

# DEPARTMENT OF TAXATION

## 2015 Fiscal Impact Statement

1. **Patron** George L. Barker
3. **Committee** Passed House and Senate
4. **Title** Individual Income Tax; Refund Checks

2. **Bill Number** SB 701  
**House of Origin:**  
           Introduced  
           Substitute  
           Engrossed
- Second House:**  
           In Committee  
           Substitute  
      X       Enrolled

**5. Summary/Purpose:**

This bill would require the Tax Commissioner and the State Comptroller to implement procedures allowing an individual requesting an income tax refund to elect to have his refund paid by check mailed to his address.

This bill would be effective for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2015.

**This bill is in conflict with Item 465C of the 2014-2016 Appropriations Act (Chapter 2, 2014 Special Session I).** Accordingly, it would have no impact unless the existing budget language is amended or repealed.

6. **Budget amendment necessary:** Yes.  
ITEM(S): 277, Department of Treasury  
          465C, Department of Taxation

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

**7a. Expenditure Impact:**

**Department of Treasury**

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Dollars</i>	<i>Fund</i>
2014-15	\$0	GF
2015-16	\$264,000	GF
2016-17	\$264,000	GF
2017-18	\$264,000	GF
2018-19	\$264,000	GF
2019-20	\$264,000	GF
2020-21	\$264,000	GF

**8. Fiscal implications:**

Administrative Costs – Department of Taxation

Even if enacted, this bill would have no impact because Item 465C of the 2014-2016 Appropriations Act (Chapter 2, 2014 Special Session I) requires the Department of

Taxation ("the Department") to issue income tax refunds through either direct deposit or debit cards. Both the engrossed House and Senate budget bills (House Bill 1400 and Senate Bill 800) include an amendment to such language to allow the provisions of this bill to apply. Assuming such budget amendments are enacted, the Department would likely revert back to issuing tax refunds in the form of paper checks or direct deposits. As a result, the Department would not incur any additional costs.

The Department interprets this bill to require an option for paper checks in addition to direct deposit. If a third option, in addition to paper checks and direct deposits, were utilized, the Department would incur a one-time administrative cost of approximately \$150,000 in FY 2016. This would include the Department's expenditures for updating its systems and processes to allow taxpayers three income tax refund options (direct deposit, debit card, or paper check).

#### Administrative Costs - Department of Treasury

If this bill passes and taxpayers are again given the option of receiving income tax refunds through checks and the Department reverts back to issuing tax refunds in the form of paper checks and direct deposits, the Department of Treasury ("Treasury") would need to have its annual General Fund appropriation increased, in the amount of \$264,000, beginning in FY 2016. The \$264,000 is based on the printing of 400,000 additional tax refund checks. The incremental cost to print a check, including postage, check stock, and banking costs, is \$0.66 per check.

#### Revenue Impact

This bill would have no impact on General Fund revenue because this bill would not affect any tax liabilities or revenues, only the method in which taxpayers would receive tax refunds.

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

Department of Taxation  
Department of Treasury

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

### **11. Other comments:**

#### Current Law

Beginning on January 1, 2013, Treasury stopped issuing income tax refunds through checks. Item 466C of the 2012-2014 Appropriations Act (Chapter 806, 2012 Session) and Item 465C of the 2014-2016 Appropriation Act (Chapter 2, 2014 Special Session I) allow the State Comptroller only to issue income tax refunds through debit cards, direct deposits, or other electronic means, unless the Tax Commissioner determines that a check is more appropriate for a transaction or a class of transactions. Taxpayers no longer have the option to elect on their returns to receive their income tax refunds through checks. This measure was part of a cost-savings initiative and was expected to save the

Commonwealth approximately \$200,000 per year. This would continue, even if this bill is enacted, until the budget language is amended or repealed.

#### Federal Optional Prepaid Debit Card Pilot Program

In 2011, the United States Treasury Department introduced a pilot program that was designed to analyze the effectiveness of providing taxpayers the option to receive their income tax refunds through prepaid debit cards. Of the 800,000 individuals who were given the option to receive their income tax refunds through a prepaid debit card, only 1,967 (0.25 percent) elected to do so.

#### Georgia's Optional Debit Card Program

In 2012, Georgia reported the results of providing taxpayers the option to receive their income tax refunds through prepaid debit cards. Of the 1.8 million income tax refunds issued in Georgia through March 30, 2012, only 9,456 taxpayers (0.52 percent) chose to have their refund issued to them through a prepaid debit card.

#### Proposed Legislation

This bill would require the Tax Commissioner and the State Comptroller to implement procedures allowing an individual requesting an income tax refund to elect on his income tax return to have his refund paid by a check mailed to the address provided on the return. This bill would also allow an individual to elect to have his income tax refund paid by debit card, direct deposit, or other electronic methods utilized by the State Comptroller.

This bill would be effective for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2015.

**This bill is in conflict with Item 465C of the 2014-2016 Appropriations Act (Chapter 2, 2014 Special Session I).** Accordingly, it would have no impact unless the existing budget language is amended or repealed.

Based on information supplied by the Department of Treasury's current debit card provider and the low participation rates in other states (less than 1 percent) for their optional debit card programs, an optional debit card contract program would be less likely to be profitable for the debit card provider. If the state were to offer an optional debit card program, the state would most likely have to subsidize the program at an additional cost. Therefore, the state would likely return to offering two options for issuing refunds: checks or direct deposits.

#### Similar Bills

**House Bill 1286** is substantively identical to this bill.

cc : Secretary of Finance

Date: 2/23/2015 CWM  
SB701FER161