

# CALIFORNIA STATE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT SYSTEM

## BILL ANALYSIS

---

**BILL NUMBER:** AB 2462 (Mullin) (As Introduced 2/23/06)

### **SUMMARY:**

AB 2462 provides the Teachers' Retirement Board (Board) the authority to supply, or contract to supply, fiduciary, recordkeeping and administrative services for employer-sponsored deferred compensation plans to school districts, community college districts and county offices of education that elect to contract with California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS) to provide those services. It also allows the cost of compliance services to be paid from employee account balances and establishes a funding mechanism to permit CalSTRS to fund development costs for this and other programs that enhance member financial security.

### **PURPOSE OF THE BILL:**

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is finalizing new regulations for employer-sponsored 403(b) deferred compensation retirement plans, which beginning January 1, 2007, will result in increased employer involvement in, and administration of 403(b) plans. Many CalSTRS employers, especially small and rural school districts that offer 403(b) plans do not have the expertise to perform these new functions and have asked CalSTRS to establish a program to provide these services on a contract basis.

### **BOARD POSITION:**

Sponsor. AB 2462 is consistent with the Board's policy to provide financially sound primary and supplemental retirement plans for California's educators by allowing CalSTRS to provide high-quality 403(b) compliance services for the lowest possible cost.

### **LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:**

Chapter 1095, Statutes of 2002 (AB 2506—Steinberg), requires CalSTRS to establish an Internet registry for vendors who offer tax-deferred 403(b) investment products to employees of school districts, community college districts and county offices of education. The information bank provides school employees a means to search and compare data on investment products including plan features, fees and historical performance.

Chapter 489, Statutes of 1994 (AB 3705—PER&SS), authorizes CalSTRS to develop a 457(b) deferred compensation plan that school employers may offer to their employees who are CalSTRS members.

Chapter 291, Statutes of 1994 (AB 3064—Morrow), authorizes CalSTRS to offer a 403(b) annuity or custodial plan available to all employees of any state or local agency that employs persons in positions eligible for CalSTRS membership.

Chapter 1316, Statutes of 1976 (AB 3056—Gualco), allows CalSTRS school employers to make contributions to the CalSTRS tax-sheltered annuity program on behalf of their employees.

**PROGRAM BACKGROUND:**

Section 403(b) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) provides a means for school employees to save additional funds for retirement on a tax-deferred basis. Under this arrangement, participants do not pay income taxes on the amount contributed or the earnings of the accounts until the funds are distributed, generally after retirement. Historically, 403(b) funds have been invested in insurance-based products, known as tax-sheltered annuities, although federal legislation subsequently permitted the establishment of custodial accounts by which participants could invest in mutual funds.

Many vendors of 403(b) investment products market their products, especially tax-sheltered annuities, directly to school employees. Some school employers have instead established 403(b) programs for their employees. Much like private-sector employers with 401(k) plans and non-educational public-sector employers with 457(b) plan, when a school-employer sponsors a 403(b) investment program, it requests bids from vendors and chooses a list of investment products that will be available to their participating employees. In many cases, an employer will also contract with a third-party administrator (TPA) to process and transfer employee contributions from the employer to the various investment providers.

Currently, school employers are not legally responsible for supervising how an employee's 403(b) assets are handled, with the vast majority doing little more than processing payroll deductions. Many contract with TPAs who distribute 403(b) moneys directly from the employer to insurance companies, in the case of 403(b) tax sheltered annuities, and mutual funds, in the case of 403(b) custodial accounts. However, these TPAs have not historically provided any services beyond recordkeeping and distribution functions.

Existing law requires school districts that offer deferred compensation plans to process the payroll deduction and perform other administrative functions. The method of paying the costs for TPA services vary widely: (1) the employer pays; (2) the TPA provides the services without cost in return for preferred treatment for their own 403(b) investment products; or (3) a fee is automatically deducted from the employee's contributions during the transfer process. The State Attorney General recently issued an opinion regarding this last practice, finding that state law prohibits a school district or TPA from charging employees a fee to cover the school district's costs of administering such deferred compensation plans. In contrast, the State Controller has statutory authority to charge for the costs of administering of the state employee payroll deduction program. The California Public Employees' Retirement System currently has similar authority under the 457 deferred compensation plans that it offers to public employers.

CalSTRS administers a 403(b) deferred compensation plan for school employers, known as the Voluntary Investment Program (VIP). Approximately 400 out of 1,100 CalSTRS employers offer the CalSTRS VIP to their employees, with most making other 403(b) plans available, as well. CalSTRS contracts with a vendor, CitiStreet, LLC, to provide administrative services and access to the various investment options made available to VIP participants, which are selected and screened by CalSTRS' Investment staff. The investment options available range from high to low risk; however, all feature low fees. VIP participants contact their employer to elect deferral amounts that are automatically deducted from their paycheck, and contact CitiStreet to select their investments and allocation of their contributions. Each participant pays an administrative fee that is based on the value of their investment account. In addition, the different investment products have associates fees that are also paid by the participant.

The IRS is in the process of finalizing regulations that will impose additional recordkeeping requirements and fiduciary responsibilities on educational and non-profit employers that make available to their employees 403(b) deferred compensation plans. The regulations will, for the first time, require school employers to retain operational control over their 403(b) plans. These requirements are similar to those imposed upon employers who offer their employees 401(k) and 457(b) deferred compensation plans.

Among other things, these new regulations require employers to:

- Keep records of individual employee's account transactions including contributions, investment returns, distributions, sales or distribution expense charges, transfers and tax withholdings;
- Adopt a written Plan Document, effective January 1, 2007, that details the terms for employee eligibility, benefits, applicable limitations, the contracts available under the plan and the terms for benefit distributions;
- Provide plan participants with automatic enrollment and an annual opportunity to elect, revoke or change a deferral election;
- Supervise catch-up contributions to make sure they do not exceed the IRC dollar limits;
- Monitor payroll deferrals elected by participating employees to ensure contributions do not exceed the maximum limits and ensure deferred contributions go only to specific funding arrangements.

Non-governmental 403(b) plans are subject to the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA). In most instances, governmental plans, including those sponsored by public schools, are currently exempt from ERISA; however, the Department of Labor, which enforces ERISA, has yet to issue a definitive answer about whether the non-ERISA plans will be exempt from the requirement to have a Plan Document. Nonetheless, public school employers will not be exempt from any and all liability. Specifically, school employers will have the ultimate fiduciary responsibility over the plans they offer and will be expected to substantially conform to the guidelines governing fiduciary responsibility set in ERISA. Because many school employers, especially small and rural school districts that offer 403(b) plans, do not have the expertise to perform these functions, some have contacted CalSTRS seeking compliance information and assistance.

The new regulations will result in much greater compliance costs for school employers, which increases the need to allow school districts to recover these costs associated with administering their 403(b) plans. Because current law does not provide the express statutory authority for school districts to charge for the costs of administering deferred compensation plans, the school districts will be forced to bear the costs of the new IRS regulations on their own, which may cause some to abandon the plans or enter into single contractual relationships with 403(b) providers, thereby limiting the investment options available to employees. Furthermore, if employers fail to comply with the regulations, contributions made to a teacher's 403(b) plan may be ruled by the IRS as nonqualified, thus preventing the deferral of taxes on contributions made to the plan.

**ANALYSIS:**

Specifically, AB 2462 will:

- Permit CalSTRS to provide, or contract to provide, school employers with fiduciary, recordkeeping and administrative services for the 403(b) plans they offer to their employees;
- Allow the school employer to charge participating employees a fee to cover the costs of deferred compensation plan administrative and compliance services;
- Establish the Teachers' Retirement Program Development Fund (Development Fund) within the State Treasury to fund the cost of establishing a contract-based program to provide school employers with 403(b) compliance services;
- Allow CalSTRS to temporarily divert a portion of the employer's Defined Benefit (DB) Program contributions to the Development Fund to implement the program;
- Provide for recovery of the diverted funds through the fees paid by contracting employers and/or participating employees.

School employers who offer 403(b) plans to their employees will be able to contract with CalSTRS for these services to ensure their compliance with the new IRS requirements. In contracting with CalSTRS, some of the employer's fiduciary and administrative responsibility will shift to CalSTRS. In addition, if CalSTRS obtains the services of an outside vendor to act as the plan administrator, the outside vendor will also assume some of the liability. Because CalSTRS has expertise in the area of federal compliance, is a not-for-profit organization and can utilize economies of scale, it may be able to make administrative services available to participating school employers at a cost that is far less than other TPAs and compliance vendors.

As an administrator providing compliance services, CalSTRS (or the company with whom CalSTRS contracts) could:

- Handle the day-to-day administrative functions such as processing the paperwork for benefit claims and loan requests, interpreting eligibility and participation standards and coordinating payroll transmissions;
- Act as the "common remitter" that collects the total investment contributions from the school employer and distributes it to participating investment providers according to participating employee's allocation strategies;
- Maintain records of all plan transactions such as contributions, investment gains and losses, distributions, forfeitures and tax withholdings;
- Keep records for each employee's account, showing employee and employer contributions, investment returns and distributions;
- Prepare and distribute tax documents and reports for each participant on an annual basis;
- Provide consulting services related to plan design issues or operational policies, legal advice and investment options;
- Present general education about the plan to participating employees, such as the enrollment process, eligibility and investment options available.

Money to initially develop the CalSTRS compliance program that provides recordkeeping, administrative and fiduciary services to contracting school employers would come from the 8.25 percent of creditable compensation contributed by employers to the Teachers' Retirement Fund (TRF) for the DB Program and the Teachers' Health Benefits Fund (THBF); a portion would be diverted to the Development Fund.

Development Fund assets will be held separately from the TRF and the THBF for the purposes of developing programs that enhance member financial security. Assets used for program development would be returned to the TRF from revenues generated by the new CalSTRS compliance program, with interest calculated on the 8 percent actuarially assumed rate. Idle funds held in the Development Fund would be invested similarly to those in the TRF and THBF.

## **FISCAL IMPACT:**

**Benefit Program cost/savings:** None. Assuming the compliance program generates sufficient revenues to offset the amount of funds diverted from the TRF, the TRF will be paid-back at the 8 percent actuarially assumed rate of return.

**Administrative costs/savings:** The start-up cost for analyzing the market needs, establishing appropriate contract requirements, selecting the best-qualified third party vendor and promoting those services are unknown. Administrative costs would be paid by contracting employers and/or their participating employees. The CalSTRS corporate database will require modification to capture a portion of employer contributions and divert to the new Development Fund, which will cost approximately \$50,000. In addition, CalSTRS' annual audit costs will increase to accommodate auditing the new Development Fund.

## **SUPPORT/OPPOSITION**

**Support:** Teachers' Retirement Board.

**Opposition:** None.

## **ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT/OPPOSITION:**

**Pros:** AB 2462 would leverage CalSTRS' expertise and relationships to provide employers with low-cost, high-quality recordkeeping and compliance services for their deferred compensation plans.

**Cons:** By diverting money from the TRF to the new Development Fund and then paying that money back at the actuarially assumed rate of return, the TRF may have less of an opportunity to earn a *greater* rate of return.