will be transferred to the General Revenue Fund at the end of each fiscal year.

Medicaid Fraud (Section 2)

The bill amends s. 409.9203(3), F.S., to require that rewards for reporting Medicaid fraud to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement be paid from the Operating Trust Fund, removing the inconsistency between ss. 409.9203(3) and 68.085(4), F.S.

Incorporation of Current Federal Laws and Regulations (Sections 3 and 4)

The bill amends ss. 501.203 and 501.204, F.S., to incorporate current federal consumer protection laws and regulations of the Federal Trade Commission into Florida's Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act, effectively specifying additional deceptive and unfair trade practices.

Nonconformity of Motor Vehicles (Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8)

The bill amends s. 681.104, F.S., to allow final written notification of the need to repair a vehicle not conforming to the manufacturer's warranty to be made by any method providing a delivery confirmation as opposed to only registered or express mail.

The bill amends s. 681.102(14), F.S., to redefine the term "reasonable offset for use" as:

the number of miles attributable to a consumer up to the date of a settlement agreement or arbitration hearing, whichever occurs first, multiplied by the base selling or sale purchase price of the vehicle as reflected on the purchase invoice, exclusive of taxes, government fees, and dealer fees, or in the case of a lease, the agreed upon value as reflected in the lease agreement and divided by 120,000, except in the case of a recreational vehicle, in which event it shall be divided by 60,000.

The difference between the definition in existing law and in the bill is the revised definition excludes government or dealer fees in calculating the reasonable offset for use. This will result in a slightly lower offset that manufacturers will be allowed to withhold when refunding the price of a vehicle that does not conform to its warranty.

The bill amends s. 681.108(2), F.S., to require upon receipt from a manufacturer of a procedure for handling consumer complaints the DLA shall:

- Notify the manufacturer of any deficiencies in the procedure;
- Certify the procedure for a period not to exceed 1 year; or
- Deny the certification and state why.

The bill requires that a manufacturer seeking recertification of a procedure for handling consumer complaints to notify the DLA at least 60 days before the one year certification period ends so that the department may review and decide whether to recertify the manufacturer's procedure. This will allow the DLA to only review those procedures that manufacturers wish to have recertified.

The bill amends s. 681.109(6), F.S., which governs disputes overseen by the Florida New Motor Vehicle Board, to allow the DLA flexibility in providing notice to the consumer and manufacturer of a rejection of a dispute. The bill removes the requirement that notice must be sent by registered mail. The legislature may wish to consider a requirement that the notice be in writing and mailed to the consumer and manufacturer.

Discriminating Housing Practices (Section 9)

The bill amends s. 760.34(4), F.S., to allow the Attorney General discretion as to whether to file an action based on a complaint involving discriminatory housing practices.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2013.

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 changes the way reasonable offset for use is calculated for purpose of motor vehicle warranties and defects. This will result in a slightly lower offset that manufacturers will be allowed to withhold when refunding the price of a vehicle that does not conform to its warranty.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill's changes to the Legal Affairs Revolving Trust Fund and the Operating Trust Fund are technical in nature and will not have a financial impact. The changes to the statutes concerning nonconforming motor vehicles may result in a small increase in caseload for the Department of Legal Affairs. The increased discretion for the Attorney General as to whether to file an action for a complaint involving discriminatory housing practices will potentially reduce the number of cases filed and result in a minor positive fiscal impact.

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.