

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 Committee on Criminal Justice

BILL: SB 1534

INTRODUCER: Senator Brandes

SUBJECT: Disposition of Liens and Forfeited Property

DATE: March 27, 2015

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Dugger	Cannon	CJ	Favorable
2.			ACJ	
3.			AP	

I. Summary:

SB 1534 amends s. 932.7055, F.S., by revising the authorized distribution and use of contraband forfeiture funds under the act as follows.

It prohibits a seizing agency from retaining the forfeited property for the agency's use.

It requires the seizing agency to deposit into the Crimes Compensation Trust Fund the forfeiture proceeds which remain after all liens and debts are paid as follows:

- All remaining proceeds, if it is a state agency; or
- Fifty percent of remaining proceeds, if it is a local law enforcement agency.

(Currently a seizing agency can retain these proceeds).

Additionally, the bill provides that the other 50 percent of forfeiture proceeds retained by a local law enforcement agency can only be used for school resource officers, crime prevention, safe neighborhood, or drug abuse education and prevention programs.

The bill also requires any local law enforcement agency that acquires at least \$15,000 under the act within a fiscal year to expend or donate 50 percent of the proceeds in excess of \$15,000 for these designated programs (currently a minimum of 15 percent is required).

II. Present Situation:

The Contraband Forfeiture Act, ss. 932.701-932.706, F.S., prescribes procedures for law enforcement agencies to follow when seizing, forfeiting, and disposing of property under the act. Currently, under s. 932.703, F.S., any contraband article, vessel, motor vehicle, aircraft, other personal property, or real property used in violation of the act, or in, upon, or by means of which

any violation of the act has taken or is taking place, may be seized and shall be forfeited subject to the provisions of the act.¹

Section 932.704, F.S., provides that the Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), in consultation with the Florida Sheriffs Association and the Florida Police Chiefs Association, shall develop guidelines and training procedures to be used by state and local law enforcement agencies and state attorneys in implementing the act. Each agency that seizes property shall periodically review its seizures, settlements, and forfeiture proceedings to determine whether they comply with the act and the adopted guidelines. The determination of whether an agency will file a forfeiture action must be the sole responsibility of the head of the agency or his or her designee. The determination of whether to seize currency must be made by supervisory personnel. The agency's legal counsel must be notified as soon as possible.²

Section 932.7055, F.S., provides for the disposition of liens and forfeited property under the act. The seizing agency may do any of the following when a final judgment of forfeiture is granted:

- Retain the property for the agency's use;
- Sell the property at a public auction or by sealed bid to the highest bidder; or
- Salvage, trade, or transfer the property to any public or nonprofit organization.³

If the property has a lien attached and the agency sells the property, the proceeds of the sale are to be distributed in this order:

- Payment of the balance due on any lien preserved by the court in the forfeiture proceedings.
- Payment of the cost incurred by the seizing agency in connection with the storage, maintenance, security, and forfeiture of such property.
- Payment of court costs incurred in the forfeiture proceeding.⁴

The proceeds which remain after all liens and debts against the forfeited property are paid are then deposited into a special law enforcement trust fund and may be used to fund school resource officers, crime prevention, safe neighborhood, drug abuse education and prevention programs, or other law enforcement purposes, including defraying the cost of protracted or complex investigations, providing additional equipment or expertise, purchasing automated external defibrillators for law enforcement vehicles, and providing matching funds to obtain federal grants. These proceeds and interest may not be used to meet normal operation expenses.⁵

Additionally, any local law enforcement agency that acquires at least \$15,000 under the act within a fiscal year must expend or donate no less than 15 percent of these proceeds for the support or operation of any drug treatment, drug abuse education, drug prevention, crime prevention, safe neighborhood, or school resource officer program. The agency has discretion to determine which program receives the funds.⁶

¹ Section 932.703(1), F.S. The constitutionality of the act was upheld by the Florida Supreme Court in *Department of Law Enforcement v. Real Property*, 588 So.2d 957 (Fla. 1991).

² Section 932.704(11), F.S.

³ Section 932.7055(1), F.S.

⁴ Sections 932.7055(3) and (4), F.S.

⁵ Section 932.7055(5), F.S.

⁶ Section 932.7055(5)(c)3., F.S.

An agency or organization, other than the seizing agency, that wishes to receive such funds shall apply to the sheriff or chief of police for an appropriation. If the agency or organization receives funding under the act, it must provide an accounting, indicating that the funds were only used for the above stated purposes.⁷

If the seizing agency is a local law enforcement agency, the proceeds are deposited into a special law enforcement trust fund established by the governing body of a county or municipality. The funds may be appropriated only to the sheriff's office by the board of county commissioners or to the police department by the governing body of the municipality when the sheriff or police chief has certified that the request for funds will be used in compliance with the act.⁸

If the seizing agency is a state agency, the remaining proceeds are deposited into the General Revenue Fund, except that some agencies have their own forfeiture trust fund, including:

- FDLE;
- Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco;
- Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles;
- Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission;
- State Attorney Offices;
- School Board Security Agencies;
- State University System Police Departments;
- Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services;
- Department of Military Affairs;
- Medicaid Fraud Control Unit of the Department of Legal Affairs;
- Division of State Fire Marshal of the Department of Financial Services; and
- Division of Insurance Fraud of the Department of Financial Services.⁹

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends s. 932.7055, F.S., by revising the authorized distribution and use of contraband forfeiture funds under the act as follows.

It prohibits a seizing agency from retaining the forfeited property for the agency's use.

It requires the seizing agency to deposit into the Crimes Compensation Trust Fund the forfeiture proceeds which remain after all liens and debts are paid as follows:

- All remaining proceeds, if it is a state agency; or
 - Fifty percent of remaining proceeds, if it is a local law enforcement agency.
- (Currently a seizing agency can retain these proceeds.)

Additionally, the bill provides that the other 50 percent of forfeiture proceeds retained by a local law enforcement agency can only be used for school resource officers, crime prevention, safe neighborhood, or drug abuse education and prevention programs. Under the bill, it can no longer be used for other law enforcement purposes, including defraying the cost of protracted or

⁷ Section 932.7055(5)(c), F.S.

⁸ Section 932.7055(5), F.S.

⁹ Section 932.7055(6), F.S.

complex investigations, providing additional equipment or expertise, purchasing automated external defibrillators, or providing matching funds for federal grants.

The bill requires any local law enforcement agency that acquires at least \$15,000 under the act within a fiscal year to expend or donate 50 percent of the proceeds in excess of \$15,000 for these designated programs (currently a minimum of 15 percent is required). The bill also requires any other agency or organization that requests to receive such funds to provide a detailed accounting, indicating that the funds will only be used for the above stated purposes. The bill states that these requests are public records as defined in ch. 119, F.S.

The bill deletes the current provisions establishing forfeiture trust funds for numerous specified state agencies. It also deletes obsolete language in paragraph (4)(d) of s. 932.7055, F.S.

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2015.

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:

Persons who receive funding from the Crimes Compensation Trust Fund may be positively impacted as a result of the bill's mandate that seizing agencies deposit forfeiture funds into that trust fund rather than the currently authorized forfeiture trust funds.

C. Government Sector Impact:

Local law enforcement and state agencies that seize and forfeit property under the act will be negatively impacted by the bill.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 932.7055 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill reenacts the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 381.0081, 895.09, and 932.703.

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.