

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 Judiciary

BILL: CS/SB 748

INTRODUCER: Judiciary Committee and Senator Steube

SUBJECT: Florida Court Educational Council

DATE: March 29, 2017

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Davis	Cibula	JU	Fav/CS
2.			ACJ	
3.			AP	

Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

I. Summary:

CS/SB 748 establishes the composition and duties of the Florida Court Educational Council in statute. The Council was originally established in 1978 by an administrative order of the Florida Supreme Court and has operated at the discretion of the Court.

The Council, as established by the bill, will be composed of 17 active judges who are elected by the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges, the Florida Conference of Circuit Court Judge, or the Florida Conference of County Court Judges.. The Council will adopt a comprehensive plan for operating the Court Education Trust Fund and the expenditure of moneys deposited into the trust fund for education and training programs for judges and other court personnel.

The bill requires the Council to adopt guidelines for administrative expenses and to describe in an annual report its efforts to reduce administrative expenses below 44 percent. The Council may not employ more than 15 full-time employees and must be headquartered at the First District Court of Appeal in Tallahassee.

The Council must submit an annual report to the Legislature detailing the number of judges and court personnel who attend training or education programs and provide specifics about the programs. The report must also detail the amount of moneys deposited into the trust fund and the balance at the end of the fiscal year.

If any provisions of the bill are declared invalid, the bill provides that the current fees that support the trust fund may not be assessed and that the remaining unencumbered funds will revert to the General Revenue Fund and the trust fund will be terminated.

II. Present Situation:

The Florida Court Educational Council

The Florida Supreme Court established the Florida Court Educational Council by administrative order in 1978. It has operated under the direction of the Supreme Court since its inception. The Council was given the responsibility to develop and maintain a comprehensive educational program for judges and court personnel. It was also tasked with making budget, program, and policy recommendations to the Supreme Court for continuing education for judges and some court professionals.¹

Education and Training

Today, the Council and the Office of State Courts Administrator provide training to judges and court staff through a variety of courses on legal issues, ethics, and administrative skills.² The Court's judicial education program has grown substantially over the years to meet the needs of the states almost 1,000 judges.³ In 2016, more than 3,245 judges and court staff received training funded through Court Education Trust Fund,⁴ which is discussed below. An additional 142 people attended distance learning sessions, and many publications are provided online.

Council Membership

The Council is composed of 20 members who are appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in an administrative order. The current members are justices or judges from each of the four court levels, the Supreme Court, district courts of appeal, circuit court, and county court, as well as one trial court administrator, and a magistrate.⁵ The current number of members and area of responsibility are:

- Florida Supreme Court – Chief Justice (1).
- District Court of Appeal (2).
- Circuit Courts (4).
- County Courts (4).
- Deans and Associate Deans (4).
- Trial Court Administrators (1).
- Florida Court Personnel (2).
- Universal Planning Committee (2).

¹ *In Re: Florida Court Educational Council*, Fla. Admin. Order No. AOSC14-35. (July 1, 2014).

² Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, Report No. 15-13, (December 2015) available at <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/MonitorDocs/Reports/pdf/1513rpt.pdf>.

³ Office of the State Court Administrator, Florida, *Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives* (2016) available at http://www.flcourts.org/core/fileparse.php/646/urlt/Short-History_2016.pdf.

⁴ Office of the State Courts Administrator, *2017 Judicial Impact Statement for SB 748* (March 23, 2017) (on file with the Senate Committee on Judiciary).

⁵ *In Re: Florida Court Education Council*, Fla. Admin. Order No AOSC16-42 (June 30, 2016) (on file with the Senate Committee on Judiciary).

The Court Education Section, within the Office of State Courts Administrator, provides staffing needs for the Council. The Court Education Section assists in managing the trust fund discussed below and oversees budgeting, record keeping, and travel reimbursements. They also assist with planning and developing training and help judges meet the continuing education requirements.⁶ According to the Office of the State Courts Administrator, there are currently 15 full-time employees who create and administer court education in the state.⁷

Court Education Trust Fund

The Supreme Court, through the Florida Court Education Council, administers the Court Education Trust Fund, which was established by the Legislature in 1982.⁸ The trust fund moneys are used to provide education and training for judges and other court personnel, as determined by the Council.⁹ The Council is responsible for developing a comprehensive plan for the operation of the trust fund and for the expenditure of the moneys deposited into the trust fund. The plan provides for travel, per diem, tuition, educational materials, and other costs incurred for the educational programs, both in and out of state, for the benefit of the judiciary of the state.¹⁰

The trust fund is funded from two sources: a portion of the filing fees for trial and appellate proceedings¹¹ and service charges in probate matters.¹² These fees or service charges amount to \$3.50 per applicable filing.

On July 1, 2015, the Court Education Trust Fund had a cash balance of \$1,204,003. During Fiscal Year 2015-16, the trust fund accrued \$2,585,091 in total revenues and had \$2,019,300 in total disbursements. The ending cash balance on June 30, 2016, was \$1,769,794.

The Supreme Court, operating through the Council, is required to submit an annual report by October 1 to the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must include the number of judges and court personnel who attend each training and educational program, the program attended and its location, and the costs incurred. The report must also identify which judges and personnel attended out-of-state programs and the costs incurred. Finally, the report must show the total dollars deposited into the fund for each fiscal year and the balance at the end of the fiscal year.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Court Education Trust Fund

The bill removes the Supreme Court as the administrator of the Court Education Trust Fund and names the Florida Court Educational Council as the administrator. The Council is required to adopt a comprehensive plan for operating the Court Education Trust Fund and for the

⁶ See *supra* note 2.

⁷ See *supra* note 4.

⁸ Ch. 82-168, s. 1, Laws of Fla. and s. 25.384, F.S.

⁹ Section 25.384(2)(a), F.S.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Sections 28.241(1)(a)l.c., and 34.041(1)(b), F.S.

¹² Section 28.2401(3), F.S.

expenditure of the moneys in the trust fund. The responsibilities transferred to the Council are almost identical to those required under current law. The comprehensive plan must provide for travel, per diem, tuition, educational materials, and other related costs incurred for in-state and out-of-state education and training programs for judges and court personnel to benefit the judiciary. The programs will be determined by the Council.

Florida Court Educational Council

Appointment and Composition

The bill significantly changes the method of appointment and composition of the Council. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court will not make the appointments to the Council. Instead, the members will be elected to staggered 2-year terms by other judges. Specifically, two members of the council will be elected by the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges from among its members. Ten members will be elected by the Florida Conference of Circuit Court Judges from among its members. And five members will be elected by the Florida Conference of County Court Judges from among its members. The Council will elect its chair for a 1-year term and also elect other officers from the membership when it deems necessary.

Duties

The administrative duties of the council include:

- Adopting guidelines on permissible administrative expenses;
- Adopting policies and guidelines relative to the selection of education and training programs, the approval of courses and the selection of participants as well as developing and funding programs for new judges, hearing officers, and magistrates;
- Adopting reporting formats; and
- Employing and supervising up to 15 council employees.

New Location

The Council and its employees will be headquartered at the First District Court of Appeal in Tallahassee.

Annual Report

The annual report required under the bill is virtually identical to the annual report required under current law. It must be submitted by October 1 to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of House and include the number of judges and court personnel who attend in-state training or educational programs, the program attended and its location, and the costs involved. The report must also include the judges and court personnel who attend out-of-state programs and the costs incurred with those programs. The annual report must identify the total dollars deposited into the trust fund for each fiscal year and the balance remaining in the trust fund at the end of the fiscal year.

The report must also provide a description of the efforts the council makes to reduce its administrative expenses below 44 percent of the previous year's gross receipts on administrative expenses. However, the report does not need to address the council's efforts to minimize its

administrative expenses if the council's administrative expenses fall below 25 percent of the previous year's gross receipts.

Invalidity and Reversion

The bill provides that if any of its substantive provisions relating to the Court Education Trust Fund or the Florida Court Educational Council are declared invalid, all of the substantive provisions are invalid. Additionally, upon the finding of invalidity, at least some of the fees funding the Court Education Trust Fund may not be assessed and the funds in the trust fund revert to the General Revenue Fund.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2017.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. Other Constitutional Issues:

There are two constitutional provisions that are relevant to this bill. Article V, s. 2(a) of the State Constitution states that "The supreme court shall adopt rules for the practice and procedure in all courts including . . . the administrative supervision of all courts." Article V, s. 14(d) of State Constitution states that "The judiciary shall have no power to fix appropriations." There is no case law indicating that the Court's authority to provide administrative supervision of all courts includes the exclusive authority to direct funding for court education programs or determine who is eligible to participate in an education program.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

If a substantive provision of the bill is declared invalid, the additional filing fee or surcharge of \$3.50 that funds the Court Education Trust Fund is not to be collected. Additionally, at the time of the finding of invalidity, any remaining unencumbered funds in the trust fund are to revert to the General Revenue Fund.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The bill does not appear to have an impact on the private sector.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Florida Court Education Council is required to establish its operations in the ninth judicial circuit.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 25.384 and 25.385.

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

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

CS by Judiciary on March 28, 2017:

The committee substitute differs from the original bill in three ways. First, the committee substitute provides for the election of the members of the Florida Court Education Council. Second, the committee substitute increases number of employees that the council may employ to 15. Lastly, the committee substitute no longer limits the administrative expenses of the council. Instead, the council is generally required to report on its efforts to reduce its administrative expenses.

B. Amendments:

None.