

# DEPARTMENT OF TAXATION

## 2013 Fiscal Impact Statement

1. **Patron** Frank W. Wagner

2. **Bill Number** SB 1365

3. **Committee** House Finance

**House of Origin:**

☐ Introduced

☐ Substitute

☐ Engrossed

4. **Title** Tax administration; monetary awards for information on tax underpayments

**Second House:**

☒ In Committee

☐ Substitute

☐ Enrolled

### 5. Summary/Purpose:

This bill would authorize the Tax Commissioner to award monetary compensation to individuals who provide information that leads to the successful collection of delinquent taxes owed by other individual or business taxpayers. If the Tax Commissioner proceeds with any administrative or judicial action based on such information, the amount of the award would be 20 percent of the collected proceeds, including penalties, interest, additions to tax, and additional amounts, resulting from such action or from a settlement in response to such action. This bill would only apply to actions by the Department against (i) any individual taxpayer, or married taxpayers, with gross income exceeding \$100,000 or any business taxpayer with gross income exceeding \$500,000, and (ii) only if the tax penalties, interest, additions to tax, and additional amounts in dispute exceed \$50,000.

The effective date of this bill is not specified. The provisions of this bill would not become effective unless an appropriation effectuating the purposes of this bill is included in a general appropriation act passed by the 2013 session of the General Assembly, which becomes law.

### 6. Budget amendment necessary: Yes.

ITEM(S): 273, Department of Taxation

Sum-sufficient to pay rewards out of collections.

### 7. Fiscal Impact Estimates are: Preliminary. (See Line 8.)

#### 7a. Expenditure Impact:

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Dollars</i>	<i>Positions</i>	<i>Fund</i>
2012-13	\$0	0	GF
2013-14	\$113,000	1	GF
2014-15	\$107,600	1	GF
2015-16	\$107,600	1	GF
2016-17	\$107,600	1	GF
2017-18	\$107,600	1	GF
2018-19	\$107,600	1	GF

## **8. Fiscal implications:**

### Administrative Cost

The Department of Taxation ("the Department") would require additional funding of \$113,000 in Fiscal Year 2014 and \$107,600 in each fiscal year thereafter in order to implement the provisions of this bill. Such funding would include funding for one full-time auditor and one wage employee to perform audits. The Department would also need a sum sufficient appropriation to pay awards.

### Revenue Impact

This bill would result in an unknown increase in general fund revenue. The amount of this gain depends on the number of informants and the quality of their information. Because of the delay between the receipt of information and collection of delinquent tax, it would likely be several years before revenue would be generated. Based on IRS "whistleblower" data, a similar Virginia program might generate a few hundred thousand dollars.

## **9. Specific agency or political subdivisions affected:**

Department of Taxation

## **10. Technical amendment necessary: No.**

## **11. Other comments:**

### Federal Whistleblower Statute

The Internal Revenue Code has included a whistleblower statute since 1867. In 2006, the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006 made fundamental changes to the IRS informant awards program by creating a non-discretionary awards provision; by adding whistleblower appeal rights; and by requiring the IRS to create a Whistleblower Office. Depending on the circumstances, an award paid to an informant may be mandatory or discretionary.

The current federal whistleblower statute provides that an individual shall receive an award of at least 15 percent but not more than 30 percent of the collected proceeds resulting from an administrative or judicial action that was based on information provided by that individual. The collected proceeds include penalties, interest, additions to tax, and additional amounts. The Whistleblower Office's determination of the amount of the award depends upon the extent to which the individual substantially contributed to the action. These award percentages apply whether the award is mandatory or discretionary.

In the event that the Whistleblower Office determines the administrative or judicial action is based principally on disclosures of specific allegations from a source other than the individual, the Whistleblower Office may award an amount that it considers appropriate, but not more than 10 percent of the collected proceeds resulting from the action. This

provision does not apply in cases where the individual is the original source of the information that results in an administrative or judicial action.

If the Whistleblower Office determines that the claim for an award is brought by an individual who planned and initiated the actions that led to the underpayment of tax or the violation of internal revenue laws, then the Whistleblower Office may appropriately reduce the award. If the individual is convicted of criminal conduct arising from this role, any award shall be denied.

In order for an individual to be eligible for the mandatory award, the relevant action must be against a taxpayer whose tax, penalties, interest, additions to tax, and additional amounts in dispute exceed \$2 million. The statute only applies to actions against individual taxpayers if the individual's gross income exceeds \$200,000 for any taxable year subject to such action.

In cases where the requirements for the mandatory award are not met, the individual that provided information which led to the collection of proceeds in an administrative or judicial action is eligible for a discretionary award.

Any mandatory award determination may be appealed to the Tax Court within 30 days of the determination. Discretionary award determinations may not be appealed.

Individual informants do not need to enter into a contract to receive an award under the whistleblower statute. Any individual informant may be represented by counsel. No award may be made unless the information is submitted under penalty of perjury.

The IRS may disclose confidential tax return information to the individual informant and his legal representative if necessary. Such information may only be disclosed if there is a written contract between the IRS and the informant (and his legal representative, if applicable) that requires the informant to comply with all IRS confidentiality conditions and requirements. The informant (and his legal representative, if applicable) must also agree in writing to (i) allow an inspection of his or her premises by the IRS relative to the maintenance of the information disclosed, and (ii) dispose of all return information upon completion of the informant's services by returning all information, including any copies or notes made, to the IRS or, if the information cannot be returned, destroying it in a manner required by the IRS.

Any informant or legal representative is subject to civil and criminal penalties for the unauthorized inspection or disclosure of return information. Additionally, if the IRS determines that any information (or his legal representative) has violated any of the confidentiality requirements, it may take any action it deems necessary to ensure that the requirements are satisfied, including (i) suspending further disclosures of return information, and (ii) suspending or terminating any duty or obligation arising under a contract with the IRS.

#### State Whistleblower Statutes

New York provides monetary awards to tax whistleblowers under the New York False Claims Act. Under the False Claims Act, any person who commits an act within the

statute which constitutes a claim, record or statement made under tax law is liable for penalties and damages. However, the False Claims Act only applies to claims, records or statements made under the tax law if the net income or sales of the person against whom the action is brought equals at least \$1 million for any taxable year subject to the action. Further, the total damages pleaded within the relevant action against that person must exceed \$350,000.

New York's False Claims Act allows for individuals to bring qui tam civil actions for violations of the act. If proceeds are recovered in such an action, the individual who initiated the action shall receive between 15 percent and 30 percent of the recovered proceeds depending on the circumstances. However, if the court determines that the action is based primarily on the disclosure of specific information relating to the allegations or transactions in court, in a legislative or administrative report, hearing, audit or investigation, or from the news media, then the court may not make an award of over 10 percent of the proceeds. Further, if the court finds that the qui tam civil action is being brought by a person who planned or initiated the violation of the False Claims Act, then the court may reduce the award to the extent it deems appropriate. Finally, if the person bringing the qui tam civil action is convicted of criminal conduct arising from his role in a False Claims Act violation, then he will not receive any share of the proceeds recovered in such an action.

A number of other states have similar False Claims Acts and provide monetary awards to qui tam plaintiffs. However, none of those states specifically allow claims, records or statements made under tax laws to fall within their False Claims Acts like New York. Instead, states like Florida do not explicitly prohibit tax actions from being brought under their False Claims Acts. Other states prohibit certain taxes from being brought under their False Claims Acts, but do not explicitly prohibit other types of taxes. For example, Illinois specifically excludes income taxes from the state's False Claims Act, but does not exclude other taxes. In contrast, states like Virginia explicitly bar tax actions from their false claims acts. In total, eleven states and the District of Columbia specifically exclude all tax actions from their false claims acts. Therefore, it appears that individuals in many states could bring tax actions using their state's False Claims Acts and receive awards, but the ability to do so is not explicit.

Texas may enter into contracts with people who have information regarding potential claims that the state may pursue in order to recover revenue or other property. The total consideration to be paid to the person with the relevant information must be contingent upon a recovery by the state. Further, the total consideration may not exceed 5 percent of the total revenue or value that the state recovers as a result of the information provided. Finally, the total consideration may be contractually limited to a specific and absolute dollar amount.

California law allows the state's Franchise Tax Board to conduct an informant reward program. However, no funding has ever been appropriated to start such a program. In 2010, proposed legislation would have required California's Franchise Tax Board to establish an informant reward program. The requirements of the program would have largely tracked the federal mandatory whistleblower award program. However, the bill did not pass. Analysts estimated that the cost of the program would be approximately

\$420,000 per year, while the revenue generated from the program would be \$200,000 for Fiscal Year 2011, \$350,000 for Fiscal Year 2012 and \$400,000 Fiscal Year 2013.

### Proposed Legislation

This bill would authorize the Tax Commissioner to award monetary compensation to individuals who provide information that leads to the successful collection of delinquent taxes owed by other individual or business taxpayers. If the Tax Commissioner proceeds with any administrative or judicial action based on such information, the amount of the award would be 20 percent of the collected proceeds, including penalties, interest, additions to tax, and additional amounts, resulting from such action or from a settlement in response to such action. Award payments would be paid only from the collected proceeds.

This bill would allow the Tax Commissioner to deny an award if the claim is brought by an individual who is a federal, state, or local tax official and the information provided was obtained in the course of the individual's official duties. The Tax Commissioner would also be permitted to deny an award if the information provided by an individual is information that the Department routinely receives from other sources, such as through an information exchange with the IRS, other state agencies, or local commissioners of the revenue.

This bill would allow the Tax Commissioner to deny an award if the claim is brought by an individual who planned or initiated the actions that led to the underpayment of taxes. Additionally, if such individual is convicted of criminal conduct arising from a claim for an award, then the Tax Commissioner would be required to deny any award.

If two or more individuals claim an award with respect to the same action, then this bill would require the Tax Commissioner to divide the award in proportion to the significance of each individual's information and the role played by each individual or his legal representative in assisting in such action. The total of all awards would not be allowed to exceed 20 percent.

This bill provides that, if any portion of the amount collectible is to be collected over time under an installment plan or restitution order, then no award would be paid until all such amounts have been collected. However, this bill would allow an award to be paid based on amounts collected to date if the Tax Commissioner and the individual agree that the collection of additional amounts is unlikely.

This bill would only apply to actions by the Department against (i) any individual taxpayer, or married taxpayers, with gross income exceeding \$100,000 or any business taxpayer with gross income exceeding \$500,000, and (ii) only if the tax penalties, interest, additions to tax, and additional amounts in dispute exceed \$50,000.

This bill would require the Tax Commissioner to develop guidelines and forms implementing the provisions of this bill. Such guidelines would be exempt from the provisions of the Administrative Process Act.

The effective date of this bill is not specified. The provisions of this bill would not become effective unless an appropriation effectuating the purposes of this bill is included in a general appropriation act passed by the 2013 session of the General Assembly, which becomes law.

cc : Secretary of Finance

Date: 2/5/2013 MTH  
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