

BILL NUMBER: AB 963 (Bonilla) as amended August 31, 2015

SUMMARY

AB 963 clarifies the definition of service that can be reported to CalSTRS and remedies membership issues for individuals in classified positions who were erroneously reported to CalSTRS.

BOARD POSITION

Sponsor. This bill ensures more effective and efficient administration of the retirement plan and helps alleviate confusion among employers on how to determine what service is creditable to CalSTRS.

REASON FOR THE BILL

Some employers have erroneously reported service to CalSTRS due to confusion surrounding the definition of “creditable service” in the Teachers’ Retirement Law. Due to this perceived vagueness, individuals have been removed from CalSTRS or have had service incorrectly reported to a different public retirement system.

SUMMARY OF AMENDMENTS

The August 31, 2015, amendments:

- Delete the revision to the definition of “compensation earnable” for outgrowth activities.

ANALYSIS

Existing Law:

Existing law requires that employers, including the state, report creditable service performed by employees based on a list of activities. The state may have individuals performing creditable service at entities such as the School for the Deaf, the School for the Blind or the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Employees reported to CalSTRS also must adhere to credentialing requirements adopted by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, minimum standards adopted by the California Community Colleges Board of Governors or provisions required under an approved charter for the operation of a charter school. The work of superintendents is excluded from these requirements. In addition, if a CalSTRS member is hired in a position to perform activities not creditable to CalSTRS, he or she can elect in writing within 60 days from the date of hire to stay in CalSTRS, as specified.

This Bill:

AB 963 continues the same requirements, while clarifying and adding criteria to the definition of “creditable service” to help with those who may have been erroneously reported to CalSTRS. The bill also provides guidance for making an election for those who have been misreported.

This bill reorganizes the definition of “creditable service” for the Defined Benefit (DB) Program and the Cash Balance (CB) Benefit Program to clarify the certification qualifications, minimum standards and other requirements that need to be met in order to perform creditable service for prekindergarten through grade 12, including the state, community college and charter school employers. The bill clarifies that outgrowth activities do not require a credential and are only creditable when they are performed for the same employer for which the member is performing creditable service.

The definition includes activities to align with other sections in the Education Code. One addition to the list is activities connected with the enforcement of laws relating to compulsory education and child welfare activities. One example of a position performing these activities would be a truant officer. A second addition is mentoring, which includes program support providers and coaches working in teacher and administrator preparation and induction programs approved by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The definition also specifies that the work of community college presidents and chancellors is creditable service along with the work of superintendents currently in statute. Because certification qualifications are not established by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the work of consulting teachers participating in the Peer Assistance and Review Program for Teachers is also specifically included. The bill makes clear that these types of work, without commission- or board-specified certification qualifications or minimum standards, must be linked to creditable service activities.

The reorganization also confirms that the activities of human resources administrators in prekindergarten through grade 12 and community colleges are considered creditable to CalSTRS. The clarification of the credential and minimum qualification requirements, along with the list of activities in the definition of “creditable service,” reduces the chances employers will misreport service in the future. With these new criteria in the definition of “creditable service,” the bill allows CalSTRS to ask employers to provide information regarding the requirements that need to be met in order to perform creditable service.

In addition, AB 963 offers a remedy for individuals whose employers have erroneously reported their service to CalSTRS. The bill provides that the service of these individuals is creditable to the DB Program if the service was performed on or before December 31, 2015, and reported to CalSTRS as creditable service.

If individuals whose service is deemed creditable are CalSTRS members, including those who retired on or before December 31, 2015, they may elect to have that service covered by a different public retirement system. If individuals had service removed from CalSTRS, including those receiving a benefit on or before December 31, 2015, they may elect to have that service covered by the DB Program. If an election is made to have service covered by the DB Program, the individual is a CalSTRS member and has all rights of a member, including electing to stay in CalSTRS if he or she is hired into a position that requires membership in a different public retirement system as specified in current statute.

AB 963 adds stipulations for individuals who make an election based on service that is deemed creditable. If a CalSTRS member elects to have service moved to a different public retirement system, any member contributions, credited interest and employer contributions, less amounts already paid to the individual, shall be returned to the employer. Furthermore, any amounts due to CalSTRS shall be collected from the individual before he or she can be covered by another public retirement system. For those who had service removed from CalSTRS and elect to have their service covered by the DB Program, that service and employee and employer contributions shall be reported and remitted to CalSTRS according to current statute.

All individuals who make such an election maintain their status pursuant to the California Public Employees' Pension Reform Act of 2013 (PEPRA). This election shall only be made by the individual who performs service deemed creditable and must be made on or before June 30, 2016. If no election is made, all service remains in the retirement system under which the individual is currently covered. Lastly, this bill makes conforming changes to references.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

AB 1381 (PER&SS, Chapter 559, Statutes of 2013) made various technical corrections and conforming changes that align the Teachers' Retirement Law with the provisions of PEPRA, as enacted in AB 340 (Furutani), including adding the definition of "retired member activities" for the CB Benefit Program.

AB 340 (Furutani, Chapter 296, Statutes of 2012) made various changes to the CalSTRS benefit structure that affect all CalSTRS members, including adding the definition of "retired member activities" for the DB Program.

AB 2700 (Lempert, Chapter 1021, Statutes of 2000) made all compensation for creditable service creditable to CalSTRS and credited member and employer contributions for service in excess of 1.000 years of service per school year to the Defined Benefit Supplement (DBS) Program.

AB 2673 (Ducheny, Chapter 608, Statutes of 1996) amended the CB Benefit Program statutes as necessary to facilitate employers' "option" to offer the Program. Made other technical and conforming amendments as appropriate.

AB 948 (Gallegos, Chapter 394, Statutes of 1995) established definitions of various employment activities that are considered creditable service and provided that the earnings limitation on postretirement service is applied only to compensation earned from creditable service.

AB 1298 (Ducheny, Chapter 592, Statutes of 1995) authorized CalSTRS to establish a Cash Balance retirement program administered by CalSTRS for part-time public school employees, which employers may elect to provide for persons employed less than half time at a contribution rate that is lower than Social Security tax. Note: The Internal Revenue Service has expressly ruled that the CalSTRS CB Benefit Program qualifies as an alternative retirement plan to Social Security.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

CalSTRS has provided education to employers in the past on what is needed in order for a position to be creditable to CalSTRS. If CalSTRS discovers that an individual has not performed creditable service, the system requires employers to re-report that service to the appropriate retirement system, and contributions received would be returned to the employer. Employers and constituent groups claim that service is being misreported because the credential requirements are confusing, and some of the activities listed in the law are vague. Those groups recommend CalSTRS should, consequently, broaden the definition of “creditable service” to allow certain positions, which they believe are generally performing activities included in the definition of “creditable service,” to be reported to and accepted by the system.

FISCAL IMPACT

Program Costs/Savings – There would likely be a de minimis impact to the fund because the full contributions for the service were paid even though the service was not creditable under current law.

Administrative Costs/Savings – Technology costs are estimated at below \$100,000 with an effort that may take up to six months related to returning any contributions to the employer and assuming standard processes for reversing contribution lines. Allowing individuals erroneously reported to CalSTRS the option to stay in the system avoids the need to process re-reporting of service that was not creditable. Other administrative costs and anticipated increase in workload are absorbable.

SUPPORT

CalSTRS (Sponsor)
Alliance of Schools for Cooperative Insurance Programs
Association of California Community College Administrators
Association of California School Administrators
Association of Chief Business Officials
Association of Chief Human Resources Officers/Equal Employment Officers
California Association of School Business Officials
California Retired Teachers Association
California School Boards Association
California Teachers Association
Community College League of California
Foothill-De Anza Community College District
Los Angeles Community College District
Los Rios Community College District
North Orange County Community College District
Rancho Santiago Community College District
Riverside Community College District
Riverside County Superintendent of Schools
Santa Clarita Community College District
School Employers Association of California
Schools Excess Liability Fund
Shasta-Tehama-Trinity Joint Community College District

Siskiyou Joint Community College District
South Orange County Community College District
Statewide Association of Community Colleges
West Kern Community College District
2 Individuals

OPPOSITION

None known.

ARGUMENTS

Pro: Addresses the problem of employers misreporting employees to CalSTRS.

Provides employers with clarity on what is and what is not creditable service.

Con: Creates an exception for individuals who were misreported.

Does not hold employers responsible for prior erroneous reporting.

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