

SUMMARY

This bill would require all state agencies to answer incoming calls within ten rings by a live customer service representative or by an automated prompt enabling the caller to speak to one.

SUMMARY OF AMENDMENTS

4/23/07

- Permits a state agency to use automated telephone answering equipment instead of a live customer service agent answering each call as long as that answering service provides the option to speak to a live customer service agent.
- Enumerates exemptions to the bill's provisions.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

From time to time, Californians need to contact State agencies because of problems or concerns, and it is not necessarily convenient or practical for that person to leave a message or to follow an automated menu. This bill ensures that in such events, a caller would have access to a live customer service agent.

BOARD POSITION

Neutral. The provisions of the bill are consistent with CalSTRS' existing practices. It is the Board's policy to adopt a neutral position or no position on legislation and regulations that do not significantly or adversely impact the benefits or services provided through the funds administered by CalSTRS or the administration of the retirement plans.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Chapter 706, Statutes of 1989 (S.B. 10—Lockyer and Nielsen) requires all state agencies to answer incoming calls on public lines within 10 rings during regular business hours.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

CalSTRS provides a toll-free telephone line to allow callers to contact CalSTRS with respect to their retirement. In accordance with current law, this number is answered within 10 rings by an interactive voice response system, which routes callers to the appropriate customer service representative (CSR). At any time during a call, the caller may press "0" to bypass additional automated information and speak to a live CSR.

During peak call times, calls may be placed in a queue until a CSR is available. The time a caller spends in the queue depends on the number of other callers and the length of time CSRs spend assisting callers. The number of calls CalSTRS receives and the complexity of callers' questions vary seasonally, weekly, and due to specific events.

CalSTRS actively incorporates customer feedback into its Call Center operations. The CalSTRS Call Center has conducted several Voice of the Customer surveys relating to customer satisfaction and interaction with the Call Center. As a result of the most recent survey, CalSTRS formed a Phone Tree Redesign team and has since implemented several of the team's recommendations. As of November 27, 2007, callers are immediately informed that they may press "0" at any time to reach a customer service representative, and callers may "zero out" at any time while in the interactive voice response system.

CalSTRS maintains several additional telephone lines that may or may not be considered public under this bill. Disability and Survivor Benefits receives the majority of its calls through the toll-free number described above. These calls are routed through one of three phone lines and into voicemail in the event that all three lines are busy. The voicemail system is cleared of calls daily. Several programs such as retirement incentives, one-year final compensation benefit enhancements, post-retirement earnings exemptions, and sick leave information are specifically staffed by individual CalSTRS employees. Circulars and directives direct employers to these specialty staff members' individual phone number. If the specific staff person is not available to answer the phone, the caller may leave a voicemail or hang-up and call the toll-free number described above.

ANALYSIS:

Existing Law:

Existing law requires state agencies to answer incoming calls on public lines within 10 rings.

This bill:

AB 865 would require state agencies to answer such calls by a live customer service agent or automated telephone answering equipment that provides the option to speak to a live customer service agent.

CalSTRS actively strives to assess and meet its customers' needs through the Call Center and other interactions with external customers. By making a live customer service agent available through CalSTRS' Call Center, CalSTRS already complies with this bill's requirements.

This bill would not require any action on the part of CalSTRS.

FISCAL IMPACT

Benefit Program Cost – None.

Administrative Costs/Savings – None.

SUPPORT

None known.

OPPOSITION

None known.

LEGISLATIVE STAFF CONTACT

Jessica Oliva
CalSTRS Legislative Analyst
229-0654
joliva@calstrs.com

Mary Anne Terranova
CalSTRS Legislative Affairs Manager
229-3891
mterranova@calstrs.com

Jennifer Baker
Director of CalSTRS Governmental Affairs and Program Analysis
229-3866
jbaker@calstrs.com