

LEGISLATIVE BILL 611

Became law May 28, 1989,
without approval of the Governor.

Introduced by Moore, 24; R. Johnson, 34;
Bernard-Stevens, 42

AN ACT relating to revenue and taxation; to amend sections 77-27,119 and 79-1330, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1943; to state intent concerning school finance; to change requirements for filing income tax returns; to provide a termination date for the School Foundation and Equalization Act; and to repeal the original sections.

Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

Section 1. The Legislature hereby finds that:

(1) More than sixty percent of all real property taxes are assessed to support public schools;

(2) Any proposal for lasting property tax relief must deal with the issue of school finance; and

(3) It is appropriate to share the income tax base with school districts in order to:

(a) Assure all Nebraska children a more equitable opportunity for an appropriate education;

(b) Provide a broad and stable system of financial support for public schools through an appropriate mixture of revenue sources; and

(c) Provide equalization of fiscal ability and property tax burden among school districts through the inclusion of income wealth in the determination of a school district's ability to provide educational programs to the extent that such income is part of the accessible tax base.

Sec. 2. It is the intent of the Legislature to replace the present school finance system with a system which shares the income tax base with school districts to provide substantial and enduring property tax relief and a stable and lasting school finance system. It is further the intent of the Legislature to assure property tax relief and tax equity by establishing limits on school district budget growth, which limits are sensitive to local needs and spending levels. It is also the intent of the Legislature that this program be in place and operational prior to January 1, 1992.

Sec. 3. That section 77-27,119, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1943, be amended to read as follows:

77-27,119. (1) The Tax Commissioner shall administer and enforce the income tax imposed by sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135, and he or she is authorized to conduct hearings, to make adopt and promulgate such rules and regulations, and to require such facts and information to be reported as he or she may deem necessary to enforce the income tax provisions of sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135, except that such rules, regulations, and reports shall not be inconsistent with the laws of this state or the laws of the United States. The Tax Commissioner may for enforcement and administrative purposes divide the state into a reasonable number of districts in which branch offices may be maintained.

(2)(a) The Tax Commissioner may prescribe the form and contents of any return or other document required to be filed under the income tax provisions of sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135. Such return or other document shall be compatible as to form and content with the return or document required by the laws of the United States. ~~Commencing with the taxable year 1971,~~ ~~the~~ The form shall have a place where the taxpayer shall designate the school district in which he or she lives and the county in which the school district is located. The Tax Commissioner shall adopt and promulgate such rules and regulations as may be necessary to insure compliance with this requirement.

(b) The State Department of Education, with the assistance and cooperation of the Department of Revenue, shall develop a uniform system for numbering all school districts in the state. Such system shall be consistent with the data processing needs of the Department of Revenue. ~~Such system shall be fully operational by December 31, 1980, and shall be used in all tax years thereafter for the school district identification required by subdivision (a) of this subsection.~~ ~~(2)(a) of this section.~~

(c) The proper filing of an income tax return shall consist of the submission of such form as prescribed by the Tax Commissioner or an exact facsimile thereof with sufficient information provided by the taxpayer on the face of the form from which to compute the actual tax liability. Each taxpayer shall include the such taxpayer's correct social security number or state identification number and the school district identification number of the school district in which

the taxpayer resides on the face of the form. A filing is deemed to occur when the required information is provided.

(3) The Tax Commissioner, for the purpose of ascertaining the correctness of any return or other document required to be filed under the income tax provisions of sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135, for the purpose of determining corporate income, individual income, and withholding tax due, or for the purpose of making an estimate of taxable income of any person, shall have the power to examine or to cause to have examined, by any agent or representative designated by him or her for that purpose, any books, papers, records, or memoranda bearing upon such matters and may by summons require the attendance of the person responsible for rendering such return or other document or remitting any tax, or any officer or employee of such person, or the attendance of any other person having knowledge in the premises, and may take testimony and require proof material for his or her information, with power to administer oaths or affirmations to such person or persons.

(4) The time and place of examination pursuant to this section shall be such time and place as may be fixed by the Tax Commissioner and as are reasonable under the circumstances. In the case of a summons, the date fixed for appearance before the Tax Commissioner shall not be less than twenty days from the time of service of the summons.

(5) No taxpayer shall be subjected to unreasonable or unnecessary examinations or investigations.

(6) Except in accordance with proper judicial order or as otherwise provided by law, it shall be unlawful for the Tax Commissioner, any officer or employee of the Tax Commissioner, any person engaged or retained by the Tax Commissioner on an independent contract basis, any person who, pursuant to this section, is permitted to inspect any report or return or to whom a copy, an abstract, or a portion of any report or return is furnished, or any other person to divulge, make known, or use in any manner the amount of income or any particulars set forth or disclosed in any report or return required except for the purpose of enforcing sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135. The officers charged with the custody of such reports and returns shall not be required to produce any of them or evidence of anything contained in them in any action or proceeding in any court, except on behalf of the Tax Commissioner

in an action or proceeding under the provisions of the tax law to which he or she is a party or on behalf of any party to any action or proceeding under sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135 when the reports or facts shown thereby are directly involved in such action or proceeding, in either of which events the court may require the production of, and may admit in evidence, so much of such reports or of the facts shown thereby as are pertinent to the action or proceeding and no more. Nothing ~~herein in this section~~ shall be construed (a) to prohibit the delivery to a taxpayer, his or her duly authorized representative, or his or her successors, receivers, trustees, ~~executors personal representatives,~~ administrators, assignees, or guarantors, if directly interested, of a certified copy of any return or report in connection with his or her tax, (b) to prohibit the publication of statistics so classified as to prevent the identification of particular reports or returns and the items thereof, (c) to prohibit the inspection by the Attorney General or other legal representatives of the state of the report or return of any taxpayer who shall bring an action to review the tax based thereon or against whom an action or proceeding for collection of tax has been instituted, (d) to prohibit furnishing to the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Court the names, addresses, and identification numbers of employers, and such information shall be furnished on request of the court, or (e) to prohibit the disclosure of information and records to a collection agency contracting with the Tax Commissioner pursuant to sections 77-377.01 to 77-377.04. Any person who violates this subsection shall be guilty of a felony and shall, upon conviction thereof, be fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than five hundred dollars, or be imprisoned not more than five years, or be both so fined and imprisoned, in the discretion of the court; ~~together with and shall be assessed the costs of prosecution.~~ If the offender is an officer or employee of the state, he or she shall be dismissed from office and be ineligible to hold any public office in this state for a period of two years thereafter.

(7) Reports and returns required to be filed under income tax provisions of sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135 shall be preserved until the Tax Commissioner orders them to be destroyed.

(8) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (6) of this section, the Tax Commissioner may permit the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States or his or her delegates, or the proper officer of

any state imposing an income tax, or the authorized representative of either such officer, to inspect the income tax returns of any taxpayer, or may furnish to such officer or his or her authorized representative an abstract of the return of income of any taxpayer or supply him or her with information concerning an item of income contained in any return or disclosed by the report of any investigation of the income or return of income of any taxpayer, but such permission shall be granted only if the statutes of the United States or of such other state, as the case may be, grant substantially similar privileges to the Tax Commissioner of this state as the officer charged with the administration of the income tax imposed by sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135.

(9) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (6) of this section, the Tax Commissioner may permit the Postal Inspector of the United States Postal Service or his or her delegates to inspect the reports or returns of any person filed pursuant to the Nebraska Revenue Act of 1967 when information on the reports or returns is relevant to any action or proceeding instituted or being considered by the United States Postal Service against such person for the fraudulent use of the mails to carry and deliver false and fraudulent tax returns to the Tax Commissioner with the intent to defraud the State of Nebraska or to evade the payment of Nebraska state taxes.

(10)(a) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (6) of this section, the Tax Commissioner shall, upon written request by the Auditor of Public Accounts, make tax returns and tax return information open to inspection by, or disclosure to, officers and employees of the Auditor of Public Accounts for the purpose of and to the extent necessary in making an audit of the Department of Revenue pursuant to section 84-304. The Auditor of Public Accounts shall statistically and randomly select the tax returns and tax return information to be audited based upon a computer tape provided by the Department of Revenue which contains only total population documents without specific identification of taxpayers. The Tax Commissioner shall have the authority to approve the statistical sampling method used by the Auditor of Public Accounts. Confidential tax returns and tax return information shall be audited only upon the premises of the Department of Revenue. All audit work papers pertaining to the audit of the Department of Revenue shall be stored in a secure place in the

Department of Revenue.

(b) No officer or employee of the Auditor of Public Accounts shall disclose to any person, other than another officer or employee of the Auditor of Public Accounts whose official duties require such disclosure, any return or return information described in the Nebraska Revenue Act of 1967 in a form which can be associated with or otherwise identify, directly or indirectly, a particular taxpayer.

(c) Any person who violates the provisions of this subsection shall be guilty of a Class IV felony and, in the discretion of the court, may be assessed the costs of prosecution. The guilty officer or employee shall be dismissed from employment and be ineligible to hold any position of employment with the State of Nebraska for a period of two years thereafter. For purposes of this subsection, officer or employee shall include a former officer or employee of the Auditor of Public Accounts.

(11) As used in subsections (10) to (13) of this section, unless the context otherwise requires For purposes of subsections (10) through (13) of this section:

(a) Tax returns shall mean any tax or information return or claim for refund required by, provided for, or permitted under sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135 which is filed with the Tax Commissioner by, on behalf of, or with respect to any person and any amendment or supplement thereto, including supporting schedules, attachments, or lists which are supplemental to or part of the filed return;

(b) Return information shall mean:

(i) A taxpayer's identification number and (A) the nature, source, or amount of his or her income, payments, receipts, deductions, exemptions, credits, assets, liabilities, net worth, tax liability, tax withheld, deficiencies, overassessments, or tax payments, whether the taxpayer's return was, is being, or will be examined or subject to other investigation or processing or (B) any other data received by, recorded by, prepared by, furnished to, or collected by the Tax Commissioner with respect to a return or the determination of the existence or possible existence of liability or the amount of liability of any person for any tax, penalty, interest, fine, forfeiture, or other imposition or offense; and

(ii) Any part of any written determination or any background file document relating to such written determination; and

(c) Disclosures shall mean the making known to any person in any manner a return or return information.

(12) The Auditor of Public Accounts shall (a) notify the Tax Commissioner in writing thirty days prior to the beginning of an audit of his or her intent to conduct an audit, (b) provide an audit plan, and (c) provide a list of the tax returns and tax return information identified for inspection during the audit.

(13) The Auditor of Public Accounts shall, as a condition for receiving tax returns and tax return information: (a) Subject his or her employees to the same confidential information safeguards and disclosure procedures as required of Department of Revenue employees; (b) establish and maintain a permanent system of standardized records with respect to any request for tax returns or tax return information, the reason for such request, and the date of such request and any disclosure of the tax return or tax return information; (c) establish and maintain a secure area or place in the Department of Revenue in which the tax returns, tax return information, or audit workpapers shall be stored; (d) restrict access to the tax returns or tax return information only to persons whose duties or responsibilities require access; (e) provide such other safeguards as the Tax Commissioner determines to be necessary or appropriate to protect the confidentiality of the tax returns or tax return information; (f) provide a report to the Tax Commissioner which describes the procedures established and utilized by the Auditor of Public Accounts for insuring the confidentiality of tax returns, tax return information, and audit workpapers; and (g) upon completion of use of such returns or tax return information, return to the Tax Commissioner such returns or tax return information, along with any copies.

(14) The Tax Commissioner may permit other tax officials of this state to inspect the tax returns and reports filed under sections 77-2714 to 77-27,135, but such inspection shall be permitted only for purposes of enforcing a tax law and only to the extent and under the conditions prescribed by the rules and regulations of the Tax Commissioner.

(15) The Tax Commissioner shall compile the school district information required by subsection (2) of this section. Insofar as it is possible, such compilation shall include, but not be limited to, the total adjusted gross income of each school district in the state. The Tax Commissioner shall adopt and promulgate such rules and regulations as may be

necessary to insure that such compilation does not violate the confidentiality of any individual income tax return nor conflict with any other provisions of state or federal law.

Sec. 4. That section 79-1330, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1943, be amended to read as follows:

79-1330. Sections 79-1330 to ~~79-1344~~ 79-1344.01 shall be known as the School Foundation and Equalization Act, which act shall terminate on June 30, 1991, unless reenacted or reestablished by the Legislature.

Sec. 5. That original sections 77-27,119 and 79-1330, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1943, are repealed.