

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 Regulated Industries

BILL: SB 750

INTRODUCER: Senator Latvala and others

SUBJECT: Franchises

DATE: April 3, 2017

REVISED: _____

| | ANALYST | STAFF DIRECTOR | REFERENCE | ACTION |
|----|---------|----------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1. | Kraemer | McSwain | RI | Pre-meeting |
| 2. | | | JU | |
| 3. | | | RC | |

I. Summary:

SB 750 creates the “Protect Florida Small Business Act” (act). The act regulates the conduct of franchisors and their representatives to prevent fraud, unfair business practices, unfair methods of competition, impositions, and other abuses upon franchisees in Florida. The bill addresses requirements for sale, transfer, or assignment of franchises, and for the mandatory repurchase by a franchisor of a franchise or an interest in a franchise, and for the repurchase of certain assets, including inventory, supplies, equipment, good will, and furnishings, upon termination, nonrenewal, or expiration of a franchise.

The bill provides that a franchise agreement in violation of any provision in the act is void and unenforceable, and any provision that restricts the location (venue) of an action related to a claim arising under a franchise agreement that involves franchisees who are residents of Florida, or a business entity established in Florida, or a franchise either operating or to be operated in Florida.

SB 750 removes the applicability of the Florida Franchise Act (s. 817.416, F.S) from franchises entered into, renewed, amended, or revised on or after the effective date of the act.

The bill has an indeterminate fiscal impact on state government. See Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill is effective upon becoming law.

II. Present Situation:

The regulation of franchising in Florida is addressed in multiple provisions of Florida law. Chapter 817, F.S. relating to Fraudulent Practices, includes provisions concerning False Pretenses and Frauds.¹

Florida Franchise Act

Section 817.416, F.S., deals with requirements for the relationship between a franchisee and a franchisor.² That statute defines the term “franchise or distributorship” to mean:

[A] contract or agreement, either expressed or implied, whether oral or written, between two or more persons:

1. Wherein a commercial relationship of definite duration or continuing indefinite duration is involved;
2. Wherein one party, hereinafter called the “franchisee,” is granted the right to offer, sell, and distribute goods or services manufactured, processed, distributed or, in the case of services, organized and directed by another party;
3. Wherein the franchisee as an independent business constitutes a component of franchisor’s distribution system; and
4. Wherein the operation of the franchisee’s business franchise is substantially reliant on franchisors for the basic supply of goods.³

The term “goods,” means “any article or thing without limitation, or any part of such article or thing, including any article or thing used or consumed by a franchisee in rendering a service established, organized, directed, or approved by a franchisor.”⁴

It is unlawful for any person selling or establishing a franchise or distributorship to intentionally:

- Misrepresent the prospects or chances for success of a proposed or existing franchise or distributorship;
- Misrepresent, by failure to disclose or otherwise, the known required total investment for such franchise or distributorship; or
- Misrepresent, or fail to disclose efforts to sell or establish more franchises or distributorships than is reasonable to expect the market or market area for the franchise or distributorship to sustain.⁵

The execution or carrying out of a scheme, plan, or corporate organization in violation of s. 817.416, F.S., if knowledge or intent is proved, is a second degree misdemeanor.⁶

¹ See part I of ch. 817, F.S.

² Section 817.416, F.S. has not been amended since 1971. See ch. 71-61, Laws of Fla. While popularly referred as the “Florida Franchise Act,” the law does not cite s. 817.416, F.S., as such.

³ See s. 817.416(1)(b), F.S.

⁴ Section 817.416(1)(c), F.S.

⁵ See s. 817.416(2), F.S.

⁶ Section 775.082, F.S., provides that a misdemeanor of the second degree is punishable by a term of imprisonment not to exceed 60 days. Section 775.083, F.S. provides that a misdemeanor of the second degree is punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500.

In addition, a person who proves a violation of s. 817.416, F.S., may be granted a judgment for all moneys invested in a franchise or distributorship. Upon such a showing of proof, a court may award the successful plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and must award reasonable costs incurred in bringing the action.⁷

The Department of Legal Affairs, or the Department of Legal Affairs and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services jointly, on behalf of the people of Florida, may sue for injunctive relief against franchise or distributorship plans or activities that engage in the intentional misrepresentations described above.⁸

The Florida Sale of Business Opportunities Act

The Florida Sale of Business Opportunities Act (SBOA)⁹ requires persons offering business opportunities to make specified disclosures about the business to a prospective purchaser.¹⁰ The required disclosures must be made if the purchaser is required to pay an initial fee or sum of money exceeding \$500 to the seller, and if the seller represents that the seller:¹¹

- Will provide locations or assist the purchaser in finding locations for the use or operation of vending machines, racks, display cases, currency or card operated equipment, or other similar devices or currency-operated amusement machines or devices on premises neither owned nor leased by the purchaser or seller;
- Will purchase any or all products made, produced, fabricated, grown, bred, or modified by the purchaser using in whole or in part the supplies, services, or chattels sold to the purchaser;
- Guarantees a partial or full refund to the seller; or
- Provides a sales program or marketing program, excepting a sales or marketing program made in conjunction with the licensing of a registered trademark or service mark.

A "business opportunity" does not include the sale of ongoing businesses to no more than five purchasers, the sale of not-for-profit demonstration equipment, materials, or samples for a price that does not exceed \$500 or any sales training course offered by the seller the cost of which does not exceed \$500, or the sale or lease of laundry and drycleaning equipment.¹²

The sale of a franchise is exempt from the required disclosures if the franchise satisfies the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) definition of a franchise¹³ and applies for the exemption with the Department of Agriculture and Consumers (DACs).¹⁴

⁷ See s. 817.416(3), F.S.

⁸ See s. 817.416(4), F.S.

⁹ Part VII of ch. 559

¹⁰ Section 559.803, F.S.

¹¹ Section 559.801(1)(a), F.S.

¹² Section 559.801(1)(b), F.S.

¹³ See *Federal Trade Commission, Franchise Rule, 16 CFR, Part 436 Compliance Guide*, (FTC Compliance Guide) at : <https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/bus70-franchise-rule-compliance-guide.pdf> (last visited Mar. 31, 2017). The FTC Compliance Guide provides a sample disclosure document and general instructions. See <https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/bus70-franchise-rule-compliance-guide.pdf> (last visited Mar. 31, 2017), at pages 34-154.

¹⁴ See s. 559.803, F.S.

The FTC defines “franchise” to mean any continuing commercial relationship or arrangement in which the purchaser’s business uses the trademark of the seller’s business, the seller exercises significant control over how the business operates, and the purchaser pays a fee to the seller.¹⁵

The application for the exemption through the DACS requires only the name of the applicant, the name of the franchise and the name under which the applicant intends to, or does, transact business, if different, the applicant’s principal business address, and the applicant’s federal employer identification number.¹⁶

Federal Trade Commission Regulations Affecting Franchises

The Federal Trade Commission’s rule on franchises gives prospective franchise purchasers information to weigh the risks and benefits of an investment in a franchise.¹⁷ The rule requires franchisors to provide all potential franchisees with a disclosure document with 23 specific items of information about the offered franchise, its officers, and other franchisees.¹⁸ The FTC Compliance Guide provides a sample disclosure document and general instructions concerning the mandatory disclosures.¹⁹

Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act

Part II of ch. 501, F.S., the “Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act” (FDUTPA) addresses protection of the public and legitimate business enterprises from those who engage in unfair methods of competition, or unconscionable, deceptive, or unfair acts or practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce. Unfair methods of competition, unconscionable acts or practices, and unfair or deceptive acts or practices in the conduct of any trade or commerce are unlawful.²⁰

Section 501.203(2), F.S., addresses who is authorized to enforce the FDUTPA (enforcing authority), which includes the:

- Office of the state attorney when a violation occurs in or affects the judicial circuit under the jurisdiction of that state attorney; or
- Department of Legal Affairs, if the violation occurs in or affects more than one judicial circuit, or if the office of the state attorney defers to the department in writing, or fails to act upon a violation within 90 days after a written complaint has been filed with the state attorney.

The enforcing authority may pursue actions:

- To obtain a declaratory judgment that an act or practice violates the FDUTPA;

¹⁵ 16 C.F.R. s. 436.1(h) (2017).

¹⁶ Section 559.803(3), F.S., and Florida Admin. R. 5J-10.002 (2012) The form for the application is available at the DACS website: <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Business-Services/Sellers-of-Business-Opportunities> (last visited March 31, 2017).

¹⁷ See 16 C.F.R. Part.436.1(h). See also <https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/franchise-rule> (last visited Mar. 31, 2017).

¹⁸ See <https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/franchise-rule> (last visited Mar. 31, 2017).

¹⁹ *Id.* at pages 34-154.

²⁰ See s. 501.2014(1), F.S.

- To enjoin any person who has violated, is violating, or is otherwise likely to violate, the FDUTPA; and
- For the actual damages caused by an act or practice in violation of the FDUTPA, on behalf of one or more consumers or governmental entities, except that damages are not recoverable against a retailer who has in good faith engaged in the dissemination of claims of a manufacturer or wholesaler without actual knowledge that it violated the FDUTPA.²¹

Any person, firm, corporation, association, or entity, or any agent or employee of such persons, who is willfully using, or has willfully used, a method, act, or practice declared unlawful, or who is willfully violating any of the rules of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) adopted under part II of ch. 501, F.S., is liable for a civil penalty of not more than \$10,000 for each such violation.²²

Willful violations occur when the person knew or should have known that his or her conduct was unfair or deceptive or prohibited by rule. The civil penalty may be recovered in any action brought under FDUTPA by the enforcing authority; or the enforcing authority may terminate any investigation or action upon the agreement to pay a civil penalty by the person, firm, corporation, association, or entity, or their agent or employee.²³

The DACS or the court may waive a civil penalty if the person, firm, corporation, association, or entity, or the agent or employee of the foregoing, has previously made full restitution or reimbursement or has paid actual damages to the consumers or governmental entities who have been injured by the unlawful act or practice or rule violation.²⁴ If civil penalties are assessed in any litigation, the enforcing authority is entitled to reasonable attorney's fees and costs; a civil penalty accrues to the state.²⁵

Violations of the FDUTPA involving senior citizens, those with disabilities and active duty or veteran members of the United States Armed Forces may result in penalties of not more than \$15,000 for each violation.²⁶

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 of the bill provides that the act may be cited as the "Protect Florida Small Business Act" (act).

The act regulates the conduct of franchisors and their representatives to prevent fraud, unfair business practices, unfair methods of competition, impositions, and other actions taken as to franchisees in Florida.

Section 2 of the bill sets forth legislative findings and intent that the welfare of franchisees, including the success and failure of their franchise businesses, affects the state economy and the

²¹ See s. 501.207(1), F.S.

²² See s. 501.2075, F.S.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ See s. 501.2077, F.S.

public, and requires promotion of fair business relations between franchisees and franchisors, and protection of franchisees against unfair treatment by franchisors.

Section 3 of the bill creates s. 686.103, F.S., to define the following terms:

- “Affiliate” means a person controlling, controlled by, or under common control with another person or, in the case of a business entity, such entity’s officer, director, or other person in control of the activities of such entity.
- “Area franchise” means a contract or agreement, expressed or implied, written or oral, regardless of whether the contract or agreement is designated as a franchise, permit, license, resolution, contract, certificate, agreement, or otherwise, between a franchisor and another person through which that person is granted the right, for consideration in whole or in part for such right:
 - To sell or negotiate the sale of a franchise in the name or on behalf of the franchisor; or
 - To become an area developer and develop a franchise for the benefit of that person or that person’s affiliates.
- ”Area franchisee” means the owner of an area franchise.
- “Franchise” or “franchise agreement” means a contract or agreement, expressed or implied, written or oral, regardless of whether the contract or agreement is designated as a franchise, permit, license, resolution, contract, certificate, agreement, or otherwise, for a definite or indefinite time, between two or more persons by which:
 - A franchisee is granted the right to engage in the business of offering, selling, or distributing goods or services under a marketing plan or system prescribed in substantial part by a franchisor;
 - The operation of the franchise business pursuant to that marketing plan or system is substantially associated with the franchisor’s trademark, service mark, trade name, logotype, advertising, or other commercial symbol designating the franchisor or its affiliate; and
 - The franchisee is required to pay, directly or indirectly, a franchise fee.
- “Franchise” or “franchise agreement” includes an area franchise.
- “Franchise” or “franchise agreement” does not include any of the following:
 - A franchise governed by the Agricultural Equipment Manufacturers and Dealers Act.
 - Any activity governed by ss. 686.501-686.506, F.S., pertaining to art dealers.
 - A franchise governed by the Outdoor Power Equipment Manufacturers, Distributors, Wholesalers, and Servicing Dealers Act.
 - A motor vehicle franchise or agreement governed by ss. 320.60-320.70.
 - A business relation between a beer distributor and a manufacturer governed by s. 563.022.
 - A professional sports franchise as described in s. 288.11625(2)(c).
- “Franchise business” means a business unit that is owned or operated by a franchisee and that is subject to a marketing plan or system prescribed by the franchise.

- “Franchise fee” means a fee or charge greater than \$100 annually which a franchisee is required to pay or agrees to pay, directly or indirectly, to the franchisor for the right to enter into or continue a franchise, including, but not limited to, a payment for goods or services. However, any one of the following is not considered a franchise fee:
 - A fee or charge that a franchisee pays or agrees to pay the franchisor for goods at a bona fide wholesale price if no obligation is imposed upon the franchisee to purchase or pay for a quantity of goods in excess of that which a reasonable person normally would purchase by way of a starting inventory or supply or to maintain an ongoing inventory or supply.
 - A payment of a reasonable service charge to the issuer of a credit card by an establishment accepting or honoring the credit card.
 - A payment to a trading stamp company by a person who issues trading stamps in connection with the retail sale of goods or services.
 - A payment, not exceeding a sum of \$1,000 annually, for the purchase or rental of fixtures, goods, or other tangible property necessary for the operation of the franchise business, if the purchase or rental price does not exceed the cost of acquiring the fixtures, goods, or other tangible property in the open market.
- “Franchisee” means a person to whom a franchise is offered or granted.
- “Franchisor” means a person who grants a franchise to a franchisee.
- “Fraud” means and includes actual fraud or constructive fraud as normally defined, in addition to the following:
 - A misrepresentation in any manner, whether intentionally false or arising from negligence, of a material fact.
 - A promise or representation not made honestly and in good faith.
 - An intentional failure to disclose a material fact.
 - Any artifice employed to deceive another.
- “Goods” means any article or thing without limitation, or any part of such article or thing, including any article or thing used or consumed by a franchisee in rendering a service established, organized, directed, or approved by a franchisor.
- “Person” means a natural person, corporation, limited liability company, association, partnership, trust, or other business entity and, in the case of a business entity, includes any other affiliate of such entity.
- “Sale” means and includes the issuance, transfer, agreement for transfer, exchange, pledge, hypothecation, or mortgage in any manner or form, whether by transfer in trust or otherwise, of any goods or interest therein, or of any franchise related thereto, for a consideration, and any option, subscription or other contract, or solicitation, looking to a sale, or offer or attempt to sell in any form, whether in written or oral form, for a consideration.

Section 4 of the bill creates s. 686.104, F.S., relating to terminations of franchises. Except as otherwise provided in the act, a franchisor may not terminate a franchise except for good cause. If a franchise is terminated without good cause, then that action constitutes an unfair termination, regardless of the specified time period of the franchise.

With limited exceptions, good cause is limited to the failure of the franchisee to substantially comply with the reasonable and material requirements imposed upon the franchisee by the franchise agreement after being given notice at least 90 days in advance of the termination and a reasonable opportunity of not less than 60 days after the date of the notice of noncompliance, to cure the failure. If the franchisee cures the failure within the time given to cure, the termination notice is void.

An immediate notice of termination may be given to a franchisee by a franchisor without an opportunity to cure if, during the period in which the franchise is in effect, any of the following events, relevant to the franchise, occurs:

- The franchisee has been the subject of an order for relief in bankruptcy, has been judicially determined to be insolvent, has had all or a substantial part of its assets assigned to or for the benefit of any creditor, or has admitted its inability to pay its debts as they come due.
- The franchisee abandons, by failing to operate, the franchise business for 10 consecutive days during which, under the terms of the franchise, the franchisee is required to operate the franchise business, or for any shorter period after which it is not unreasonable under the facts and circumstances for the franchisor to conclude that the franchisee does not intend to continue to operate the franchise business, unless such failure to operate is due to an act of God; a work stoppage; a strike or labor difficulty; a fire, flood, hurricane, or sinkhole; or other causes beyond the franchisee's control.
- The franchisor and franchisee agree in writing to terminate the franchise.
- The franchisee fails, for a period of 10 days after a notice of noncompliance, to comply with any federal, state, or local law or regulation, including, but not limited to, any health, safety, building, and labor law or regulation applicable to the operation of the franchise.
- A final judgment against the franchisee remains unsatisfied for 30 days, and the franchise business or franchise business premises are seized, taken over, or foreclosed by a government official exercising his or her duties, or seized, taken over, or foreclosed by a creditor, lienholder, or lessor, unless a supersedeas or other appeal bond has been filed.
- A levy of execution has been made on the license granted by the franchise or on a property used in the franchise business and is not discharged within 5 days after such levy.
- The franchisee is convicted of a felony or any other criminal misconduct that significantly, directly, and adversely affects the operation of the franchise business.
- The franchisor makes a reasonable determination that continued operation of the franchise business by the franchisee will result in imminent and substantial danger to public health or safety.

Section 5 of the bill creates s. 686.105, F.S., relating to nonrenewal of a franchise agreement. A franchise agreement is deemed to be continuing, and a franchisor may not refuse to renew a franchise unless the franchisor complies with the following requirements:

- The franchisor provides written notice to the franchisee of the franchisor's intent not to renew at least 180 days before the expiration date or before an extension of the franchise agreement.
- Any of the following circumstances exist:
 - Termination of the franchise agreement is authorized under proposed s. 686.104, F.S., created by the bill.
 - The franchisor and franchisee agree in writing not to renew the franchise.
 - The franchisor completely withdraws from directly or indirectly distributing its products or services in the geographic market served by the franchisee.
- The franchisor agrees not to enforce against the franchisee, upon nonrenewal of the franchise, any covenant not to compete with the franchisor or with other franchisees of the franchisor.
- The nonrenewal of the franchise is not for the purpose of converting the franchise business to operation by an employee or agent of the franchisor for the franchisor's own account.
- If the franchisor determines to sell, transfer, or assign its interest in the marketing premises occupied by a franchisee whose franchise agreement is not renewed, either:
 - The franchisor, during the 180-day period after giving notice to the franchisee of its determination to sell, transfer, or assign its interest, provides the franchisee a right of first refusal of at least 30 days' duration of a bona fide offer made by another to purchase the franchisor's interest in the premises; or
 - The franchisor or the purchaser, transferee, or assignee of the franchisor's interest in good faith offers the franchisee a franchise on substantially the same terms and conditions being offered by such purchaser, transferee, or assignee to other franchisees at the time the franchisor determines to sell, transfer, or assign its interests.

As a condition of renewal, a franchise agreement may require that the franchisee meet the reasonable qualifications for new franchisees that exist at the time of renewal and execute a new franchise agreement incorporating terms and fees for new franchises that exist at the time of renewal.

A franchisee who receives a notice of intent not to renew a franchise agreement may file an action or request arbitration within the 180-day notice period to seek a determination of whether the nonrenewal is proper under the act. The franchise agreement and all other related agreements between the franchisor and the franchisee must continue in effect until a preliminary determination of the issues raised in the action or arbitration is made by the court or arbitrator.

Section 6 of the bill creates s. 686.106, F.S., concerning sales, transfers, and assignments of franchises, including rights of first refusal.

A franchisor may not deny the surviving spouse, heir, or estate of a deceased franchisee (the survivors), or of the person controlling a majority interest in the franchisee, the opportunity to participate in the ownership of the franchise or franchise business under a valid franchise agreement for at least 180 days after the death of the franchisee or a person controlling a majority interest in the franchisee (the status quo period). During the status quo period, the survivors must either meet all of the existing reasonable qualifications for a purchaser of a franchise or must sell, transfer, or assign the franchise to a person who meets the franchisor's

existing reasonable qualifications for new franchisees. The surviving spouse, heir, or estate must maintain all standards and obligations of the franchise.

With the prior written consent of the franchisor, a franchisee may sell, transfer, or assign a franchise, all or substantially all of the assets of the franchise business, or an interest in the franchisee. The franchisor's consent may not be withheld unless the purchaser, transferee, or assignee does not meet the qualifications for new or renewing franchisees, or the franchisee and the purchaser, transferee, or assignee fail to comply with other reasonable transfer conditions specified in the franchise agreement.

The list of franchisor's reasonable qualifications for the approval of new or renewing franchises in effect at the time the franchisor receives notice of the proposed sale, transfer, or assignment must be made available to the franchisee and must be consistently applied to similarly situated franchisees operating within the franchise brand.

To invoke the protections of the act, before the sale, transfer, or assignment of a franchise, all or substantially all of the assets of the franchise business, or an interest in the franchisee, the franchisee must notify the franchisor of the franchisee's intent to sell, transfer, or assign. The notice must be in writing; must be delivered to the franchisor by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested, or by business courier; and must include all of the following:

- The name and address of the proposed purchaser, transferee, or assignee.
- A copy of all agreements related to the sale, transfer, or assignment of the franchise, the assets of the franchise business, or the interest in the franchisee.
- The proposed purchaser's, transferee's, or assignee's application for approval to become the successor franchisee.

The proposed purchaser's, transferee's, or assignee's application must include all forms, financial disclosures, and related information generally used by the franchisor in reviewing prospective new franchisees, if those forms are readily made available to the existing franchisee. If the forms are not readily available, the franchisee must request, and the franchisor must deliver, the forms to the franchisee by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested, or by business courier, within 15 calendar days after the franchisee's request. As soon as practicable after receipt of the proposed purchaser's, transferee's, or assignee's application, the franchisor must notify the franchisee and the proposed purchaser, transferee, or assignee in writing of any additional information or documentation necessary to complete the sale, transfer, or assignment application.

If the franchisor's list of qualifications for the approval of new or renewing franchisees in effect at the time the franchisor receives notice of the proposed sale, transfer, or assignment is not readily available to the franchisee when the franchisee notifies the franchisor of the franchisee's intent to sell, transfer, or assign the franchise, all or substantially all of the assets of the franchise business, or an interest in the franchisee, the franchisor must communicate the list of qualifications to the franchisee within 15 calendar days after receipt of the proposed purchaser's, transferee's, or assignee's application.

The franchisor must, within 60 days after receipt of all of the necessary information and documentation required to be submitted, or as specified by written agreement between the

franchisor and the franchisee, notify the franchisee of the approval or disapproval of the proposed sale, transfer, or assignment. The notice must be in writing and be delivered to the franchisee by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested, or by business courier. If the proposed sale, transfer, or assignment is disapproved, the franchisor must include in the notice of disapproval a statement specifying the reasons for the disapproval. A proposed sale, transfer, or assignment is deemed approved unless disapproved by the franchisor in the manner provided in this subparagraph.

In a claim against the franchisor for disapproval of a sale, transfer, or assignment, the reasonableness of the franchisor's decision is a question of fact requiring consideration of all existing circumstances. The act does not prohibit entry of a summary judgment when the reasonableness of the disapproval of a sale, transfer, or assignment can be decided as a matter of law.

In addition, the act does not prohibit a franchisor from exercising the contractual right of first refusal to purchase a franchise, all or substantially all of the assets of a franchise business, or an interest in a franchisee after receipt of a bona fide offer from a proposed seller to purchase the franchise, assets, or interest. A franchisor exercising the contractual right of first refusal must offer the seller payment at least equal to the value offered in the bona fide offer.

Section 7 of the bill creates s. 686.107, F.S., concerning the repurchase of inventory upon termination, nonrenewal, or expiration of a franchise agreement.

The bill requires a franchisee must have the opportunity to monetize any equity that the franchisee may have developed in the franchise business before the termination of the franchise agreement without transferring the equity in the franchisor's intellectual property to the franchisee. Therefore, upon termination, nonrenewal, or expiration of a franchise agreement, a franchisor must repurchase at fair market value inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, and furnishings of the franchise business. The franchisor must also purchase the goodwill of the franchise business.

Franchisors are not required to purchase any personalized items, inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, or furnishings that are not reasonably required to conduct the operation of the franchise business in accordance with the franchise agreement or any ancillary or collateral agreement or whose title and possession are not, or cannot be, lawfully granted by the franchisee to the franchisor upon the franchisor's payment to the franchisee for the inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, or furnishings at the time the franchisee ceases to operate the franchise business.

Upon the termination, nonrenewal, or expiration of a franchise, a franchisor may offset money owed to the franchisee under the requirements of this section of the bill, with any amount owed by the franchisee to the franchisor. The section of the act does not apply if:

- The franchisee declines a bona fide offer of renewal from the franchisor which is consistent with proposed s. 686.105, F.S., as created by this bill, and the franchise agreement between the franchisor and franchisee.
- The franchisor does not prevent the franchisee from retaining control and continuing to operate the franchise business.

- The franchisor and franchisee agree in writing to terminate or not renew the franchise or to allow the franchise to expire.

This section of the bill does not apply to inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, or furnishings sold by the franchisee between the date of the notice of termination, nonrenewal, or expiration and the date the franchisee ceases to operate the franchise business pursuant to a termination, nonrenewal, or expiration.

If a franchisor fails or refuses to repurchase any inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, good will, or furnishings required to be repurchased within 60 days after the termination, nonrenewal, or expiration of a franchise, the franchisor is civilly liable for the entire value of those items, in addition to the franchisee's reasonable attorney fees, court costs, and interest on the value of those items computed at the legal interest rate²⁷ from the 61st day after termination.

Section 8 of the bill creates s. 686.108, F.S., respecting repurchases of inventory upon the death or incapacity of a franchisee.

In the event of the death or incapacity of a franchisee or person controlling a majority interest in the franchisee, the franchisor must, at the option of the heir at law, if the franchisee died intestate, the devisee under the terms of the deceased franchisee's last will and testament, if the franchisee died testate, or the person holding a power of attorney or a guardian in the event of incapacity, repurchase the inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, good will, and furnishings under proposed s. 686.107, F.S., which is created by this bill. The repurchase provisions of s. 686.107, F.S., are made expressly applicable to the repurchase.

An heir, devisee, transferee, person holding a power of attorney, or guardian has 1 year after the date of the death or incapacity, as applicable, of the franchisee or person controlling a majority interest to exercise his or her option to sell the inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, good will, and furnishings of the franchise business. However, this section does not require the repurchase of inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, good will, and furnishings in the event of death if the heir, devisee, or transferee and the franchisor enter into a new franchise agreement to operate the franchise business.

The provisions in this section of the bill also apply to the portion of a franchise agreement pertaining to death or incapacity of a franchisee or person controlling a majority interest to the extent that the franchise agreement is not inconsistent with this section.

Section 9 of the bill creates s. 686.109, F.S., relating to indemnification of franchisees. If a complaint, claim, or lawsuit relates to a part or an accessory; to the manufacture, assembly, or design of goods or services covered under the act; or to other functions of the franchisor which are beyond the control of the franchisee, a franchisor must fully indemnify and hold harmless its franchisee against any loss, including, but not limited to, court costs and reasonable attorney fees or damages arising from the complaint, claim, or lawsuit. The complaint, claim, or lawsuit may involve matters dealing with strict liability, negligence, misrepresentation, express or implied breach of warranty, or rescission of a sale, or may involve other matters not listed in the act.

²⁷ See s. 687.01, F.S.

Section 10 of the bill creates s. 686.111, F.S., concerning the rights and prohibitions that govern the relations between a franchisor or subfranchisor and its franchisee:

The parties must deal with each other in good faith. A franchisor or subfranchisor may not engage in any action that is arbitrary, capricious, in bad faith, or unconscionable and, in terms of law or equity, causes damage to a franchisee or to the public.

A person may not, during the selling or establishing of a franchise, intentionally misrepresent or fail to disclose:

- The prospects or chances for success of the proposed or existing franchise;
- The known required total investment for such franchise; or
- Any effort to sell or establish more franchises than is reasonable to expect the market or market area for the particular franchise to sustain.

The act prohibits, as an unfair and deceptive act or practice, or an unfair method of competition, in violation of the act, a franchisor or its representative from directly or indirectly:

- Coercing, compelling, or attempting to coerce or compel a franchisee to enter into an agreement, written or oral, supplementary to an existing franchise with the franchisor, or the officer, agent, or other representative thereof; or commit any other act prejudicial to the franchisee by threatening to cancel the franchise or any contractual agreement existing between the franchisor and the franchisee. However, notice in good faith to the franchisee of the franchisee's violation or breach of a term or provision of the franchise or contractual agreement does not constitute a violation of this section if such notice is in writing, is mailed by registered or certified mail to the franchisee at its current business address, and contains the specific facts as to the franchisee's violation or breach of the franchise or contractual agreement.
- Terminating or fail to renew a franchise agreement in violation of the act.
- Allowing a franchise agreement to expire without complying with the act.
- Failing to repurchase inventory, supplies, goods, fixtures, equipment, good will, and furnishings in violation of the requirements in the act for repurchase of inventory.
- Preventing a sale, transfer, or assignment of a franchise in violation of the requirements regarding the sales, transfers, and assignments.
- Violating the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act²⁸ in connection with its business as a franchisor, or an officer, agent, or other representative thereof.
- Resorting to or using false or misleading advertisement in connection with its business as a franchisor, or an officer, agent, or other representative thereof.
- Willfully discriminating, directly or indirectly, in price, programs, or terms of sale offered to a franchisee or giving to a franchisee an economic, business, or competitive advantage not offered to another franchisee of the same or similar franchise.
- Imposing, directly or indirectly, an unreasonable restriction on a franchisee relative to transfer, renewal, termination, location, or site control.
- Without prior written disclosure to a franchisee, obtaining money, goods, services, anything of value, or any other benefit from another person with whom the franchisee does business or employs on account of or in relation to the transactions between the franchisee, the franchisor, and the other person,

²⁸ See ss. 501.201-.213, F.S.

- Requiring a franchisee to assent to a release, assignment, novation, waiver, or estoppel that would relieve any person from liability imposed under the act, including, but not limited to, through the use of a disclaimer or checklist designed to avoid a protection under the act.
- Requiring a franchisee to assent to the use of a choice of law provision by selecting a different state's law to govern the relationship of the parties.
- Restricting or inhibiting, directly or indirectly, the right of a franchisee to join a trade association or the free association for any lawful purpose among franchisees.
- Competing with a franchisee within the franchisee's exclusive territory or grant a franchise to another person for a franchise business to be located within the exclusive territory.
- Imposing upon a franchisee, by contract or rule, written or oral, any unreasonable standard of conduct.
- Requiring a franchisee to waive its rights to a jury trial or waive any procedure or remedy otherwise available in this state, although binding arbitration is enforceable if it complies with the act.

A person who executes or carries out a scheme, plan, or organization that violates any provision of proposed s. 686.111, F.S., created by the bill, if knowledge or intent is proved, commits a misdemeanor of the second degree.

A person who proves in court that a violation of this section has occurred is entitled to receive a judgment for all money invested in the franchise and all of the franchise business's losses and other damages incurred while running the franchise business together with reasonable attorney fees to any person holding an interest in a franchise or who has been injured by a violation of the act, and who is bringing the action against the person who violates this section and reasonable costs incurred in bringing such action.

The Department of Legal Affairs, by itself or jointly with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, may sue on behalf of the people of this state for injunctive relief against any franchisor plan or activity that is in violation of the act.

Section 11 of the bill creates s. 686.112, F.S., and provides that a franchise agreement or other contract, any part thereof, or any practice under such contract, that violates any provision of the act is deemed against public policy and is void and unenforceable.

Section 12 of the bill creates s. 686.113, F.S., to require that the notices of termination, nonrenewal, or expiration required under the act:

- Be in writing;
- Be posted by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, or be personally delivered to the franchisee; and
- Contain a statement of:
 - Intent to terminate, not renew, or allow the franchise to expire;
 - The reasons for the termination, nonrenewal, or expiration; and
 - The effective date of the termination, nonrenewal, or expiration.

Section 13 of the bill creates s. 686.114, F.S., and provides that provisions in a franchise restricting the venue to a forum outside of Florida state or selecting the law of any other state or jurisdiction other than Florida, are void with respect to any claim arising under or relating to a franchise agreement involving a franchisee that was, at the time of signing, a resident of this state; or business entity established in this state; or a franchise business either operating or planning to be operated in Florida.

Section 14 of the bill creates s. 686.115, F.S., and provides that the act does not limit the right of a franchisor and franchisee to agree, before or after a dispute arises, to binding arbitration to settle a claim under the act if the standards applied and the remedies available are not less than the requirements specified in the act, and each arbitrator an impartial person or is chosen from a list of impartial arbitrators provided by the American Arbitration Association.

Section 15 of the bill creates s. 686.116, F.S., and provides that if a franchisor terminates, fails to renew, or allows a franchise to expire in violation of the act, the franchisor must pay the franchisee the fair market value of the franchise business and franchise assets, in addition to any other damage caused by the violation. Any person aggrieved or injured in his or her business or property by a violation of the act may bring an action in state or federal court in Florida, to recover the damages sustained and the costs of such action, including reasonable attorney fees.

In addition to any other remedy or relief to which a person is entitled, any person aggrieved by a violation of the act also may bring an action to obtain a declaratory judgment stating that an action or a practice violates the act, and injunctive relief enjoining a franchisor that has violated, is violating, or is otherwise likely to violate the act from committing the violation.

In an action for money damages, upon a finding that the franchisor has acted maliciously, the bill authorizes a judge or jury to award punitive damages as authorized by Florida law.

The Department of Legal Affairs or the state attorney may bring an action for injunctive relief or other appropriate civil relief for a violation of the act if the violation occurs in the judicial circuit of the department or the state attorney, respectively. The remedies are in addition to any other remedies provided by law or in equity, including, but not limited to, the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act.²⁹

Section 16 of the bill creates s. 686.117, F.S., and provides that any person or franchisor who engages directly or indirectly in an agreement or contract in Florida concerning a franchise, and any franchise whose franchisee is a Florida resident or is domiciled in Florida, or whose franchise business is, has been, or is intended to be operated in Florida, is subject to the act and to the jurisdiction of Florida courts, in accordance with Florida law.

The act expressly applies to:

- Any written or oral agreement between a franchisor and a franchisee, including, but not limited to, a franchise offering; a franchise agreement; a sale of goods, services, and advertising; a lease or mortgage of real or personal property; a promise to pay; a security interest; a pledge; an insurance contract; an advertising contract; a construction or installation

²⁹ See ss. 501.201-.213, F.S.

contract; a servicing contract; and any other agreement in which the franchisor has a direct or indirect interest;

- Any franchise entered into, renewed, amended, or revised after the effective date of the act;
- Any existing franchise of an indefinite duration which may be terminated by the franchisee or franchisor without cause; and
- Any existing franchise entered into before the effective date of the act, only to the extent that the act does not significantly impair the existing contract rights between the parties.

The act is supplemental to, and does not preempt, local ordinances dealing with prohibited or unlawful conduct in the manufacturing, distribution, wholesaling, advertising, or sale of goods if such ordinances are not inconsistent with the act.

The bill provides that the act supersedes s. 817.416, F.S., with respect to any franchisee that signs a franchise agreement on or after the effective date of the act. Under the bill, s. 817.416, F.S., continues to govern the claims of all franchisees that signed franchise agreements or were victims of fraud perpetrated before the effective date of the act, as well as distributors and any other entities, past, present, or future, which would be covered by s. 817.416, F.S., but not by the act.

Section 17 of the bill amends s. 817.416, F.S., to provide that s. 817.416, F.S., does not apply to a franchise entered into, renewed, amended, or revised on or after the effective date of the act and that a franchise entered into, renewed, amended, or revised on or after the effective date of the act is subject to the requirements of the act.

Section 18 of the bill directs the Division of Law Revision and Information to replace the phrase “the effective date of the act” wherever it occurs in the act, with the date that the act becomes a law.

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:

SB 750 creates provisions affecting persons who engage, directly or indirectly, in an agreement or contract in Florida in connection with a franchise, and any franchise whose franchisee is a Florida resident or is domiciled in Florida, or whose franchise business is, has been, or is intended to be operating in this state. Such persons are made subject to the act and to jurisdiction

of Florida courts for violations of the act. With respect to *existing* franchise agreements or contracts, certain provisions of the bill may implicate constitutional concerns relating to impairment of contract.³⁰

In *Pomponio v. Claridge of Pompano Condominium, Inc.*,³¹ the Florida Supreme court stated that some degree of flexibility has developed over the last century in interpreting the contract clause in order to ameliorate the harshness of the original rigid application used by the United States Supreme Court. The Florida Supreme Court invalidated a statute, as an unconstitutional impairment of contract, which required the deposit of rent into a court registry during litigation involving obligations under a contract lease. The court set forth several factors to be considered in balancing whether a state law has in fact operated as a substantial impairment of a contractual relationship, stating “[t]he severity of the impairment measures the height of the hurdle the state legislation must clear.”³²

The court stated that if there is minimal alteration of contractual obligations, the inquiry may end at its first stage. Severe impairment pushes the inquiry into a careful examination of the nature and purpose of the state legislation. The factors to be considered are whether:

- The law was enacted to deal with a broad, generalized economic or social problem;
- The law operates in an area that was already subject to state regulation at the time the contract was entered into; and
- The effect on the contractual relationships is temporary, or whether it is severe, permanent, immediate, and retroactive.³³

In *United States Fidelity & Guaranty Co. v. Department of Insurance*,³⁴ the Florida Supreme Court followed *Pomponio* and said that the method requires a balancing of a person’s interest to not have his or her contracts impaired, with the state’s interest in exercising its legitimate police power. The court adopted the method used by the U.S. Supreme Court, in which the threshold inquiry is “whether the state law has, in fact, operated as a substantial impairment of a contractual relationship.”³⁵ The severity of the impairment increases the level of scrutiny.

Relevant to the extent of the impairment is whether the industry the complaining party had entered had been regulated in the past because if the party was already subject to regulation when the contract was entered, then it is understood that it would be subject to further legislation upon the same topic.³⁶ If the state regulation constitutes a substantial impairment, the state must have a significant and legitimate public purpose³⁷ and any adjustment of the rights and responsibilities of the contracting parties must be appropriate to the public purpose justifying the legislation.³⁸

³⁰ Article I, s. 10, U.S. Constitution and Art. I, s. 10, Fla. Const.

³¹ *Pomponio v. Claridge of Pompano Condominium, Inc.*, 378 So. 2d 774, 776 (Fla. 1979).

³² *Pomponio*, 378 So. 2d at 779.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *United States Fidelity & Guaranty Co. v. Department of Insurance*, 453 So. 2d 1355 (Fla. 1984).

³⁵ *United States Fidelity & Guaranty Co.*, 453 So. 2d at 1360 (quoting *Allied Structural Steel Co., v. Spannaus*, 438 U.S. 234, 244 (1978)).

³⁶ *Id.* (citing *Allied Structural Steel Co.*, 438 U.S. at 242, n. 13).

³⁷ *United States Fidelity & Guaranty Co.*, 453 So. 2d at 1360 (citing *U.S. Trust Co. of New York v. New Jersey*, 431 U.S. 1, 22 (1977)).

³⁸ *United States Fidelity & Guaranty Co.*, 453 So. 2d at 1361.

Furthermore, although retroactive application of a law may be constitutional in certain situations,³⁹ in 2011, the Florida Supreme Court unanimously held, in *Cohn v. The Grand Condominium Association, Inc.*,⁴⁰ that by changing the distribution of voting power between residential owners and other owners in a mixed-use condominium (i.e., a provision of an existing contract), the retroactive application of the law at issue in that case altered the rights of the unit owners in contravention of their contractual agreement and, thus, impaired the obligation of contract as applied.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

SB 750 may impact the financial interests of persons who engage, directly or indirectly, in an agreement or contract in Florida in connection with a franchise, and any franchise whose franchisee is a Florida resident or is domiciled in Florida, or whose franchise business is, has been, or is intended to be operating in this state.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill amends s. 817.416, F.S., to state that the provision does not apply to a franchise entered into, renewed, amended, or revised on or after the effective date of the act.

Notwithstanding the removal of certain franchises from the provisions of s. 817.416, F.S., the authority of the Department of Legal Affairs, or the Department of Legal Affairs and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services jointly, to sue for injunctive relief against franchise or distributorship plans or activities that engage in intentional misrepresentations pursuant to s. 817.416(4), F.S., (the intentional misrepresentation remedies) remains effective. There may be additional costs associated with enforcement of the intentional misrepresentation remedies deemed necessary in connection with activities conducted pursuant to the act.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

SB 750 provides that the Department of Legal Affairs or the state attorney may bring an action for injunctive relief or other appropriate civil relief for a violation of the act, if the violation occurs in the judicial circuit of the department or the state attorney. The jurisdiction of the Department of Legal Affairs is not limited by judicial circuit.⁴¹

³⁹ *Century Village, Inc. v. Wellington*, 361 So. 2d 128 (Fla. 1978).

⁴⁰ *Cohn*, 62 So. 3d. 1120, 1122 (Fla. 2011).

⁴¹ See s. 16.015, F.S.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 817.416 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill creates the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 686.101, 686.102, 686.103, 686.104, 686.105, 686.106, 686.107, 686.108, 686.109, 686.111, 686.112, 686.113, 686.114, 686.115, 686.116, and 686.117.

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.

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