

Introduced by Senators Gonzalez, Stern, and Wiener

January 30, 2023

An act to amend Section 16642 of, and to add Section 7513.76 to, the Government Code, relating to public retirement systems.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 252, as introduced, Gonzalez. Public retirement systems: fossil fuels: divestment.

The California Constitution grants the retirement board of a public employee retirement system plenary authority and fiduciary responsibility for investment of moneys and administration of the retirement fund and system. These provisions qualify this grant of powers by reserving to the Legislature the authority to prohibit investments if it is in the public interest and the prohibition satisfies standards of fiduciary care and loyalty required of a retirement board.

Existing law prohibits the boards of the Public Employees' Retirement System and the State Teachers' Retirement System from making new investments or renewing existing investments of public employee retirement funds in a thermal coal company, as defined. Existing law requires the boards to liquidate investments in thermal coal companies on or before July 1, 2017, and requires the boards, in making a determination to liquidate investments, to constructively engage with thermal coal companies to establish whether the companies are transitioning their business models to adapt to clean energy generation. Existing law provides that it does not require a board to take any action unless the board determines in good faith that the action is consistent with the board's fiduciary responsibilities established in the California Constitution.

This bill would prohibit the boards of the Public Employees' Retirement System and the State Teachers' Retirement System from making new investments or renewing existing investments of public employee retirement funds in a fossil fuel company, as defined. The bill would require the boards to liquidate investments in a fossil fuel company on or before July 1, 2030. The bill would temporarily suspend the above-described liquidation provision upon a good faith determination by the board that certain conditions materially impact normal market mechanisms for pricing assets, as specified, and would make this suspension provision inoperative on January 1, 2035. The bill would provide that it does not require a board to take any action unless the board determines in good faith that the action is consistent with the board's fiduciary responsibilities established in the California Constitution.

This bill would require the boards, commencing February 1, 2025, and annually thereafter, to file a report with the Legislature and the Governor, containing specified information, including a list of fossil fuel companies of which the board has liquidated their investments. The bill would provide that board members and other officers and employees shall be held harmless and be eligible for indemnification in connection with actions taken pursuant to the bill's requirements, as specified.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 7513.76 is added to the Government
2 Code, to read:
3 7513.76. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the
4 following:
5 (1) The combustion of coal, oil, and natural gas, known as fossil
6 fuels, is the single largest contributor to global climate change.
7 (2) Climate change affects all parts of the California economy
8 and environment, and the Legislature has adopted numerous laws
9 to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to a changing
10 climate.
11 (3) Fossil fuel companies' plans to expand production, public
12 relations campaigns, and efforts to obstruct climate stabilization

1 policies are incompatible with California’s climate goals, and our
2 obligation to current and future generations.

3 (4) The production of fossil fuels and the effects of climate
4 change resulting from the use of fossil fuels all lead to
5 disproportionate adverse impacts on low-income communities and
6 communities of color.

7 (5) A transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy will
8 create greater employment, support the economy, and improve
9 public health.

10 (6) The purpose of this section is to require the Public
11 Employees’ Retirement System and the State Teachers’ Retirement
12 System, consistent with, and not in violation of, their fiduciary
13 responsibilities, to divest their holdings of fossil fuel company
14 investments as one part of the state’s broader efforts to decarbonize
15 the California economy and to transition to clean, pollution-free
16 energy resources.

17 (b) As used in this section, the following definitions apply:

18 (1) “Board” means the Board of Administration of the Public
19 Employees’ Retirement System or the Teachers’ Retirement Board
20 of the State Teachers’ Retirement System, as applicable.

21 (2) “Company” means a sole proprietorship, organization,
22 association, corporation, partnership, venture, or other entity, or
23 its subsidiary or affiliate, that exists for profitmaking purposes or
24 to otherwise secure economic advantage.

25 (3) “Investment” means the purchase, ownership, or control of
26 publicly issued stock, corporate bonds, or other debt instruments
27 issued by a company. “Investments” also includes purchase,
28 ownership, or control of mutual funds and exchange-traded funds,
29 unless the board is satisfied on reasonable grounds that a mutual
30 fund or exchange-traded fund is unlikely to have in excess of 2
31 percent of its assets, averaged annually, directly or indirectly
32 invested in fossil fuel companies.

33 (4) “Public employee retirement funds” means the Public
34 Employees’ Retirement Fund described in Section 20062 of this
35 code, and the Teachers’ Retirement Fund described in Section
36 22167 of the Education Code.

37 (5) “Fossil fuel” means petroleum oil, natural gas, and thermal
38 coal. Thermal coal is coal used to generate electricity, such as that
39 which is burned to create steam to run turbines. Thermal coal does
40 not mean metallurgical coal or coking coal used to produce steel.

1 (6) “Fossil fuel company” means one of the 200 largest publicly
2 traded fossil fuel companies, as established by carbon content in
3 the companies’ proven oil, gas, and coal reserves.

4 (c) The board shall not make additional or new investments or
5 renew existing investments of public employee retirement funds
6 in a fossil fuel company.

7 (d) (1) The board shall liquidate investments in a fossil fuel
8 company on or before July 1, 2030.

9 (2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), this subdivision shall be
10 suspended upon a good faith determination by the board that an
11 act of God, war, or other unforeseeable event creates conditions
12 that materially impact normal market mechanisms for pricing assets
13 and shall only be reinstated upon a subsequent good faith finding
14 of the board that market conditions have substantially returned to
15 normal ex-ante. Upon such a finding, the board shall have six
16 months to liquidate any remaining investments in a fossil fuel
17 company.

18 (3) Paragraph (2) shall remain in effect only until January 1,
19 2035, and as of that date is inoperative.

20 (e) (1) Commencing February 1, 2025, and annually on
21 February 1 thereafter, the board shall create a report that includes
22 the following:

23 (A) A list of fossil fuel companies of which the board has
24 liquidated its investments pursuant to subdivision (d).

25 (B) A list of fossil fuel companies with which the board still
26 has not liquidated its investments.

27 (C) A list of fossil fuel companies of which the board has not
28 liquidated its investments as a result of a determination made
29 pursuant to subdivision (f) that a sale or transfer of investments is
30 inconsistent with the fiduciary responsibilities of the board as
31 described in Section 17 of Article XVI of the California
32 Constitution and the board’s findings adopted in support of that
33 determination.

34 (D) An analysis of methods and opportunities to rapidly and
35 effectively reduce dependence on fossil fuels and transition to
36 alternative energy sources in a realistic timeframe that avoids
37 negatively contributing to economic conditions particularly
38 damaging to public employee retirement funds and to overall net
39 employment earnings of the state’s workforce.

1 (2) The board shall submit the report to the Legislature, in
2 compliance with Section 9795, and to the Governor, and shall post
3 the report on the board's internet website.

4 (f) Nothing in this section shall require a board to take action
5 as described in this section unless the board determines in good
6 faith that the action described in this section is consistent with the
7 fiduciary responsibilities of the board described in Section 17 of
8 Article XVI of the California Constitution.

9 SEC. 2. Section 16642 of the Government Code, as amended
10 by Section 3 of Chapter 459 of the Statutes of 2019, is amended
11 to read:

12 16642. (a) Present, future, and former board members of the
13 Public Employees' Retirement System or the State Teachers'
14 Retirement System, jointly and individually, state officers and
15 employees, research firms described in subdivision (d) of Section
16 7513.6, and investment managers under contract with the Public
17 Employees' Retirement System or the State Teachers' Retirement
18 System shall be indemnified from the General Fund and held
19 harmless by the State of California from all claims, demands, suits,
20 actions, damages, judgments, costs, charges, and expenses,
21 including court costs and attorney's fees, and against all liability,
22 losses, and damages of any nature whatsoever that these present,
23 future, or former board members, officers, employees, research
24 firms as described in subdivision (d) of Section 7513.6, or contract
25 investment managers shall or may at any time sustain by reason
26 of any decision to restrict, reduce, or eliminate investments
27 pursuant to Sections 7513.6, 7513.7, 7513.74, ~~and 7513.75.~~
28 ~~7513.75, and 7513.76.~~

29 (b) This section shall remain in effect only until Section 7513.74
30 is repealed, and as of that date is repealed.

31 SEC. 3. Section 16642 of the Government Code, as added by
32 Section 4 of Chapter 459 of the Statutes of 2019, is amended to
33 read:

34 16642. (a) Present, future, and former board members of the
35 Public Employees' Retirement System or the State Teachers'
36 Retirement System, jointly and individually, state officers and
37 employees, research firms described in subdivision (d) of Section
38 7513.6, and investment managers under contract with the Public
39 Employees' Retirement System or the State Teachers' Retirement
40 System shall be indemnified from the General Fund and held

1 harmless by the State of California from all claims, demands, suits,
2 actions, damages, judgments, costs, charges, and expenses,
3 including court costs and attorney's fees, and against all liability,
4 losses, and damages of any nature whatsoever that these present,
5 future, or former board members, officers, employees, research
6 firms as described in subdivision (d) of Section 7513.6, or contract
7 investment managers shall or may at any time sustain by reason
8 of any decision to restrict, reduce, or eliminate investments
9 pursuant to Sections 7513.6, 7513.7, ~~and 7513.75~~, 7513.75, and
10 7513.76.

11 (b) This section shall become operative upon the repeal of
12 Section 7513.74.

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CITY OF HUNTINGTON BEACH
2000 MAIN STREET, HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA 92648-2702

TONY STRICKLAND
MAYOR

May 3, 2023

The Honorable Lena Gonzalez California State Senate
33rd District 1021 O Street, Suite 7720
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: OPPOSE SB 252 (Gonzalez) – Public retirement systems: fossil fuels: divestment

Dear Senator Gonzalez,

On behalf of public employees and teachers, as well as state taxpayers, the ACC-OC Board of Directors voted to oppose SB 252. As introduced, this bill would prohibit the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) and the State Teachers' Retirement System (STRS) from making new investments or renewing existing investments of public employee retirement funds in fossil fuel companies. SB 252 would further require the boards to liquidate investments in a fossil fuel company on or before July 1, 2030. Lastly, the bill would require a report to the Legislature and the Governor beginning in 2025 to provide information on fossil fuel companies where the board has liquidated their investments.

It is important that CalPERS has the flexibility needed to exercise their fiduciary duties on behalf of public agencies and public employees in California. By limiting their ability to invest in specific industries to achieve other policy goals, the resulting lower returns for these retirement systems destabilizes those systems and requires a further infusion of tax dollars to make up the difference.

Rather than destabilize state retirement systems serving public employees, the State Legislature should work with industries of concern to achieve meaningful changes that benefit all Californians.

Should you have any questions about ACC-OC's position on SB 252, please contact Alisa Backstrom, City Treasurer, at 714-536-5299 or at Alisa.Backstrom@surfcity-hb.org.

Sincerely,

Tony Strickland
Mayor
City of Huntington Beach

CC: Senator Janet Nguyen
Senator Dave Min
Assembly Member Diane Dixon
Assembly Member Tri Ta
ACC-OC Board of Directors (via email)
Bismarck Obando, Director of Public Affairs (bismarck@calcities.org)
League of California Cities (cityletters@calcities.org)